

**38TH UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)
GENERAL CONFERENCE**

LEADERSHIP FORUM

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**SPEECH BY H.E. PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

- **Distinguished Heads of State and Delegation,**
- **The President of the General Conference,**
- **The President of the Executive Council,**
- **The Director General,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me begin by sincerely congratulating Minister Stanley MUTUMBA SIMATAA on his election as President of the 38th General Conference.

- **The President of the General Conference,**

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including UNESCO, I am pleased to note that Africa is chairing this General Conference through your country. This is a strong sign that the world is changing – for the better.

The United Nations system in general, and UNESCO in particular, have contributed tremendously to this extraordinary change by supporting our continent's political independence, the

assertion of its personality and the preservation of its culture. Thus, a rejuvenated Africa has made a comeback to the community of nations.

Despite centuries of suffering and subordination, Africa has continued to believe and hope in humanity. It has brought to the community of nations its humanism marked by respect for the human person and dignity, a humanism of fraternity and solidarity. This explains its quest for a more just and more united new world order. Africa had no difficulty in adopting the ideals contained in the United Nations Charter and the UNESCO Constitution.

Mr President, my country fathoms the weight of your responsibility from experience and assures you of its support.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through me, Cameroon, which is pleased to participate in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of UNESCO, would like to heartily thank Mrs Irina BOKOVA, Director General of UNESCO, for her

invitation. It is an honour and privilege to address this historic session.

I will start by recalling the special ties binding my country and the United Nations. After the First World War, Cameroon was placed under the mandate of the League of Nations, and later under United Nations trusteeship. Under the auspices of the latter, it pursued its progress towards independence. Cameroon therefore rightly considers itself as an offspring of the United Nations and the international community.

Within the large family of the United Nations system, Cameroon has a particular inclination towards UNESCO.

The reason is simple. As a peaceful and tolerant country inhabited by peoples of diverse origins, religions and cultural traditions, Cameroon shares UNESCO's humanistic ideal the ultimate goal of which is to promote human "development" and harmony between peoples. Like UNESCO, Cameroon thinks that our differences, far from being a handicap, are a source of enrichment.

My country also shares the vision of lasting peace which is stated in the preamble of the Constitution of our organization which I would like to quote. *"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed"*, end of quote.

Harmony and understanding between peoples are closely linked to the recognition of and mutual respect for different cultures and their dialogue. The dissemination of education and the progress of science can but contribute to such values.

Fortunately, UNESCO has, since its inception, devoted itself to promoting these values. In fact, where war raises its ugly head, one can see the tragic consequences for the population and the cultural heritage of humanity. What is happening in Syria, Iraq and Mali is a vivid illustration.

Far from discouraging us, these deplorable examples should, instead, strengthen our resolve to defeat these destructive and backward ideologies.

My own country, which is a haven of stability, is now going through this painful experience. In recent years, it has suffered the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram. This sect is spreading grief and desolation in families, causing population displacement and the influx of refugees, and disrupting social and economic life in the Far-North Region of my country.

Worse still, this intolerant loose conglomeration is sowing seeds of ethnic and religious division, thus undermining the very foundations of our country which is its unity. The struggle to eradicate the sect compels us to devote huge resources to our defence at the expense of improving the living conditions of Cameroonians. The pooling of resources with our neighbours, the establishment of a joint African Union Multinational Force, and the valuable support provided by friendly powers will, I believe, enable us to crush this barbaric enemy soon.

I take this opportunity to recall that no country is safe from terrorist attacks. What has just happened in Paris in the

evening of 13 November is very revealing. The war against terrorism concerns every nation that ranks respect for the human person and life among its core values. It is incumbent on every nation to make its contribution.

- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Over the past decades, we have received constant support from our foreign partners and international organizations. This support has helped us, over time, to build a democratic society and ensure our development. Our ambition is to achieve the status of an emerging country by 2035.

UNESCO occupies a privileged position among our partners. So, I would now like to say a few words concerning our cooperation with this organization.

In the area of education, UNESCO has contributed to implementing major projects such as the promotion of universal education, the fight against illiteracy, the enhancement of teaching methods, citizenship education and the modernization of our university system.

In the domain of science, UNESCO is helping us to improve environmental management and the functioning of the National Micro-science Centre.

Regarding culture and communication, we can proudly mention the building of the capacity of cultural actors and improvement of the management of protected areas, as well as the promotion of access to information.

This list is far from exhaustive as UNESCO's achievements in my country are numerous and diverse. I also hail the establishment of the UNESCO Regional Office for Central Africa in Cameroon which will strengthen its action in our sub-region.

I would like to end by expressing my deep appreciation for UNESCO's activities in Cameroon under the stewardship of Irina BOKOVA. I would like to warmly congratulate and thank her and to inform her that her visit to my country last year remains etched in our memories.

Thank you for your attention.

Dans le secteur des sciences, l'UNESCO nous accompagne dans l'amélioration de la gestion de l'environnement et le fonctionnement du centre national de microscience.

Pour ce qui est de la culture et de la communication, on peut évoquer pour s'en féliciter le renforcement des capacités des acteurs culturels et l'amélioration de la gestion des aires protégées, ainsi que la promotion de l'accès à l'information.

Cette brève énumération ne saurait être exhaustive tant sont importantes et diversifiées les réalisations de l'UNESCO dans mon pays. Je dois également saluer l'implantation au Cameroun du siège sous-régional de l'UNESCO pour l'Afrique Centrale. Cette décision va consolider son action dans notre sous-région.

En terminant, qu'il me soit permis d'exprimer ma haute appréciation du travail accompli par l'UNESCO au Cameroun sous l'autorité de Mme Irina BOKOVA. Je tiens à l'en féliciter chaleureusement et à l'en remercier.

**Qu'elle sache que sa visite dans mon pays
l'an dernier reste gravée dans les
mémoires.**

Je vous remercie de votre attention.