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REQUESTS FOR ORAL HEARINGS

Letter of 3 September 1953 from Mr. Etienne M'Bida,
on behalf of the "Radicaux Modés Camerounais", to
the President of the Trusteeship Council

NOTE: In accordance with the decision of the Fourth Committee taken at its 319th meeting on 29 September 1953, the text of the following is circulated for the information of members.

M'balmayo, 3 September 1953

M'Bida Etienne
Founder of the "Radicaux Modés
Camerounais" party
Nseng-Nlongi, M'balmayo, Cameroons

The President of the Trusteeship
Council, c/o The President-General
of the United Nations

I have the honour to send you this memorandum on behalf of the R.M.C.

Since you will open the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly in a few days' time, my letter will certainly reach you rather late. I am sending it to you in accordance with your desire that the citizens of the Trust Territories should concern themselves with the future of their countries and hasten their political advancement with a view to the achievement of a certain measure of political self-government.

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This desire, expressed by you to some of our people, did not fail to achieve realization in a recent resolution of the Trusteeship Council pursuant to which, by five votes to two, with two abstentions, the citizens of the Trust Territories are to take part in the government of their countries. We joyfully welcomed that decision, which goes some way towards meeting our claims.

But this gain has not yet been put into effect, and the international situation and the disturbed political balance of the two zones of a single territory prompt us to bring up again the issues debated before at the last session of the United Nations General Assembly: the unification of the Cameroons and the constitution of an autonomous government in this country.

In point of fact, it is easy to see from a careful study of the provisions applicable to us that the United Nations has placed us in an impossible position; a country whose sovereignty is not vested in any body is necessarily a prey to inconceivable difficulties from an administration pursuing a policy of assimilation, bent on applying it unilaterally to all the territories under its jurisdiction, and not hesitating to make use of the method of cold war to achieve its ends. Furthermore, the international situation, more particularly the present political situation in Europe, and the German question, where developments are bound to be directly related to our own future, are far from guaranteeing the security of our territory. Therefore, on behalf of the R.M.C., which represents a large part of the country, I wish to place before you, with all the clarity required for the solution of such important problems, our viewpoints on the unification of the Cameroons and on the drafting of a Cameroons constitution comparable to those of the British territories adjacent to ours, such as Nigeria, and to that demanded by our neighbours in the British zone.

The United Nations reply denying the urgency of the unification of the Cameroons is somewhat difficult to understand. I have already spoken to you of the foreign policy of the trustee countries, particularly that of our own, and you are, moreover, familiar with it.

Britain's colonial policy is completely imbued with a liberal spirit. It readily grants self-government progressively to its territories according as they achieve maturity. In the British zone some of our compatriots have already been appointed ministers in the Government of Nigeria. All that remains to be done, therefore, is to apply the same policy throughout the territory. Europe is in the process of unification; that is a source of considerable misgiving for us, for we are ruled by clauses, of disturbing elasticity, which darken the horizon of our beloved motherland. Under the terms of the United Nations Charter, sovereignty, the basis of all security, is actually not vested in any mandatory Power. Nor is it vested in the indigenous inhabitants, who do not possess the key to any sort of power. Now the European Defence Community comprises France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands. Their interests in the Trust Territories are contradictory and they leave us no hope of one day achieving freedom. Are we not about to be betrayed by our trustees? The majority of the great Powers: America, USSR, have expressed the same opinion as we on this question. How is it possible to form an alliance with Germany without agreeing to restore the colonies to that country on demand? It will be realized that this position is extremely dangerous. We, by that very fact, run the risk of falling back into the bottomless abyss of eternal slavery.

Even on the assumption that the Cameroons are not ceded to the Germans, the prospect of a future claim to the Cameroons by the Germans of today at a time when they are in process of recovering both the integrity and the independence of their territory inevitably commands us to be vigilant. We therefore urgently request you to respond favourably to our petitions. At our present stage of development, we should no longer like, when Germany has regained its independence, to suffer the anguish of seeing our country once more about to be subjugated to Germany. If your diplomatic moves succeed in placing us on a footing of equality with the other nations, we shall not fail to co-ordinate our efforts with theirs for the maintenance of the peace of the free world. In that case we shall no longer be running the risk of losing our heritage.

The need to unify the Cameroons and to form an autonomous government having thus been demonstrated, we must now consider what steps are required.

The drafting of a constitution disposes of the unification issue. The following is an outline of my ideas concerning that future constitution: After the end of the 1914-1918 world war, France and Britain were unable to agree on the setting-up of a Franco-British condominium in the Cameroons. They cannot now agree to reopen the question. We must therefore contemplate a different solution or rather resort to a compromise. In my opinion, the Cameroons should be administered by a tripartite government, that is to say an autonomous government assisted by two commissions, a United Nations commission and a Franco-British commission. The government should comprise a ministry and a Cameroons national assembly (senators and deputies). The permanent United Nations commission will, in accordance with the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, comprise a representative of the USSR, one of the United States of America, one of Europe, one of Asia and one of Australia. Its function will be to settle any dispute that may arise between the young government and the Franco-British commission. The members of the latter will be the High Commissioners of each of the regions. It will guide the new government in the administration of the country. In this way the influence of each of the trustees in its own sector will be safeguarded. The government will have its headquarters at Yaoundé, which will be called the federal capital. The capital of the region under French trusteeship will be removed to Douala. It is our hope that the general elections for the entire territory may take place next December.

Furthermore, we urgently request you to let us take part in the work of the United Nations this year so that we can present our arguments and reply to any objections that may be raised. The Territory's budget will not be seriously upset thereby.

May our aspirations, on the eve of this General Assembly of the United Nations which is called upon to settle the great problems of supreme interest to us, find a favourable echo among you and be realized for the greater good of our countries, our metropolitan States, and that august Assembly, guardian of the peace of the universe.

I have the honour to be etc.

Leader of the R.M.C.

(Signed) M'bida Etienne
