

DIAMOND JUBILEE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

‘SASSE COLLEGE: LEADERSHIP & EXCELLENCE FOR AN EMERGING CAMEROON’

By

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The personal representative of H.E Paul Biya, President of the Republic and Head of State;

Minister Jacques Fame Ndongo, Minister of Higher Education;

Minister Pierre Mukoko Mbonjo

The Representative of the Governor of the South West Region;

The Senior Divisional Officer of Fako Division

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Sasse Buea;

Your Lordship the Emeritus Bishop of Mamfe;

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The Chairperson of the Organizing Committee, Dr. Edmund Agbor;

Honourable Senators;

Honourable Parliamentarians;

Traditional Rulers;

Distinguished Guests and Invitees;

SOBANS;

Current Students of this great Institution;

Ladies and Gentlemen in your various capacities;

About four months ago, I was informed by the Organizing Committee of the 75th Anniversary Celebrations that I was to give this Academic Discourse entitled, "Sasse College: Leadership & Excellence for an Emerging Cameroon". Personally, I don't know what guided their choice, in the most important anniversary celebration ever of St. Joseph's College Sasse, the Alma Mater of this great collection of people called SOBANS. I kept on asking the question: 'why me'? As I mulled over this question; it dawned on me that this wasn't about student No. 2417 - Julius Oben of the 1974 batch; it was for a bigger and better course; it was about Sasse College; it was about leadership; it was about excellence; it was about sacrifice; it was about imparting knowledge and sharing experiences; it was all the things that the Mill Hill Missionaries had hoped for Sasse, when the doors of the first Secondary School in this part of Cameroon were opened in February 1939, six months before the German battleship Schleswig-Holstein fired on the Polish fort of Westerplatte and marked the start of the Second World War. Sasse came with the Second World War, but did not go away in 1945, lest only the likes of Alexander Chungwa, Mome Mbole, John Akuma or my primary school headmaster Augustine Valimbe, who were among the first 75 students admitted, would have qualified to be Sasse Old Boys - SOBANS. Sasse College had one main objective 75 years ago: to train manpower that could help society to overcome its challenges, and "emerge" from poverty and deprivation; from underdevelopment.

Sasse outlived its twin brother, the Second World War. Logical to the theory of rejuvenation, a good part of the world woke up to prosperity after the ruins of the Second World War. It gave the kickoff for emergence in Europe, the United States, Japan, the Soviet Union, today Russia, China and the Asian Tigers. The twin brother was not left out but started its march towards emergence as well. Seventy five years have gone by; seventy five years of change; seventy five years of striving to be ahead of the competition; seventy five years as the flag bearer of Anglophone secondary education; seventy five years of leadership; 75 years of consistency to become a household brand. In 75 years, Sasse has had different actors on the stage, different captains, all steering the Sasse ship towards excellence, each in his turn working towards the training of young men to fit in and contribute to the development of society. Yes! for 75 years, Sasse College has been working towards an emergent Cameroon and I salute all the past principals and formators who have made this possible, training well rounded men who are now SOBANS in our present day Cameroonian society as well as our global village. SOBANS have applied and continue to apply all what they learnt during their time in Sasse and today represent the cream and light of our society. They form a rich database of SOBANS, in which we find followers, leaders and excellent leaders. Leadership, which is key for an emergent society can therefore be readily found amongst SOBANS. What is leadership and who is a leader I may ask? Wikipedia defines leadership as "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task"

Henry Kissinger describes a leader as "someone with the task of getting his people from where they are to where they have not been"; while General Colin Powell says this of great leaders; "they are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution

everybody can understand". How can we talk about leaders without mentioning the selfless Nelson Mandela, who in 1998 had this to say of a leader, "he is like a shepherd; he stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind". In talking about leaders, it is also important to know who leaders are not; and this could not be better put than by this quote from Dwight Eisenhower; "you do not lead by hitting people over the head – that's assault, not leadership".

