



**MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION
*MINISTÈRE DE LA COMMUNICATION***

**GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION ON THE
SOFTENING MEASURES AND SUPPORT TO
THE NATIONAL ECONOMY WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL RESPONSE
STRATEGY AGAINST COVID-19 IN
CAMEROON**

PRESS BRIEFING OF MINCOM

STATEMENT

OF

**H.E. RENE EMMANUEL SADI
*MINISTER OF COMMUNICATION***

Yaounde, 13 May 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are all aware, the Prime Minister, Head of Government, made public on April 30, 2020, the additional measures prescribed by THE HEAD OF STATE, HIS EXCELLENCY PAUL BIYA, within the framework of the implementation of the National Response Strategy to the COVID-19 Pandemic in our country.

These new measures, nineteen in all, come at the heels of other measures, taken in the same vein, first on March 17, 2020, then on April 09, 2020.

These latter measures are part of the concern to soften the constraints brought about by the need for rigour and discipline in the conduct of the response strategy on the one hand, and the imperative to implement an alternative scheme to support the national economy in order to mitigate the impact of the health crisis on businesses and households, on the other hand.

It is therefore for the purpose of providing new insights necessary to better enlighten national public opinion on these important measures, that I have invited you here to take part in this exchange. Allow me to indicate that two Members of Government will also take part in this press briefing, notably, the Minister of Finance, Mr MOTAZE Louis Paul and the Minister of Public Health, Mr MANAOUDA Malachie, whom I am particularly delighted to warmly welcome in this auditorium.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge faced by public authorities in the management of this crisis is that of maintaining a judicious balance between health safety and that of safeguarding the socio-economic vitality of the country.

Allow me to remind you here, that the day after the first cases of coronavirus were confirmed in Cameroon, the PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC prescribed a double set of measures, aiming at containing the spread of this pandemic throughout the national territory and to ensure, if necessary, optimal care for people who may be affected, so as to reduce as much as possible the fatality rate that would result.

Despite the binding nature of these measures, it could be noted with satisfaction, at least in the early days, that the populations in general were respectful of both the barrier gestures recommended by the World Health Organization and the preventive measures prescribed by the Government on March 17 and April 09, 2020.

This resilience of the populations resulted in a notable slowdown in relative value, in the contamination rate noted by the technical services of the Ministry of Public Health.

At the same time, however, the national economy, as well as the social organization of our country,

were considerably impacted by the harmful effects of the pandemic and the various constraints generated by the necessary multifaceted response that it would have required.

With regard to the economy, Cameroonian companies are today affected by this health crisis, owing particularly to the slowdown in activities in this area, due to the decline in our international trade, in particular our commercial relations with the main foreign partners of Cameroon heavily affected by the pandemic.

On the social level, the economic consequences of the crisis are likely to affect employment, and therefore household income.

Fortunately, in our country, the timeliness and adequacy of the response measures taken by the Government have so far preserved most of the jobs and protected the purchasing power of the populations.

Though there may be so much to be commended, the fact remains that in the context of the current crisis, the cash flow of companies is exposed to significant tensions which are likely to deteriorate their operating balances and to hinder the smooth fulfillment of their tax obligations.

It is therefore in recognition of this worrying situation that THE HEAD OF STATE prescribed softening socio-economic measures which should

essentially contribute to the resilience of our businesses, and in turn, safeguard the national economic fabric.

I would like to point out that these measures concern:

- The suspensions for the second quarter of 2020 of general accounting audits, except in cases of suspected tax evasion, a measure aimed at sparing companies of additional payments, which often result from this type of in-depth checks;**
- The postponement of the deadline for filing statistical and tax declarations, without penalties in case of payment of the corresponding balance. This allows us to take into account the difficulties that companies may have encountered in signing this declaration on time due to the constraints linked to the barrier measures enacted;**
- The granting of moratoria and deferrals of payment to companies directly affected by the crisis, hence suspending forced recovery measures against them, a suspension measure which has the effect of protecting businesses from debt collection proceedings which could have hindered the pursuit of their activities;**
- Supporting the finances of company through the allocation of a special envelope of CFAF 25 billion for the clearance of stocks of Value Added Tax credit awaiting reimbursement. This**

measure aims to relieve the cash flow of companies already tense due to the effects of the crisis, thereby enabling them to direct this cash flow towards the adjustment expenses imposed by the economic situation;

- The postponement of the deadline to pay land taxes for the 2020 financial year to 30 September 2020, a measure which mainly aims to protect the purchasing power of households in this period of crisis;**
- Full deductibility to determine the corporate income tax of denotations and gifts made by the companies for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, a measure which allows companies that have accompanied the State in the response to the crisis, in particular through donations, to offset these against their Corporate Tax due at the end of the financial year;**
- The exemptions from the Tourist Tax in the hotel and catering sectors from the rest of the 2020 financial years as from March, as a support measure for this sector strongly impacted by the crisis;**
- Exemption from the withholding tax and from parking fees for taxis and motorbikes as well as from the axle tax for the 2nd quarter. This measure could be extended to the rest of 2020, which alleviates the shortfall caused by the**

restrictive measures imposed on carriers due to the requirement of social distancing;

- Exemption for the second quarter from the withholding tax and council taxes (market duty tax, etc.) for petty traders (bayam sellams) who are thus supported because of their further vulnerability exacerbated by the crisis situation.**

To this set of measures that I have just mentioned, we should add the exemption from customs duties and Value Added Tax on the purchase of materials and equipment intended for the fight against COVID-19.

