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[Speech by President Felix Houphouet-Boigny at the opening session of the National Council meeting on 16 November in Abidjan]

[Excerpts] I said upon my return from Paris how happy I was to be back with you. Today I am even more so since you have brought to me, in the name of the Ivory Coast, your profoundly comforting presence, your kindness and your love. All of us need these qualities to fight the difficult battle in which our country is engaged.

Before my departure for Paris, we held two successive meetings -- the meeting of the Political Bureau and that of the Steering Committee. A very thorough analysis of the situation was contained in a communique broadcast on radio and television and published by FRATERNITE MATIN. I think it is unnecessary to return to those details because they constitute measures we adopted and which must serve as a basis for our thoughts today.

But I also said that we would place this family meeting under the double sign of solidarity and responsibility. The current situation in our country, in Africa and in the world calls for more solidarity and a greater sense of responsibility on our part. I will be very brief today. I have always asserted emphatically that whatever our difficulties we will emerge happy and proud from the crisis because the struggle will have brought us so close together that we will find ourselves united as brothers.

The dream comes before reality because one is allowed to dream, but never before in my 40 years at the head of the party and of the country have I taken my wishes to be reality and the Ivory Coast is not the only country with wishes. If men's illusions were destroyed, there would no longer be men. But we have tried each time to turn our dreams into reality.

My brothers and sisters, the situation today is so serious that I am obliged to tell you this morning that we intend to depend on ourselves. We know that everyone is full of good will, but they are also faced with difficulties. I am an old man who was taught to express himself with images: One cannot ask a squatting frog for a chair. If it had one, why then would it be squatting? There are some people full of good will who would like to help us but who cannot while there are others who are not full of good will -- they are numerous -- and who do not want to help us so that they can benefit from this state of dependence in which our states find themselves. For such people, there has been no change in attitude, rather the exploitation continues. We must be aware of this.

After our seventh congress, we tried to correct our errors in the political, economic and financial fields as well as in education by putting education at the service of development. And since development in the Ivory Coast starts with agriculture, it is, therefore, with the farmers that we will talk of aid. I have not had the opportunity to explain my views on this vital issue for the future of this country, so it is natural for me to explain my ideas on the issue today.

I would like to tell you, however, that to fight efficiently against preconceived ideas and against the prevailing crisis which is the consequence of the world crisis, I will not give my views to the National Council today. I need your ideas and your deliberations. If the decision were to be made by me alone, I would not shirk my responsibility. But I would like this decision to be enlightened by your suggestions. That is why I said I would be brief.

After enumerating the difficulties facing us, I will ask you for advice because this is a responsible National Council. After our last congress, each one of you must have realized that he is responsible to the nation, to his region and to himself.

We will also touch on issues which are not within the framework of the Ivory Coast. You saw on television all the visits of my peers from other African countries. I was unable to honor all their requests to meet with me. What you do not know is that I received other visitors who insisted that their visits be kept secret.

It is this synthesis of ideas and meeting which has led me to emphasize the exceptional seriousness of the situation. There is no sign indicating an end to this crisis.

Many of my colleagues in the Third World were shocked by President Reagan's statement that the American people are trying to put some order to their affairs, therefore, they do not have the time to preoccupy themselves with the problems of others. It is cynical but it is reality. We must also count on ourselves above all. Of course, our position is not that of an already developed country. We are a developing country subject to some constraints which sometimes overcome us. We must, therefore, organize ourselves to emerge from the crisis.

We have already condemned political errors. I will not go back to that. We have spoken of the train of democracy. It has now been put on the rails, but that is not all. It has to move toward its goal: the happiness of the Ivorian. We must be extremely vigilant and cautious. Any small thing could ruin the proper functioning of our train. Therefore, for goodness sake, a year after general elections which brought about competition between men of the same party and not of different parties, it is painful to note that the consequences of the electoral campaign are still alive to the extent that prefects and sub-prefects spend most of their time talking about reconciliation. What a waste of time! In a competition, even within the same family, there must be winners and losers; the winners of today may become the losers of tomorrow. The real winner and the only winner is our country. Your mandate is not an end in itself but a means of serving the country efficiently. I would like you to be aware of this reality today.

The Ivory Coast is not only concerned over the price of coffee but also with the sale of coffee. What does this mean? They have devised a new trick to exploit us even more by setting quotas for each producing country. Hence, the portion of our coffee exceeding the quota is sold dirt cheap. Now, this poses a problem because we buy the coffee with money from the banks; therefore, the coffee must be exported so that the bankers can be repaid.

Regarding cocoa, we are mostly concerned about the price which is still very low. Nevertheless, we are compelled to put up with the whims of the market to sell our coffee, cocoa and many other raw materials despite the unsatisfactory prices. This is why we are fighting and will continue to fight.

Meanwhile, this is the situation. And, I asked those Americans, Europeans, Japanese and communists -- since they were all at the press conference which you viewed in a recorded television broadcast -- is there one country in the world which can undergo such a drastic reduction by more than half of its export earnings and continue to exist without serious disturbances? But this is now our situation. From 700 to 800 billion francs, our earning dropped to between 350 and 400 billion and now we hardly get 37 billion. [as published] Industry, commerce and construction rely on the farmers' earnings. When we collect 800 billion, we construct and import accordingly. Customs revenues have suffered a severe blow from the fall in the prices of our commodities.

