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ROLE OF THE DIASPORA IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF PEACE
IN NORTH-WEST AND SOUTH-WEST REGIONS IN CAMEROON



Entretien avec

DR. CALISTUS ABANG



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Calistus ABANG

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Tel: 237 694 096 263, info@ipreva.org – www.ipreva.org

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Author Introduction

Calistus ABANG has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Yaounde 2, Soa, Cameroon. He is a researcher who has devoted most of his research in diasporas studies and is author of ‘The Political and Economic Contributions of Cameroonian Diasporas, Case of those in the USA and Great Britain and their Contributions in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon’, Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, June 2019, and the “The sense of belonging as an epic of nationalism: The case of Cameroon Diasporas”, African Humanities Review (pending publication). He collaborates in many other scholarly works and is a researcher with the State of African Diaspora (SOAD). He is also a specialist in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action sanctioned by many international certifications from reputed training centers and Higher Institutes.



Our interest through this exchange with you is to guide national policies to strengthen the inclusive process of peacebuilding. We also aim to guide the support that bilateral and multilateral, state and non-state partners can provide to the implementation of programmes to promote governance and sustainable reconstruction in the South-West and North-West regions of the Republic of Cameroon, which are experiencing a socio-political crisis with secessionist tendencies since late 2016.

The reconstruction of these regions in protracted crisis requires that robust measures be taken in the process of consolidating peace on the social, economic, political and cultural levels. Against this backdrop, there is a growing willingness on the part of the government to recognize the importance of the role of its citizens living abroad or the new African Union diaspora in national development. How do you see this Cameroonian diaspora? How do you describe it?

Calistus Abang: First and foremost, we should be very careful when dissecting the Cameroonian diasporas and what has become today known as the anglophone crises in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. Before delving into the crux and the axis of your question, permit me state with regret here that, from my personal research and observation, Cameroon is the only country in Africa which regards its diasporas with much disdain. This is always backed by the famous dirge “in the name of national security”. There is the fear that with the much acquired potentials and skills, these diasporas will come to challenge the gerontocratical stooges in place, this explains why there is growing suspicion about the Diapsoras. Each time the issue of diasporas is raised, it was like a taboo question. It is only recently that Cameroon was tipped to understand that it stands to gain much if its diasporas was included in the development of the country. It is from here that the margin between both the Cameroon successive governments and the Diasporas started beaming.

Now coming to your question, one will love to know why talking of reconstruction of a shattered region still in the midst of bullets? It is same like attending the third year in the university while owing credits in level 1 and 2. For you to obtain the terminal degree, you must reconcile your situation behind. That is the picture we see immediately we think about reconstruction in a zone where people are unable to go



freely doing their daily activities due to deafening shoot-outs between belligerents.

The Cameroonian Diasporas is made up of people with diverse backgrounds which can go a long way to help remedy any situation the government needs it attention. Unfortunately, the squabbles in the English-speaking region in Cameroon, are blamed solely on the diasporas. It is but obvious that the government will not count a hundred percent on them to quell these crises considered to have been caused by them. However, the government has all it takes to carry out the reconstruction of this region if it aligns with the request for an inclusive dialogue to end the crises so that the reconstruction can go on in a super high gear, hitch-free. But unfortunately, the government is not ready for an inclusive dialogue which is the yearnings of the international partners, diasporas and the civil society. The government relies on the fact that, a major national dialogue took place which unfortunately was termed by many, as a cosmetic dialogue which brought together only a hand full of the members of the diasporas whose majority are members of the ruling CPDM in their respective countries and could not speak against party lines.

Aristide B. Bilounga: *The African Development Bank (AfDB) has conducted several studies on the diaspora, including the “Bank’s approach to migrant donation transfers” in 2009 and the study on “Africans Living Abroad: Trends, Structures and Determinants of Migration” in 2011. These studies, like many others, highlight the role of the diaspora in nation building. In the current Cameroonian context, can we say that the diaspora plays an effective role in the reconstruction of the regions of the Southwest and the Northwest?*

Calistus Abang: I agree with the stance of the ADB *vis-à-vis* the remittances of African Diasporas as a whole and Cameroonian diaspora in particular. One of the main visible domains in which diaspora impact is felt in their home countries, is the remittances sent home for various purposes. Remittances are parts of the earnings of the members of the Diasporas which are sent home to love ones and families for various reasons. They include direct transfers, transfers of



goods and services, some of which are later sold and the proceeds used to carry out personal Investments, paying of school fees and various bills. The ADB had cautioned that finance institutions need to reduce charges levied on money transfers between the Diasporas and their home countries which was to be a great relief on the Diaspora-Development nexus. The world bank contends that the African Diasporas sends huge sums of money back home in the form of remittances. Before the war in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, sparked-off, the Cameroon diasporas of English extraction, communed every end of year with their families and never missed any occasion that took place in their regions. When coming, they brought in goods and services which greatly augmented the purchasing powers of their families. Infrastructural developments got heightened as can be seen in Molyko, mile 17, 18 in Buea, upstation, Bambili in Bamenda just to name but a few. But with the advent of the senseless war whose victims keep swelling, very few of them can even step their feet in Cameroon because of the fear of being apprehended for suspicion among them which is growing in leaps and bounce. To bring these diasporas on board the reconstruction of these regions, the government needs to declare a cease-fire and pardon so that these citizens can freely come home and continue with their Development oriented projects which had hitherto been the beacon of these places and their various families.

Aristide D. Bilounga: *How do you think the Cameroonian state and its development and humanitarian partners can better mobilize the diaspora for peace and sustainable development?*

Calistus Abang: One of the recommendations of my research, was the creation of a department of the diasporas like it is obtained in India where there is an agency for the diasporas, in Morocco and Senegal where there are ministerial departments. By having these structures, prove the willingness of the government to incorporate its diasporas in Development drive of the country. By having these structures, give the diasporas the lee-way to enter the country and intervene in domains



of their various competencies. Many other countries are benefitting from the largess, acumen and prowess of Cameroonian diasporas to the disadvantage of Cameroon as a result of suspicion that the government has vis-a-vis the diasporas. We have people like Christopher Fomunyuy who is a reputed and respectable Cameroon whose talents are tapped by other countries in matters of peace-building etc. Let the diasporas be given pardon for those who have committed crimes against the state and let the state be tax friendly with goods and services from the diasporas. Many cars are abandoned at the seaports by Cameroonian diasporas who ship them to sell and carry out important projects which lead to job creation etc but are heavily taxed by custom duties.

Aristide D. Bilounga: *Do people have a role to play in the effort of the Cameroonian diaspora to strengthen the nation?*

Calistus Abang: Yes, the population has a role to play. For instance, you will be shocked to hear that a member of a diaspora community arrives the country and the population is fast to inform the security that this person is around and many are in custody awaiting trials simply because they are from “abroad”. They come to carry out development Projects but because of the growing suspicion that the war in the English region is fanned by the diaspora and the Brigade “anti-sardinard” phenomena, is a cause for concern. The population needs to stamp out this suspicion and give way for peace. Also, the population has to help fight against tribalistic tendencies especially in the acquisition of land. It is said that some villagers openly discriminate in the attribution of land to the diasporas. If this is the case, then much need to be done especially through peaceful co-existence.

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