



**STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY JOSEPH DION NGUTE, PRIME
MINISTER, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE MAJOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE.-**



Yaounde Conference Centre, Monday 30 September 2019

- The President of the Senate,
- The Right Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
- The President of the Economic and Social Council,
- The President of the Constitutional Council,
- The First President of the Supreme Court,
- Distinguished members of Government,
- Heads of Diplomatic Missions,
- The Governor of the Centre Region,
- The Senior Divisional Officer of the Mfoundi Division,
- The Government Delegate to the Yaounde City Council,
- Fellow Cameroonians from the diaspora,
- Dear compatriots from the Adamawa, Centre, East, Far-North, North, North-West, West, Littoral, South and South-West Regions,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to take the floor today, on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Major National Dialogue convened by the President of the Republic, **His Excellency Paul BIYA.**

I would like to thank each and every one of you most sincerely for responding favourably to the invitation you received to be part of this exceptional appointment in our common history.

I particularly welcome our brothers and sisters who have come from the remotest areas of our country and those who have come from abroad to attend this Major National Dialogue.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 10 September 2019, President Paul BIYA solemnly addressed the nation. In his message, he recalled the corporate origin of the crisis that has been hitting the North-West and South-West regions of our country since 2016.

The Head of State highlighted the measures taken by authorities to address the concerns raised by English-speaking teachers' and lawyers' unions. He also pointed out that Government's response to these concerns has gone well beyond the expectations of these unions.

However, a secessionist project was added to the corporate demands, leading to despicable acts of violence and seriously disrupting economic and social life in these two regions.

It is in order to put an end to these acts of violence, and to enable the North-West and South-West Regions to regain the necessary serenity for the full development of the people living there, that the Head of State decided, in his memorable speech to the nation on 10 September 2019, to convene this Major National Dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate the historical responsibility we have towards our children, our grandchildren and future generations. By deciding to invite Cameroon's constructive forces to this Major National Dialogue, President Biya makes each of us fully responsible for the fate of our country.

We are therefore gathered here to seek to give our national community in general, and our brothers and sisters in the South-West and North-West in particular, a beam of light in the dark night of this tribulation.

We are here to pay tribute to all the innocent victims of the atrocities of the last three dark years.

Allow me, at this juncture, to ask you to stand up and observe a minute's silence in memory of the innocent victims of this conflict.

[...]

Thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Major National Dialogue convened by the President of the Republic to bring together Cameroonians of good will in the same place and space, offers us the unexpected opportunity for a collective start, aimed at finding concrete and pragmatic solutions, far from petty squabbles, to the problems that have separated us physically and intellectually in recent years.

This dialogue offers us the opportunity to find, in the model of the commitment of our country's founding fathers, the strength to transcend our differences and to make our cultural diversity a source of wealth for our people.

If history has made us heirs to two official languages, English and French, we should use them as a source of opportunity and not as a source to undermine our living-together, we should make them levers of our social progress, and not obstacles leading us towards the unknown abysses of division and separation.

From this perspective, the gravity of the situation in the North-West and South-West Regions must challenge and concern us, but above all, it must oblige us all, individually and collectively, regardless of our regions of origin, our political or religious convictions, to achieve a result, that is, **to restore peace and tranquillity in these two Regions.**

Yes, it is the quest for this objective that must, as everyone knows, drive us during the next four days of our meeting, at this crucial time in our history.

Cameroonians are watching us. The whole world is watching us.

It is now up to us to show how we want to make history: **do we want future generations to remember that we were unable to find consensual answers to concerns that are not insoluble? Or, do we want to be considered as true “peacemakers” in resolving this crisis that has deprived many of our children of their**

parents, their education, and threatened their future, sometimes irreversibly?

Our common intelligence and individual responsibility must lead us to defend peace, at all times and in all places, at all costs, and to reject the horror of war, its massacres and atrocities, which penalise individuals and the community in every way.

The ideal of peace, the first element of our motto, which the Head of State is tirelessly working to promote and consolidate, must be the absolute quest for this important national meeting.

That is why all components of our nation have been invited to participate. In accordance with the wishes of the President of the Republic, these include representatives of public authorities, international and non-governmental organizations, associations, political parties, trade unions, companies, the diaspora, clergy, intellectuals, journalists, traders, armed groups, traditional leaders and other opinion leaders. In other

words, of all men and women who love peace and progress.

The density and relevance of the contributions collected through different channels, during the consultations I have held over the past two weeks and beyond, on the instructions of the Head of State, have enabled me to appreciate the eagerness of our compatriots to work in one way or another to restore social peace, resume economic activities and rebuild infrastructure in the North-West and South-West Regions of our country.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Major National Dialogue that brings us together throughout this week will undoubtedly allow us to deepen our reflection on various issues related to the future of our country.

In accordance with the roadmap defined by the Head of State, our discussion will focus specifically on eight (08) main themes, namely:

- bilingualism, cultural diversity and social cohesion;
- the education system;
- the judicial system;
- assistance for the return of refugees and displaced persons;
- the reconstruction and development of the Regions affected by the crisis;
- disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants from armed groups;
- the role of the diaspora in the crisis and their contribution to the country's development;
- and finally, decentralization and local development.

These themes will be discussed during plenary sessions, then further developed within the framework of work in commissions, which will begin this late afternoon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The future of our country is in our hands. It is a future that we must all build together, here and now, on the occasion of this Major National Dialogue.

I therefore appeal to the sense of patriotism and responsibility of each and every one of us. Throughout our work, let us live up to the expectations that the Head of State and our compatriots have placed in us.

As the Head of State already reminded the nation in one of his speeches, we must be worthy of the sacrifice made by our illustrious predecessors to build the Cameroonian Nation, and the legitimate struggle they waged against oppression in the quest for freedom.

It is therefore mindful of our capacity and determination to take up this important challenge, and strengthened by our common hopes to meet the deep aspirations of the people of the North-West and South-West Regions, and of all the other components of the Nation, that I declare the Major National Dialogue open.

**Long live His Excellency Paul BIYA, President of
the Republic, Head of State!**

Long live Cameroon!

Thanks for your kind attention.-