I have said this before and I say it again: Our farmers have accepted the greatest sacrifices. For 3 years, they have seen the price of their coffee and cocoa frozen at 300 francs while their expenses increase. They are the ones who pay us. This is why I said a while ago: Stop taking stands that are contrary to the interests of the state.

As I said before the Political Bureau, pupils with the primary school-leaving certificates were recruited in 1959 as auxiliary teachers. Some of them have even become assistant schoolmasters. And they are the ones who trained our pupils for 5 years. Their studies suffered much from this because they had a poor start. So we wanted senior school graduates to become schoolmasters and this affected the decision of secondary school teachers. Consequently, some secondary school pupils were graduated with only a score of 7 points out of 20. Afterward, people intervened, which began the unofficial enrollment of pupils by headmasters. And today, we are faced with a dilemma. Out of 12,000 to 14,000 secondary school graduates, 7,000 are in arts (geography, history, law, sociology, philosophy).

This must be corrected now. This is why we are beginning to adopt increasingly stringent measures. It is in the overriding interest of the country. We have reduced the number of secondary education graduates and, henceforth, we will assign students to various faculties according to the country's needs and possibilities, in other words, in the interest of the young people themselves...Illegal enrollment is ruled out. We are asking the entire country to support the reform which has been carried out in the greater interest of the nation. We have 1,100 unemployed intellectuals. We are doing what we can. We have called on the private sector to help us. It has responded to our appeal and we are continuing...but it must be stopped and this is what we have done. So I am asking all of you to understand. We are all parents of students but the measures we have just taken in the interest of the country must be respected.

At the congress, I did not explain the aid to the farmers and many people thought it meant construction of a few more dams for agriculture, supplying a few more fertilizers to the farmers and, to the cultivators of rice or cotton or aiding coffee and cocoa farmers. That is not what it meant.

Education to serve development means the use of all those who were educated for development. But this has not been the case. We have more than 1,100 university graduates who have no jobs; but this is not all. There is the youth -- the generation which has to take over from my generation. This problem starts from the last year in the primary school and continues to the university. Many of these young people have been dismissed from school after the second year of schooling; others during the first part of secondary school; and the rest after their advanced level grade.

They have no jobs; are we thinking of them? They are the country's active force and it is to them that I was referring when I mentioned aid to the farmers.

I don't want to be a prophet of misfortune but you must think of them. In 20 years, today's youth will be 40 or 60. Do you think they will have enough strength to hold their cutlasses? No. And do you believe that their children who went to school will take up their cutlasses and hoes to till and to climb the palm trees? Don't be deceived. We must find something else to make possible the rational utilization of the children trained at school so their education can truly aid development.

I say a little door was opened at Cancun. Ronald Reagan said: "We are willing to help the Third World -- especially the African countries -- to attain self-sufficiency in food production. To say it differently, we will give them experts to make studies; we will even give them some means."

We will seize this opportunity. I am, therefore, asking you to think over this: How can these young people be put to use? We have an answer to this but we will not give it now. We want you to think it over; we will give you our opinion at the right time....

We must accept sacrifice; we mentioned the 1,100 unemployed intellectuals. But they are not the only ones. There are 4,000 foremen who have been declared excess and are threatened with being thrown out into the streets. To solve this problem, we need to display a sense of solidarity. I will not say how, but you must think it over.

And now, there is the case of the other workers with no special skills, especially those in the construction sector. Today, the construction sector has been reduced by a fourth or a fifth. The misfortune is that even the world's most beautiful woman can only give out what she has. All the same, we will not be wrong in asserting that in 3 years at most, we will emerge from the tunnel.

We must accept the fact that the Ivorian has no foresight. These foremen, who worked between 10 and 15 years, have not been able to build a single house for themselves. The Ivorian does not save. But how can we become masters of our industry and of our trade if we do not save enough?

Concerning our functionaries and workers in the private sector, it must be recognized that they bring honor to the country. Thanks to them, we are being praised abroad. During my recent visit to Switzerland, a delegation of businessmen offered me a loan of 250 billion CFA francs -- payable in 20 years at an interest rate of 7 or 10 percent. The attitude of these businessmen was motivated by the fact that our country soon will begin to produce oil.

We are a country in which people have confidence. Even those we denounce respect us.

Already, we have employed 560 of the 1,100 unemployed; the rest must also work. Also there is the case of the foremen. What must be done?

The independence anniversary celebrations were becoming too expensive for the state. The last one held at Katiola cost the government 7 billion CFA francs. Therefore, we have thought it over and believe that the money for the feasts could be saved and used to help the out-of-work foremen.

To conclude, I would like to say this: In Paris, I have challenged the world that has been exploiting us. I told the rich countries that within 30 or 40 years, our children will engage in another form of dialogue -- the dialogue of solidarity; and it is you, the youth, who, armed with patience, will engage in the combat.

Let's not have to deplore the deterioration of trade tomorrow; let's not have to weep over the fate of our farmers and workers, because by then you will have established factories and will be working in them, and by so doing, the challenge of the old man [Houphouet-Boigny] will be transformed into a living reality -- that of a free Ivory Coast, an independent and fraternal Ivory Coast.

Think over what I have just said; I want you to brighten my judgment.