

LETTER TO MY COMPATRIOTS, CAMEROONIAN WOMEN AND MEN

Fellow Cameroonians,

Dear compatriots,

On October 7th, you courageously expressed the choice of the future and modernity by mostly casting your votes in my favour. While waiting for the blessed days when my allies and I will come to meet you to show you our infinite gratitude, I would like now, given the circumstances, to express my deepest gratitude to you for the honour and privilege thus extended to me. I told you: Together it is possible.

But as you know, your choice has not been respected by those in power and the institutions marching to their drum; so that this event, which is undoubtedly one of the most significant in our recent political history, has given rise to a post-election crisis. This led, in an unprecedented outburst of hatred, to the unlawful arrest and detention of nearly 200 militants and supporters of our party, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM), of Cameroonians without political commitment, leaders of allied organisations and myself.

It has been more than three months since we were illegally imprisoned for demonstrating in an absolutely peaceful manner, to denounce the government's refusal to restore peace to the English-speaking regions of the North-West and South-West, the non-respect of the choice of the majority of Cameroonian voters in the presidential election of October 7th, 2018 and the inaction of the regime on the looting of public fund in the preparation for the African Cup of Nations (AFCON 2019), the organisation of which was finally withdrawn from Cameroon, to the great national disgrace.

Since our arrest and imprisonment, you have witnessed an exceptional and exemplary solidarity: many of you have come to visit us at our various places of preventive detention and imprisonment, when, by dint of perseverance, permission was granted to you; you went massively to the rare hearings before the courts of Yaoundé to encourage us with your gestures, your smiles, your courageous, audacious songs. Although each time, security fence with armed men and in combat posture kept

you very far from our itinerary, I saw you at each of our passages, and believe me, I was moved.

Faced with the explosive security and humanitarian, political, economic and social situation in which Mr BIYA has plunged our country, the international community has just sounded the alarm by inviting the authorities to respect the fundamental rights of Cameroonians, to release the hostages of some 200 people arrested and thrown in prison, and to organise an inclusive dialogue to address in particular the deadly crisis in English-speaking areas. Likewise, the international community has indicated the urgent need for consensual reform of the electoral system before any new election is held. I appreciate the position which joins in several points the claims made for some years already by the CRM. Indeed, no one is unaware of our repeated positions and proposals concerning the crisis in the English-speaking regions: we have always been opposed to any idea of secession; I gave the best of myself to recover parts of Cameroonian territory in Lake Chad and in the Bakassi peninsula to accommodate such a disastrous prospect. But once we agree that secession is not an option, we have recalled, since the launch of our party in 2012, that there is an Anglophone problem in Cameroon and that it must be resolved through dialogue. I reiterated this position on June 25th, 2016 during my meeting in Bamenda, then on December 10th, 2016 at my meeting in Ngaoundéré. More recently, in November 2018, in the face of escalation in this crisis that turned into a very deadly armed conflict and in which many atrocities are committed, I proposed a solution articulated as follows: negotiation of a ceasefire; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of combatants; setting up of a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission; organisation of an inclusive national dialogue to discuss without taboos and to identify appropriate solutions to the crisis and the refoundation of our State.

These proposals have always clashed with the silence of the ruling power which prefers to lock itself into the option of a military solution that, alas, only fuel escalation. By risky shortcuts, they compare the situation of Anglophones in Cameroon to that of Catalonia in Spain, or they remember the war against plans for secession in the United States or Northern Ireland. It suffices to recall that in Spain, Catalonia enjoys, like other Spanish regions, an autonomic status equivalent to

federalism; However, the English-speaking regions, like the others, have no autonomy, and the Cameroonian government, proponent of a centralism of another age, went so far as to forbid the use of the word “federalism” in the media. As for wars against secession, neither the majority of Cameroonians nor the international community are in favour of partitioning our country. The representatives of the regime in place make this kind of amalgam and agitate these examples to create confusion and refuse dialogue.

Another specious argument is that there is no one with whom to negotiate. There is no need to elaborate extensively on this point. A chance should be given to the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) that Cardinal Christian TUMI and others have been trying to organise for some time and unfortunately have been facing the opposition of the Cameroonian government. This initiative could be a useful stone for building the inclusive dialogue to which the country’s situation invites us.

