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President Paul BIYA and the Historical Litigation: Speech of December 31, 2022!

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On December 31, 2022, as is tradition, President Paul BIYA addressed the Cameroonian nation, in an "airy" speech that seemed to embrace everything, without actually "gripping onto" anything!

The 1st point that challenges us in this speech concerns the oil sector, a labyrinth "Made In Cameroon", in which only the "initiated" can identify themselves.

Mr. Paul BIYA: *"To guarantee the regular supply of petroleum products and domestic gas to the domestic market, it was necessary to increase the volume of public subsidies, at the cost of significant budgetary efforts. Thus, during the year 2022, nearly 700 billion CFA francs were spent by the Treasury on subsidies for fuel and 75 billion CFA francs for domestic gas. »*

There is no need to go as far as the West to seek a comparison tool to clearly demonstrate what President Biya's address to the nation is particularly keen to hide: the weight of the historical Cameroon-France dispute on the daily life and livelihood of all Cameroonians.

We will take Angola, this country where I have been living my political exile for almost 37 years, and whose economic and social fabric was totally destroyed after independence in 1975, by a fratricidal war that lasted several decades until 2002. Only 20 years after the war, Angola offers the world the image of an African country, free, proud of its economic and social successes, its various infrastructures, cities and towns that are springing up like mushrooms all over the country, the magnificent bay of Luanda... a country free to choose its partners, for the well-being of its populations, with a national currency: the Kwanza, created in 1976 less than a year after the proclamation of the independence of the country, when the country could not even boast of 3 economists ... currency whose parity with the Euro is:

1 Euro = 534 Kwanzas.

Can the same be said of Cameroon, 62 years after the pseudo-independence of January 1, 1960 and its CFA Franc at 655 Frs for 1 Euro?

Who can say exactly where Cameroonian oil is today, since the beginning of the drilling of the first drop? It is no secret that the exploitation of our oil primarily benefits France with its CFA franc.

- Although subsidized by the State, the price of a liter of gasoline in Angola is 160 Angolan Kwanzas, the equivalent of 195 CFA francs as of January 02, 2023.
- With State subsidy of petroleum products in Cameroon, the price of a liter of gasoline is 630 CFA francs!
- As for domestic gas, the cylinder costs 1500 Kwanzas, or 1845 CFA francs.
- In Cameroon the price of domestic gas is 6500 CFA francs.

One does not necessarily have to be an experienced economist to figure a difference in price between these 2 gas cylinders of 4655 CFA francs more in Cameroon. What becomes of the "additional 4655 francs"? Yet in this sister country, for a bottle at 1500 kwanzas, (1845 CFA francs), the company that produces the gas still gets to generating its profit, the State levies its tax and the distributor makes good on their profit margin...

How can this enormous difference be explained for an oil-producing country such as Cameroon? It should simply be understood that through the national hydrocarbon company SONANGOL, Angola's oil belongs to Angolans. They are thus free to choose their partners.

Meanwhile, Mr. Paul Biya can only declare: *"However, it is increasingly obvious that our country (...) will not be able to escape indefinitely a readjustment of the prices of petroleum products, if we want to preserve our budgetary balances and calmly pursue the implementation of our development policy »*. With a liter of gasoline at 630 CFA francs, and the specter of a rise in the price of fuel, how will the Cameroonian cope, Mr. President?

Same scenario on electricity management in Angola. Subsidized, the household price per KWh stands at 11.83 Kwanzas, (14.53 CFA francs), for companies at 9.64 kwanzas, (11.84 CFA francs). This is made possible because the production, management and distribution of electricity are all in the hands of Angolan companies. The same is true for water.

On the other hand, for Cameroon, what about the company ENEO, which has become infamous on the web, with its reckless and frequent power cuts that individual households together with the entire economic sector of the entire nation are forced to endure as well? How can you run an economy like this, when there are several hydroelectric dams that cannot meet the needs of the country?

Every day, there is gnashing of teeth against the Cameroon Water Company, Camwater. It is incredible that in 2022 in the economic and political capitals of Cameroon, Camwater has set up a vast supply program by tanker trucks, in the very heart of its two major cities! What then about the situation in the hinterland?