To these great men of history, I will add my voice that "leaders are not made in Yaoundé, but are individuals who possess certain characteristics worth emulating". This personal view is in line with the established 'Trait Theory of Leadership'. In 1841, Thomas Carlyle in the book 'Heroes and Hero Worship' identified the talents, skills and physical characteristics of men who rose to power. In this same 19th century (1869 to be specific), Francis Galton's Hereditary Genius, examined leadership qualities in families of powerful men, and concluded that leaders were born not developed. These views were contrary to that of Cecil Rhodes (1853 – 1902) who believed that public-spirited leadership could be nurtured by identifying young people with the "moral force of character and instincts to lead", and educating them in contexts (such as collegiate environment) which further developed such characteristics". Networks created in this context could be of future benefit and help in different aspects of leadership and understanding.

Yes, Sasse educated young men in a God fearing, morally upright context, with sharing as the best means to survival, creating what today is this extremely rich database of human resources. The very rich and diverse human resource database that Sasse has built over the years has focused on emergence. What emergence however, if I may ask? Emergence as a slogan or real emergence? Emergence that is awaited and will come on 1st January 2035 or emergence that is a gradual and well calculated process identified by Guy Gweth as comprising the following 7 steps:

Stepping up energy supply;

Developing infrastructure;

Accelerating the development of the agricultural sector;

Improving the business climate and competitiveness of the economy;

Increasing the diversification of external trade;

Rationalizing the management of natural resources and the environment;

Boosting youth employment.

To answer the question of what type of emergence, I thought I should look at and draw inspiration from the Academic Discourse presented by Professor Gabriel Obenson, twenty five years ago at the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Sasse College. At that time "Emergence" was not yet a buzzword

in Cameroon, and the priorities of our nation as well as other African countries were different; reason why his talk was entitled "Sasse as an osculating educational basis for Cameroon". This accomplished geologist of blessed memory was able to use various mathematical equations to conclude that "Sasse and its products play an obvious leadership role in all positive facets of our country, because of the sense of perfection and excellence instilled in these products whilst in Sasse". If we look at all the great people that Cameroon has ever had, from those who worked for the independence of our country, having served in Nigeria as well as Cameroon, the great medical practitioners, the seasoned lawyers and judges, farmers, engineers, administrators, educationists, law enforcement and defence officers, journalists, diplomats, accountants, businessmen, sportsmen, musicians etc.; Professor Obenson could not be more right. If we look at priests and religious, with Sasse having produced more Anglophone Bishops than all Secondary schools put together: from His Lordship Bishop Paul Verdzevov, Bishop Pius Awa, Bishop Fontem Esua, Bishop Immanuel Bushu, Bishop Francis Teke Lysinge; it is surprising that His Eminence Christian Cardinal Tumi, Bishop George Nkuo, Bishop Agapitus Nfon and Bishop Andrew Nkea are not SOBANS.

But what good are these products in the context of our present day Cameroon? A country blessed with an abundance of natural resources, yet not sure to emerge in 2035, if no drastic steps are taken? A recent phenomenon that seems to have no end in view is the wave of arrests and imprisonment of former government ministers and the country's top brass. Another striking feature is that most of these men are Christians or more precisely, Catholics, or people who have lived and worked with Christians, presuming that if the Christians around them had lived exemplary lives, one would have expected some form of positive influence. Someone has remarked that the Small Christian Community of Kondengui seems to be the fastest growing Small Christian Community in Cameroon! Still looming large over these high-level arrests is the widespread practice of corruption and institutionalized banditry in Cameroon, a malaise that has become so pervasive and endemic in this beloved country. Can we do better at tackling corruption in this country and drastically reduce its debilitating effects on national development and progress? Can the wheels of justice be strengthened in such a way that Cameroon can become a State in which the judiciary can act promptly and fairly in adjudicating cases of corruption?

