

# The Choice for the Cameroons

**By Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, P.C., K.B.E., LL.D, M.P., Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.**

*[If you vote for the Republic of Cameroun] You would throw in your lot with a country whose government has made no firm promises to you and has given no undertaking, a country which unfortunately has been torn in recent years by civil wars... If you do so, then you cannot expect as of right to live in peace, to cultivate your farms in peace, or to receive the same justice which has been provided for you until now... If you vote against Nigeria... you will be putting yourselves under a country which as different laws and a completely different attitude towards life.*

***Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of Nigeria.***

**The statement below is the text of a broadcast delivered by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, P.C., K.B.E., LL.D, M.P., Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on Radio Nigeria, received in the Southern Cameroons on 22 January 1961, reassuring Cameroonians of their future if they decided in the plebiscite to rejoin Nigeria.**

THE PRIME MINISTER: I want to talk to you this evening about the Southern Cameroons so that you may all understand quite clearly the position of the Federal Government in this matter.

I hope that my words will reach those people in the Southern Cameroons whose votes are going to decide the fate of the whole population, the fate not only of those alive but now also of generations as yet unborn.

In three weeks' time, those people in the Southern Cameroons who have registered will vote either to rejoin the Federation of Nigeria or to join forces with the Cameroun Republic. This is a serious matter, more serious than any which most men are ever called upon to decide in the course of a whole lifetime.

So I want to make it quite clear what will happen if the majority of voters choose to rejoin Nigeria—and I emphasize this word 'rejoin' because until last October we had been together forty years. And for the past fifteen years, the representatives of the Southern Cameroons have played an active part in the Government of Nigeria through their membership first of the Legislative Council and then of the House of Representatives and in the Council of Ministers.

## **Our Recent History**

Many of you who are listening to me this evening will be familiar with the recent history of the relations between the Southern Cameroons and the Federal Government, but I shall repeat the outlines so that you may be reassured that you, through your Governments, have treated the Southern Cameroons fairly and indeed with favour.

So far from exploiting the people of Southern Cameroons, as has often been alleged, the Federal Government of Nigeria and its predecessor, the former Central Government, has in fact done all in its power to assist the territory in its development.

I need not remind you that the territory of the Southern Cameroons is a Trust Territory, a mandated territory which the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations Organization, entrusted to the United Kingdom.

This mandate started in 1922 and from the year, the Southern Cameroons was administered as an integral part of Nigeria, sharing to the full the services which the Nigerian Government provided.

Indeed they received more than the share which was strictly due to them and it is a fact—a fact which cannot be disproved—that in every single year from 1922 until 1949 the Central Government subsidized the Southern Cameroons.

And even after that, when the financial position of the Southern Cameroons improved, the Central Government made special arrangements to ensure that the surplus each year in respect of revenue and expenditure attributable to the Southern Cameroons should be devoted exclusively to the welfare of the people in the Trust Territory.

Not only did the Central Government do all this but only two years ago the Federal House of Representatives decreed that the amount of advances made by the Federal Government to the Southern Cameroons should be completely written off, together with the interest which had accrued from year to year, and also that the advance of working capital which the Federal Government had made to the Southern Cameroons should be converted into an absolute gift. That was plain evidence of our goodwill towards the people of the Southern Cameroons.

## **Nigeria's Undertaking to Southern Cameroons**

Before I recount the material benefits which the Trust Territory has received from its partnership with Nigeria, let me tell you of the political undertakings which we in Nigeria have given to its people so that they may know exactly what their status will be if they choose to rejoin us.

In this connection, I would remind you of the policy which independent Nigeria has, since last October, proclaimed towards all her neighbours and to the other States in Africa, namely that whatever their size, whether they be small or large, they will be treated as equals. So it is with the Southern Cameroons.

This small territory with a population of under one million will have the full status of a Region, equal with the huge Northern Region, equal with the Eastern Region with its population of over eight million, and the Western Region with its six million people.

While the number of elected Members of the House of Representatives will be in proportion to the population, the full allowance of twelve Senators will be accorded to the Southern Cameroons just the same as the North and East and West.

I know I speak for my colleagues the Regional Premiers when I say that we do indeed desire to procure the friendliest relations. There is absolutely no question of any feelings of hostility or of any ill intentions.