Still, according to President Biya, *"The launch of construction work on the urban section of the Yaoundé-Nsimalen highway and the acceleration of work on the Douala-Yaoundé highway will be among the Government's priorities."*

And this "heavy axis" Douala – Yaoundé, which actually and more deserving should bare the name "axis of death", sees hundreds of bereaved families every year! This axis, which overlooks two important ports of the country, (Douala and Kribi) is part of the "Douala, Bangui, N'Djamena corridor" whose characteristic for carriers, is synonymous with corruption coupled with all kinds of harassment.

And Camrail, the railway company with its only Douala/Yaoundé train per day? And Bolloré who has just "thrown in the towel" after 23 years of siphoning Cameroonian rail!

Mr. President of the Republic, what should one think of Camair-Co, an airline in poor condition that swallows, year after year, huge subsidies from the State just to survive? A national disgrace! Meanwhile, Angolan airline TAAG currently owns 21 aircraft (with firm plans to buy another 24 in 2023 alone). It serves 14 destinations within Angola, not to mention constant inter-African and intercontinental air traffic!

Admittedly, not everything is perfect in this country that is being built. But it has only been 20 years of construction, and in an Angola where the overwhelming majority of banks are in the hands of Angolans, mobile phone companies are national, a telecommunications satellite was placed in orbit in 2022, the exploitation and mining of diamonds, soil and subsoil in general are under the close supervision of Angolan entities. It is legitimate to ask what the State of Cameroon, created more than six decades ago by France, does with the resources of the country as well as other state property.

To return to the problem of FrançAfrique or rather to the historical Cameroon-France Dispute, here, we have a group, in this case Bolloré, which is the quintessential illustration and clear example of a nebula where totally iniquitous and tight occult links are woven, and where billions are being paid to a group without the President of the Republic of Cameroon being moved or even thinking of informing his people.

More worrying and just as striking in this speech is the astonishing silence of President Paul Biya on the sale of Bolloré Africa Logistics (BAL) to the Italian-Swiss shipowner: Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC).

On the Bolloré website we can read: "After obtaining the regulatory and competition approvals that conditioned the completion of the transaction, the Bolloré Group announced on December 21, 2022 the sale of 100% of Bolloré Africa Logistics to the MSC Group. It concerns all of the Bolloré Group's transport and logistics activities in Africa."

This transaction amounts to a total of 5.7 billion euros, that is about 3,740 billion CFA francs. This operation also concerns Cameroon! For decades, Vincent Bollore's group has been and will continue to be an integral part of Cameroon's socio-political-economic landscape. Curiously enough, the departure of this group from and in a sector as fundamental as transport and logistics activities, seems to be a non-event for President Paul Biya.

When we know Bollore's sphere of activity in Cameroon, it is easy to understand that this transfer agreement to the Italian-Swiss group, affects the very lives and livelihoods of several thousand Cameroonian workers as well as the very essence of certain acquisitions of our national sovereignty. It does not quite suffice just to leave. A careful and detailed assessment report must be addressed and clarified of all of Bollore's past activities, especially in the following areas:

- The Wood Park of the Port of Douala during a 30-year period,
- The Autonomous Port of Douala during a 15-year period,
- Camrail during a 23-years period
- The Cameroon Timber Parks Exploitation Company (SEPBC) during a 30-year period
- The "Kribi Logistics Hub"
- Etc, etc

The list of Bollore's activities in Cameroon over several decades is quite exhaustive and long. Faced with this historic sale, it is the duty of the Head of State of a country which considers itself as sovereign, to inform his people. Despite this departure, the Bolloré group will, not only always be at the heart of the historical Cameroon – France dispute, but will always remain as one of the most monstrous and most outrageous predators of our country as well.

A recap and brief reminder on the general activities of the "Bolloré Transport & Logistics Cameroon" group, created in 1947, some of which have just been sold:

- The Camrail railway line
- The Autonomous Port of Douala
- The Cameroon Timber Parks Exploitation Company (SEPBC)
- the "Kribi Logistics Hub"
- two forestry companies: HFC-Forestière de Campo and SIBAF, Société industrielle des bois africaines.
- Air and sea freight (FCL/LCL container),

- land transport,
- customs brokerage,
- warehousing and distribution,
- mining
- humanitarian aid,
- oil
- gas,
- food,
- beverages,
- industrial projects,
- technologies,
- energy,
- non-metal commodities.