With regard to the presidential election of October 7th, 2018, supporters of the regime claim that after the proclamation of the results by the Constitutional Council, there is no need to challenge them. According to them, we must submit to this verdict. They forget too quickly – and I understand them – that this is an erroneous verdict rendered by an institution that is both illegal and illegitimate in that its composition clearly violates the texts that organise and govern it. We have demonstrated beyond doubt that 10 of the 11 members of the Constitutional Council are members of the CPDM, Mr BIYA’s party, of which they are also part of the governing body, the 11th member being an SDF member. Several of them hold other positions incompatible with membership of the Constitutional Council. On this basis, we lodged an appeal in recusation and legitimate suspicion, but it was rejected by the Constitutional Council. As for the argument that we would not have won the election because we would not have enough reports of the local polling stations and that in any case we never presented them to the public, it is just specious. I reiterate that we are ready to present our reports at any time as part of a recount of votes. Moreover, the CPDM itself never presented the reports proving the victory of Mr BIYA, neither to the Constitutional Council, nor in any other place. We have amply demonstrated to the said Council, on the basis of the alleged Elecram reports, which alone are authentic, all the irregularities

which tainted the consolidated results by the National Commission for the Final Counting of Votes. I remind you that the total results of the 8 candidates, in relative value, was greater than 100%! What are we criticised for? For challenging distorted results at all levels, which did not reflect the reports from polling stations and of showing that they were the product of Excel tables generated by computer scientists in the pay of the regime? No! I will not apologise for winning the presidential election of October 7th, 2018 and for denouncing the diversion of the democratic choice of the majority of Cameroonian voters in my favour.

For the rest, I have constantly been calling for dialogue. It was rumoured that I would have been approached by the people in power. I would like to solemnly tell you here that this is false. Neither yesterday nor today have I been approached by anyone, despite my outstretched hand.

By transforming the post-election crisis resulting from an unacceptable diversion of the democratic choice of Cameroonian voters during the last presidential election into a savage police hunt, a grotesque judicial repression and a brutal and cynical administrative settling of scores, the regime of Mr BIYA believes that it can thus get rid of a thorny problem that casts a harsh light on the impossibility of democracy in Cameroon under the current conditions. This regime believes that the prison can fix everything. But even death cannot fix everything. Thoughts cannot be locked up. Neither can a cause; it is nurtured by the awareness of people, it grows independently of the mind that has identified it and goes on its own way until it is completed. At the same time as I urge you to make the cause of our common struggle grow, I would like to reassure you of my determination to lead the fight for freedom and democracy, the restoration of the dignity of Cameroonians, the inclusive development and prestige of our country.

Since our arrest and imprisonment, our party, the CRM, which has always been fought by the Territorial Administration since its creation, faces new challenges that threaten its very existence. Target of attacks and tribalistic hatred orchestrated by the BIYA regime, it is now subject to a *de facto* ban. Indeed, the Minister of Territorial Administration has formally and informally prohibited all its activities throughout the country, including meetings and public events duly declared in accordance with the

law, community work for the benefit of the population such as cleaning gutters and the cleaning of the bush in neighbourhoods initiated by its militants, the massive enrolment of new members at the national headquarters and local headquarters of the party, the creation and installation of new party units in various localities. All the appeals filed before the competent courts for the annulment of the Minister's improper prohibition were rejected on the ground that they are irrelevant, even though in form, the said Minister is not competent to take such an act, which falls within the jurisdiction of the Divisional Officers, and that in substance, the disputed act clearly violates Law No. 90/055 of 19 December 1990 laying down the rules for meetings and public events. But I can assure you that the CRM will not be held hostage by a rabid regime because of the exposure to the eyes of the world of its turpitudes it had so well camouflaged until then. Let it be understood once and for all that we will not let ourselves be crushed by the village dictatorship established in the country.