As can therefore be seen, the decisions taken by THE HEAD OF STATE on April 30, 2020, have a significant impact both on businesses and on the socio-economic vitality of our country, and undeniably reflect his firm resolve to support businesses and households during this difficult period.

With particular regard to the support given to businesses, it should be specified that all categories of businesses, whether large, medium or small-sized, will benefit from these measures. It is, by way of illustration, the case of the allocation of a special envelope of CFAF 25 billion to clear the stock of Value Added Tax credits awaiting reimbursement, which benefits all these companies without exception.

In addition, and in the same vein, particular attention should be paid to small and medium-sized enterprises, which are an important player in our economy and which, as a result, benefit from an exemption of tax including local taxes to which small operators such as petty traders and commercial motorbike operators are generally subjected.

Another important measure concerns the hotel and transport sectors, which are the most affected by the crisis. In this respect, these sectors benefit respectively from an exemption of the tourist tax and axle tax, as well as from local taxes and duties payable by transporters, for the remainder of the 2020 financial year.

Finally, households have not been forgotten, and in their favour, THE HEAD OF STATE has decided to postpone the due date for the payment of the property tax to September 30, 2020, and lifted taxes on products and equipment intended for the prevention, screening and treatment of COVID-19.

In addition to all the measures that I have just recalled, two others have been prescribed that have a more direct and visible impact on the general public and daily life of Cameroonians.

This includes the opening of drinking spots, restaurants and leisure facilities after 6 p.m. It also concerns the lifting of the measure reducing the

authorized number of passengers in all public transport by bus and taxi.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This is the whole range of softening measures decreed by the Head of State and made public on April 30 by the Prime Minister, Head of Government.

It goes without saying that they have been thought out, thoroughly considered, that is to say, in terms of both advantages and disadvantages.

As a matter of fact, as we know, there is a debate going on about the timing, appropriateness and rationale of these measures. This debate is not specific to Cameroon. It is taking place almost everywhere in Africa and in the rest of the world.

However, the trend that can be observed is towards greater softening for some and the lifting of lockdown for others, which confirms a broad convergence of points of view on the need to reconcile health requirements with economic and social imperatives.

In all, we can therefore affirm the timeliness and adequacy of the presidential decision and the appropriateness of the socio-economic softening measures he prescribed.

Moreover, these measures were hailed by the vast majority of Cameroonians who lauded the wisdom,

lucidity and clear-sightedness of the PRESIDENT of the REPUBLIC.

However, we cannot refrain from deploring the misinterpretation that a large section of our fellow citizens seem to be giving of these softening measures, which to them, proclaim victory over COVID-19 and thus the end of the fight against the Pandemic.

Unfortunately, this misinterpretation is reflected on a daily basis in a relaxation of the constraints that are essential for the protection of each and every one of us, in the non-observance of the barrier gestures recommended by the WHO or in the failure to comply with government regulations, including the compulsory wearing of masks in areas open to the public, social distancing set at a minimum of one metre, and a ban on overloading in public transport. It cannot be overemphasized that strict compliance by all with these measures is and remains the sine qua non condition for the success of the National Response Strategy Against COVID-19 and hence for our collective survival.

Incidentally, if we look closely, the softening of the Government measures still in force is in no way incompatible with the precautions imposed by the barrier measures, both at the individual level and in the various leisure and catering facilities, or even in public transport.

Whether the obligation to wear a mask, respect for social distancing or other requirements, all these

measures must and can be observed individually and collectively. The main thing is to really become aware of the potential role of each and every one, in the transmission or spread of the coronavirus, as in the decline or the containment of this pandemic.

With regard to leisure facilities, such as drinking spots and restaurants, for example, the Government is calling on the responsibility of promoters, owners and restaurant managers to help enforce the recommended actions and barrier measures.

The same applies to all sectors of activity where the involvement of everyone is required, so that in the long run the use of coercion remains the exception rather than the rule.

I would also like to draw our attention to a phenomenon gaining ground in our cities or our communities. This relates to the stigmatization of people tested positive, those suffering from COVID-19, or even those have recovered from the disease.

Such an attitude which is not far from ostracism, and which tends to cast reproach on citizens who, for the majority, ignore the conditions or the circumstances in which they contracted the virus, does not need to be given any room, and must be denounced. It should be noted that COVID-19 is neither a shameful disease nor a curse.

Given that it is a disease that spares no one, and which attacks both the young and the old, one

cannot look at, consider or treat COVID-19 patients as plague victims.

As with all pandemics that have plunged humanity into mourning over the centuries, there are of course those who die, and also those who recover.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in short, we are faced with a challenge, whose scale and seriousness are measured in terms of its spatial coverage and the worldwide mobilization it generates.

In order to address this challenge that concerns us, the contribution of each member of the national community to the eradication of COVID-19 is not an option, but an obligation whose strict observance is both a moral and a civic requirement.

For its part, the Government will continue to fully assume its responsibilities to foster the efforts undertaken to limit and overcome the harmful effects of COVID-19 in Cameroon.

Thank you for your kind attention. The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Public Health will now be able to provide us with new insights or clarifications, and also answer any questions you may have.

The Minister of Communication

(é) René Emmanuel SADI