We feel that they and we are members of one family and nothing would give us greater pleasure than welcome them home again.

### **My Message to the People of Southern Cameroons [*If you Choose "La Republique"... Wahala Go Dey*]**

If I may speak for a moment direct to the people of the Southern Cameroons I ask you to examine very, very carefully the issues which are at stake.

On the one hand you can choose certainty and security: an honourable status as an integral party of a big nation in Africa with your future assured. With Nigeria you can look forward to sharing in the tremendous economic development of our country, to sharing in the massive schemes for expanding education to an extent hitherto beyond our dreams, and to the social benefits which we are now beginning to enjoy.

Above all, you can be assured of the security of the rule of law, the protection of your lives and houses and farms, and to the guarantee of your human rights.

All this is waiting for you if you choose to come back to Nigeria.

And now ask yourselves what is the alternative.

You would throw in your lot with a country whose government has made no firm promises to you and has given no undertaking, a country which unfortunately has been torn in recent years by civil wars.

It pains me to mention these things and believe me I take no joy in the misfortunes of our neighbours, but it is my duty to warn you of the dangers which lie ahead of you if you go down that road.

If you do so, then you cannot expect as of right to live in peace, to cultivate your farms in peace, or to receive the same justice which has been provided for you until now.

Instead of peace and prosperity, instead of more schools and hospitals and improved communication which you may genuinely expect from reunion with Nigeria, you will risk losing everything.

If you vote against Nigeria, I cannot see how you can avoid living a life of poverty and hardship, and under the constant shadow of violence which the Government cannot control. You will be putting yourselves under a country which has different laws and a completely different attitude towards life.

Just think carefully of all this.

I do most sincerely ask you, because it is not only your own immediate future which will be affected but the very survival of your families.

### **Material Benefits Southern Cameroons Received from its Partnership with Nigeria**

I shall now give you an outline of the economic and financial conferred on the Trust Territory by the Nigerian Governments during recent years. I must do this not to boast of our generosity, but to refute the shameful lies which have been circulated in order to deceive the people who are going to vote on their future next month.

The League of Nations mandate was conferred in 1922. From that year until the outbreak of war in 1939 the former Government of Nigeria spent approximately three quarters of a million pounds more than it received in revenue from the territory.

By 1948, the figure had been increased by a further million pounds, and what is more the Cameroon Development Corporation had been established with capital provided by the Nigerian government.

For five years from 1949 when the revenues improved and exceeded expenditure the annual balances were credited to a special fund for the benefit of the Territory, and were used to finance the large road development plan under which in particular the Victoria-Bamenda road was vastly improved.

Then in 1954, the Southern Cameroons was created into a separate unit and participated in the revenue allocation scheme with this difference from the other three Regions, the difference that in order to make the territory viable it was given a proportionately larger share of the revenue than any of the other three Regions and in addition the sum of £300,000 was provided as working capital for the Government of the Southern Cameroons.

And this was not the end of the assistance which we gave.

Many of you will remember that in 1955, the Cameroons Development Corporation ran into difficulties. The Southern Cameroons Government depended on that Corporation for most of its revenue and if the revenue from the Corporation fell below £580,000 a year, the Government itself would be in difficulty so we guaranteed that figure and in two years made advances of £450,000.

Two years ago, all that debt of £450,000 together with the working capital of £300,000 was written off.

What we did was to make a present of three quarters of a million pounds to the people of Southern Cameroons.

### **Our Justified Pride**

We in Nigeria feel proud, and I think we are justified in feeling proud, of the way we have treated the people of Southern Cameroons.

The record is there for all to examine—we have nothing to hide; far otherwise—if time permitted I should like to tell you of the benefits brought by the Posts and Telegraphs, by the Electricity Corporation and through other activities of the Federal Government.

Well it is time for me to stop now but once again I do most sincerely ask you, especially the people of Southern Cameroons, to think very very carefully about the future.

Think of all that is at stake and make your decision solemnly with all the responsibility you can command.

**Source: Balewa, Abubakar Tafawa. 1964. *Nigeria speaks: Speeches made between 1957 and 1964. Selected and Introduced by Sam Eppelle.* Ikeja: Longmans of Nigeria. pp. 85-90.**

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