Because of this *de facto* ban on our party, but also the blood that continues to flow unnecessarily in the English-speaking regions of the North-West and South-West despite the cries of distress of the civilian populations and unanimous calls for dialogue, I now announce that the CRM will not take part in the staging of May 20th. This date, which is supposed to commemorate the Unity Day in our country, tends to lose, in the current context, its symbolic strength. In 37 years of unchallenged reign, Mr BIYA has unfortunately succeeded in making it empty of political meaning, because of its permanent manipulation of cultural differences by an assumed state tribalism and the exclusion of populations from the management of their destiny. His regime has deconstructed a young nation in the making, the milestones of which were laid under difficult conditions by Ahmadou Ahidjo, and reduced it to a juxtaposition of ethnic groups which I conjured up its omen many years ago. As ever, our country is today divided by the walls of identity retreats, imprisoned by stubborn ethnic hatreds and threatened with implosion.

The northern part contrasts with the rest of the country with a state of abject poverty maintained by the regime with the complicity of a feudal elite, and is bruised in the Far North region by the war of the Islamist sect Boko Haram. And I will not mention the endemic insecurity in the Adamaoua and East regions, and the boiling of

the war in the North-West and South-West over into the French-speaking regions of the West and Littoral. What “Unity” will we celebrate on May 20th?

Dear compatriots,

I discovered through the media that Mr BIYA became a follower of social networks and would write tweets to the Cameroonian people to appeal to their patriotism. I know that many of you are wondering about this sudden impulse of a man who has based his power on the contempt of Cameroonians, indifference to their problems, and a shocking disinterest for the wonders of his country where he has never spent his holidays, preferring the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva and the sweets on the shores of Lake Lemman Geneva. I would like so much to take him to discover the incomparable beauty of Rhumsiki and its famous Pic, of Poli and its peaceful plains curled up by a collar of mountains, Adamaoua plateaus where plump herds graze peacefully in the moor, of the sweetness of the North-West highlands, reminiscent of the Switzerland he loves so much, the majesty of the Korup main forest and its 13 endemic bird species, the magic of Rio del Rey at a time when the cormorants fly along this sea boulevard whose waters take away the miasma of the country towards the infinity of the sea. Does he know Bimbia, place of memory of the primordial tragedy? I would have liked to bring him to so many other places in this country, which he obviously knows badly, having visited in only 37 years less than ten out of the country’s 58 divisions.

There can be no patriotism without attachment both to the territorial base of the homeland and to the people that populate the country. In this respect, it is particularly painful for me to note that Mr BIYA has never set foot in the two emblematic parcels of the national territory which we fought tooth and nail to get after 8 years and a half of proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of The Hague and about 9 years of laborious implementation of the decision on the merits of this high world jurisdiction: I want to speak about the area of Lake Chad of about 1,000 km² where the big island of Darak is found, and of the most famous Bakassi Peninsula, which covers about 1,000 km² as well.

As for the Cameroonian people, Mr BIYA put such a distance between him and the Cameroonians of all the regions that one wonders which people he claims to

govern. It has become clear today that the idea of national integration that he stealthily launched at the beginning of his long reign before abandoning it just as quickly was just one of his many lures. In fact, he based his power on the division of Cameroonians and orchestrated and maintained tribalism. He has never formally and unequivocally denounced this scourge that dangerously threatens the future of our country, nor has he ever disavowed members of his successive governments who have made hateful tribalism speeches on various occasions, nor passed legislation to suppress such a scourge, while his party has an overwhelming majority in parliament for almost forty years.

Mr BIYA's sudden recourse to the patriotism of Cameroonians is a desperate attempt by a regime in distress, which tries to reject its failures on the external partners of our country: narrow nationalism, racism and xenophobia, that is where they want to bring us, we open and welcoming people. It is an old string of routed dictatorships to heat up a nationalist sentiment. But patriotism is and cannot be racism or xenophobia. It is the indecipherable feeling and the invisible link that unite the members of a national community when striving for the same ideal, not by exclusion of foreigners, but where appropriate, in partnership. It is based on a lived and assumed attachment to one's country and the love of the women and men who live there, in a living-together based on tolerance and nourished by references of common values. I have always thought that we should not engage in politics if we do not like people.