In this speech, President Paul BIYA said: *"... Before concluding, I would like to draw your attention to two scourges that are taking on a certain magnitude in our society. It is about corruption and incivility...*

... Last year, in similar circumstances, I told you of my concern to strengthen governance in the management of public affairs and to control state spending. I can assure you that this concern remains constant and intangible. Also, I would like once again to recall that all those who enrich themselves illicitly, by despoiling the State, at any level whatsoever, will be held accountable."

Mr. President of the Republic, Cameroonians have the right to know how budgetary lines 94 and 65 have been managed by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, Regional Development and the Ministry of Finance. For line 94, from 2010 to 2021, nearly 1,850 billion CFA francs were spent in a totally opaque way. This is Cameroonian taxpayers' money, which was distributed at the whim of those who manage it, to a bunch of kleptomaniac and criminal cronies. Because, how can one understand that during a plenary session at the Cameroonian National Assembly in November 2022, the Minister of Finance could not give a clear answer to the questions that were addressed to him by a parliamentarian, as to how 1,850 billion CFA francs had been extracted and had disappeared from State coffers without trace?

Meanwhile, civil servants are destitute unless they have the opportunity to "rob" users or to dip their hands into the coffers of the welfare state. The private sector is saddled with endemic corruption, let alone the informal sector, which is not even worth mentioning.

We are not even talking about the scandalous amounts of public contracts that are given to friends, year after year, with huge retro-commissions. It's mind-blowing and disgusting. Shameless embezzlement and financial scandals over the years on the part of a minority with access to public wealth!

The rampant, escalating and endemic corruption in which our country is immersed must challenge you more and make you deploy much more action than just words. Because prisons are already full of unscrupulous managers, but rather unfortunately, that has not discouraged the embezzlers who are your main collaborators!

Even sadder still, are the hundreds of students who are poured into the job market every year, with no hope of finding a job.

What about the COVID-19 affair, for which billions have "evaporated" on their way from unscrupulous fund managers to the rightful beneficiaries?

Hospitals are mere mirrors. As proof, from the onset of the slightest "health bobo", the kleptomaniac elite takes the plane at the expense of the taxpayer to other skies, in order to receive appropriate care.

At the same time, the new 2023 finance law is "merciless" for the Cameroonian taxpayer with an inexplicable increase that will only come to further "sink" the budget of an already bloodless and poor Cameroonian citizen. The price of the housewife's market basket becomes unbearable, and evoking the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is nothing other than an attempt to hide the chains that bind us to France. Since it is not for our country to pay part of the bill for France's involvement in this conflict.

On another point, as usual during his 40 years of reign, it is with the same contempt for the bloodshed of hundreds of thousands of Cameroonians during the war for Reunification and Independence that Mr. Biya, addressing the Cameroonian people on December 31, carefully avoided evoking the date of January 1, 1960. Date on which Cameroon, rather than take off definitively, instead was plunged into a frightening obscurantism.

The historical Cameroon – France dispute is the central point of this struggle for the appropriation by the Cameroonian of their history, their territory, their life in general. The ardent issues raised here are both contemporaneous and burning. All these facts are the emanation of a pernicious system imposed since the 50s by France, which "granted" us autonomy on January 1, 1960 instead of true independence. And ever since, that autonomy has only established kleptomaniac and perverse behaviors by both the French and

Cameroonians. As long as the root of the Cameroonian problem is not eradicated, so long as a break is not taken to take stock and to analyze the wrongs, the same causes of corruption will continue to reproduce the same manifestations of misery and compounded decay. If the diagnosis is wrong for a patient, you imagine the disaster.

In conclusion, we are in 2023, we Cameroonians, have the legitimate right to ask you this crucial question: "Mr. President of the Republic of Cameroon, can you sincerely tell the Cameroonian people that you are in tune and in sync with the Cameroon of today, including the way in which it functions? Are you proud to leave this legacy to our children, after 40 years of unshared power?"

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