That corruption is pervasive in Cameroon is indisputable. This has been in the domain of public discourse for a long time. Good governance is its first major casualty, giving rise to a criminalized economy, decrepit infrastructure, worsening insecurity, impoverished citizenry and a totally disoriented polity. It diminishes the stature of Cameroon and assails the pride of its citizens in the comity of nations. Worse still, the fight against corruption, identified as the bane of Cameroon's development, has stalled. This is a tragedy for Cameroon; and there is little doubt that Cameroon's diverse and growing security challenges are partly rooted in widespread poverty and unemployment, which in turn, are outcomes of pervasive corruption. Interestingly, Cameroonians know, based on their own perceptions and experiences, that their country is one of the world's most corrupt, and for those who pretend not to know, reports like the recent Transparency International rankings published a few weeks ago are there to remind them and for the world to see. Sadly, corruption walks tall in Cameroon today as though it is no longer a crime to indulge in it, the recent high-level arrests, notwithstanding. Investigations by both the legislative and the executive arms are increasingly regarded by Cameroonians as a political ploy to

rid the system of those who have fallen out of political favour. The lack-lustre disposition of government to the people's agitation to arrest the galloping corruption in the country accentuates and strengthens the malaise. Progress and credibility in the fight against corruption can be won only through concrete, well-thought-out plans and not through impromptu arrests, here and there.

Given this state of affairs, what can Sasse do? Sasse College does not run the Presidency of Cameroon; Sasse College does not run the Ministries in Cameroon; Sasse College does not run any of the arms of government, as we know in Cameroon. Sasse College has fulfilled and continues to fulfill its obligations of training well rounded Cameroonian boys, you and me - SOBANS. The question now is, "What difference can we make"? What possible change can we bring about? As SOBANS, where can we look for inspiration to make a difference in Cameroon? Where better to draw our inspiration than from Pope John Paul II and what he did to his fellow Poles that led to the Solidarity Movement that peacefully brought down Communism. Pope John Paul reminded Poles of the presence of Jesus Christ in their history as a nation. He reminded them that even though external forces of Communism under the Soviet Empire were controlling Poland, the true Poland was not in the powers of the Kremlin, not in Moscow, but in the hearts of the Poles, in their consciences. He probably had in mind the description of the Second Vatican Council of the human conscience: "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the lives of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 16).

Dear SOBANS, even if we cannot control the political forces that have propelled our country with such a great centrifugal force into this spiral of corruption, leading to hopelessness and desperation for so many of our young people, we can begin to make a difference if we were to act according to right conscience, wherever we find ourselves as Old Boys of Sasse. Conscience gives every SOBAN the opportunity to be a good leader, leading from behind, which could be very effective, as we see in the life of Pope John Paul II in his native Poland; or in the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in India and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Conscience teaches every SOBAN that leadership must not be identified with political authority. Conscience teaches every SOBAN that leadership implies followership, and that people are naturally attracted to what is beautiful, good and true, to cite the transcendental properties of being. Above all, CONSCIENCE teaches every SOBAN to live, act, and work, for the dignity of every

Cameroonian man, woman and child; to work for the common good of Cameroon and not just for our individual interest; and above all, to strive for a spirit of solidarity in our lives as Cameroonians; in other words to be “our brother’s keeper”. To qualify what SOBANS can do, in working towards a more just, equitable and responsible society, we don’t need to look very far, but to our very own former Prime Minister of Cameroon, now Senator Peter Mafany Musonge, whom many loved to call “Mr. Clean” because of his determined stand against corruption within government, at a time when many did not have the courage to call its name; the same Right Honourable Musonge who also recently headed a disciplinary council of the ruling CPDM political party, giving hope to many Cameroonians that ‘Cameroon is serious in fighting corruption, and will one day emerge’. Not all SOBANS can be Peter Mafany Musonge, but as Martin Luther King Jr. put it “If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in great ways”. If one SOBAN can do it, all SOBANS should be able to do this in their own way.

Mr. Chairman, representative of the President of the Republic of Cameroon, distinguished SOBANS, students, ladies and gentlemen; today our great nation Cameroon, asks us all to work towards emergence by 2035. I want today to say loud and clear, and hopefully with the voices of all SOBANS that, “Sasse College in 75 years has fulfilled its obligation of developing leadership towards an emergent Cameroon”. The challenge now therefore is for SOBANS as individuals created in the image of God, to use all what they acquired in their time in Sasse College as well as their consciences, which will make them more disciplined, hardworking, honest, integral, patriotic, dedicated and with a common vision, to make Cameroon ‘more beautiful for God’. Then and only then can we talk of real emergence.

I thank you for your kind attention.