My entry into politics was and remains inspired by three primordial ambitions: gather the Cameroonians in the republican fraternity; put a smile on the faces of the poorest people through shared development and prosperity; make Cameroon a great nation, an African power, a country that counts in the concert of nations. Nothing and no one can take away from me the deep love I feel for you. No one will be able to prevent me from loving you with that fraternal love which has always burned in me; a love kneaded in the republican fraternity that is beyond blood ties and ethnic connivance. Those whose paths have crossed mine can testify to that. May this sweet flame ignite each of you and consume maintained absurd hatreds, so that together we turn to our national project, that of meeting the multiple challenges of modernity and the new world that challenges our youth. I remain convinced that we will arrive one

day - not very far away - to live in concord in our common homeland, Cameroon, organised in the form that we will have chosen together by a common will.

The international community is easy to blame. With the CRM, its allies and myself, it has become the convenient scapegoat of this regime's repeated failures. But, the risk of dislocation of the state, the living-together crisis, the worsening of inequalities and injustices resulting in the amplification of the social fracture, the zombification of populations, especially young people with the loss of their self-esteem, the feeling of exclusion and lack of perspective that leads them to dream of nothing more than emigration at all costs, the exclusion of the diaspora hunted as an enemy, the stagnation of per capita income stuck at US \$1,300 for more than a quarter of a century, the chronic trade deficit of more than CFAF 1,200 billion, the galloping indebtedness, the life expectancy at 55, the maternal and infant mortality rate among the highest in Africa, inefficient budget management characterised by unproductive expenditures, children dying in search of drinking water, the unavailability of electricity for the greatest number, the increase in the number of poor, the rate of sexual assault among the highest in the world, the exceptional performance of the country in terms of corruption that place Cameroon in the leading pack of the most corrupt countries on the planet, all this is not done by the international community. This is the dramatic consequence of the obscurantist, venal and irresolute governance of a man who has experience only in politicking, low and destructive politics, but who is dramatically indigent with regard to the construction of a modern state and the economic and social development of the country. He must have the courage to assume his failures.

The autistic regime is locked in the delirium of an imaginary planetary plot against our country. Believe me, the fundamental mission of the international community is to ensure the maintenance of peace and security in the world. In this respect, it has far too much to do than to seek to destabilise Cameroon, while struggling to overcome the Congolese and Central African crises, just to take the example of Central Africa. History opens new perspectives and the international community is extending a helping hand.

Stay more than ever mobilised, because nothing is finished until it is over. We must continue to assert peacefully our presence on the political scene, so much so that we are today the alternative force in which a large majority of Cameroonians place their hopes for a better future. Let us remain united and resist the political corruption and the multifaceted blackmail of the regime. Let us work to rebuild our state, to preserve its unity in its rich diversity by fighting tribalism and all the factors of division. Let us continue to fight for a consensual reform of the electoral system, a guarantee of a peaceful democratic game ensuring popular support for power.

The current hardships that many imprisoned militants, supporters, our allies and I face, postpone the moment of the splendid marriage of our beloved country with Freedom, Justice and Shared Progress. But they only postpone this moment that I announced to you during the campaign of the 2018 presidential and which keeps on imposing itself on me as a certainty. However, we will only succeed together and by our determination. It is not the fight of an individual, nor of a political party, nor of an ethnic group, nor of a region, nor of Anglophones, nor of Francophones. It is the common struggle of a people against the turmoil of their country. The next steps will be decisive. Through your many messages that reach me, I know that you care for me, for us; I appreciate it. But worry even more for Cameroon whose multiple wounds cause fear of the worst. We will spare no sacrifice for the salvation of this country which is so dear to us. You have already taken important steps on the steep path that opens before us. But you must not relax your efforts that will be solicited again and again; for, as I have already told you, our liberation will come from ourselves and from no one else. The others can accompany you, but nobody will replace you, the Cameroonian people. I count on you so that together, without evasion, we give a chance to the Cameroonian youth, and later to our country.

With my republican fraternity.

Yaoundé Main Prison, April 28th, 2019

Maurice KAMTO

