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REPORT OF THE TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL

Statement made by Mr. Ahmadou Ahidjo, Prime Minister, Head of the Government of the Trust State of the Cameroons, speaking as a member of the French delegation at the 800th meeting of the Fourth Committee, on 14 November 1958

Note: In accordance with the decision taken by the Fourth Committee at its 800th meeting, the text of the following statement is distributed to members of the Committee for their information.

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Mr. Chairman, in the statement which I had the honour of making to this body a few days ago, I tried to review the political development of the Cameroons during the last few years and to give you an accurate picture of the existing situation and of the present feelings and aspirations of the majority of the Cameroonians.

Having studied the statements of a number of delegations, however, I think it would be useful if I gave you some additional information on some points.

I do not of course consider it necessary to repeat here information which can be found in the documentation of the Trusteeship Council or which can be better obtained, because it will be at greater length and in greater detail, on the spot by the Visiting Mission, whose main task is to report what it finds.

I shall therefore confine myself to explaining my feelings about some important problems to which delegations have given attention. In that connexion, I should like to point out that I am the Prime Minister, the Head of a coalition Government appointed by a democratically elected Assembly, and that I cannot therefore make commitments for the future with regard to matters within the competence of the legislature.

The question of amnesty has been frequently touched upon. Amnesty is a word that is brandished by many but with very varying meanings. To begin with, I would point out that there is already an amnesty law which was voted by the French Parliament. At least it has served to wipe out the offences committed in 1955 and to enable those who have been away from the Cameroons for several years to return to their country if they so desire. There are no political conditions attached to the granting of this amnesty and I would remind you that everyone is free to establish a political association or a political party in the Cameroons if he sees fit. It must, however, be a democratic party resolved to observe the laws and regulations of a system in which people try to respect the opinions and lives of their neighbours. We have no desire to have shock brigades, para-military bodies and an inhuman ideology revived among us, under the cover of democracy.

Moreover, a de facto amnesty is being applied in the Cameroons. Men who in the last few months had decided to return to a status of legality in

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Sanaga Maritime have been left unmolested, except for a few who had to answer for reprehensible crimes and whose cases have been brought before the courts in the normal manner; here, too, the action against them has been characterized by by the greatest leniency.

Jurisdictional powers, including the power of granting an amnesty, will as I said the other day, be transferred to the Cameroonian Parliament on 1 January 1959. I am sure that it will then examine the provisions of a broader amnesty, in a spirit of pacification and reconciliation. Nevertheless, I should like to point out that amnesty, before becoming a matter of law, must be born in the heart and that the spirit of reconciliation cannot be imposed from without but must arise from the steadfast resolve of those concerned.

For its part, the Government of the Cameroons is daily demonstrating its tolerance and liberality.

Among the members of Parliament, as elsewhere in the country, political parties and organizations which have opinions and programme different from, or opposed to, our own hold meetings, make statements, issue declarations, publish newspapers whose violently critical tone and articles would not be tolerated in many other countries, and distribute leaflets, of which they sometimes send copies to the United Nations.

I was extremely surprised at the suggestion that there might be new elections.

Our Assembly was freely elected, on the basis of universal suffrage, by nearly a million voters in a country with about 3,200,000 inhabitants; as women were voting for the first time, we had a hitherto unequalled degree of participation, very high for Africa and higher than is sometimes the case in old-established democracies.

The electoral campaign hinged entirely on the question of the development and independence of the Cameroons, as I pointed out a few days ago. I therefore see no need for a new consultation to ascertain the opinion of the Cameroonian people concerning their future.

The people have accordingly been consulted already on the political system they wish to adopt on the termination of trusteeship and the Legislative Assembly, by its motion of 24 October, has plainly informed the Administering Authority of the choice of the Cameroonians.

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Our Assembly has been in office for under two years. When our brothers in the Cameroons under British administration have chosen to join us, we shall no doubt be moved by common consent to hold further elections. We are not going to hold elections every year; we have better things to do in building up the structure of our independence on sound foundations.

However that may be, the possible organization of elections is no longer within the competence of the Administering Authority but is a matter for the judgement of the Cameroonians. Now that we are on the eve of independence, we believe ourselves to be capable of taking any steps which we may consider desirable as regards our internal political life.

I have just referred to the question of reunification and I think that I shall be meeting the wish expressed by several delegations if I explain more fully our feelings on that subject. The Cameroons under French administration will become independent on 1 January 1960; the inhabitants of the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under British administration will therefore have to be consulted before that date on the question of whether they intend to join us when we attain independence.

Then, when we are both emancipated, we shall discuss in full freedom, as friends and fellow-countrymen, the practical and institutional problems of reunion.

I do not think it is my business to give an opinion on the precise form the consultation of our brothers in the British Cameroons should take; your Visiting Mission is there to find out what procedure it considers the best. What we want is that there shall be genuine consultation and I repeat that we are waiting with open arms for them to join us in our independence.

That independence will be complete and full, like that of the States whose representatives are seated round this table. The powers in respect of external relations, defence and currency, which under the temporary Statute of domestic autonomy we, like our Togolese friends, have entrusted to France, will from 1 January 1960 onwards be the exclusive responsibility of the Cameroonian Government.

Our future relations with France, or with any other Power - and we ourselves are eager to establish such relations - will be like any other international

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relations; they will be freely discussed on a basis of equality, and will be contractual in character, as is customary in relations between States.

In making this further statement I did not suppose that I should convince those who had already decided against me even before I opened my mouth for the first time. But I do think that I have provided all States Members of this Assembly whose first and foremost concern is to foster the forthcoming independence of a young State with the details and explanations that they might desire.

I should have liked to be able to participate in your debates long and assiduously. But you know that in order to come here I had to leave the session of our Assembly, which is now debating the Statute that is to govern us until 1 January 1960, the date of our independence. You are also aware that the Visiting Mission, the last body from this international Organization that we shall welcome before we attain our independence, and hence of special importance to us, is due to arrive today in the capital of the Cameroons and that I must go to receive it.

I am sure that in the circumstances you will forgive my approaching departure and my all too brief visit to this Assembly, which has barely given me time to become acquainted with your methods and procedures.

Nevertheless I am confident that, however brief it may have been, the visit of a delegation from the Cameroonian Government, speaking on behalf of the Cameroonian people, will have helped to dispel some doubts and to dispose of some myths.

I want once again to assure you of the confidence that the Cameroonian people have placed in your impartiality and your benevolent attitude, and I shall leave for my country convinced - the expressions of sympathy I have received here are to me the best pledge of that - that men of goodwill will join together to enable us to take our place in the community of nations as soon as possible after our accession to independence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
