

ELECTIVE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Douala, December 16, 2020

Acceptance speech
by **M. Célestin K. TAWAMBA**

“That is why, my dear friends, I would like to urge you, each time you cross the threshold of your company, both on arrival and at departure, to bear these figures in mind! They are striking proof of the size and diversity of the network that you constitute. They measure the contribution that is yours to the creation of wealth and jobs in our country. They make you an economic and social force that must be recognised for the central role it plays in our society. “

**The Honorary President, Dear André Siaka,
CEOs and Directors,
Dear Members,
Dear Friends,**

I will start by thanking you for massively mobilising to physically take part in this election, despite the current health crisis and the ensuing constraints.

I appreciate your passion for this campaign and this election. Thanks to you, the electoral process that we have just experienced was conducted smoothly.

In this regard, I would like to congratulate the members of the Council of the Wise. They rigorously supervised the entire electoral process, from the announcement of the elective general assembly, through the validation of the list of candidates, up to the day before the vote was held. I would like to thank them for ensuring that the statutory rules were respected, as well as the rules of transparency and ethics in the conduct of these elections. Once again, they acted as true guardians of the temple they are for our Association.

Thanks again!

As you can probably imagine, I feel greatly honoured and very emotional at this moment.

I deeply appreciate the vote of confidence that you have just renewed in me and in the members of the 'GICAM in Action: Part II' List, the team that I was leading.

The magnitude of this confidence, as indicated by our list score, further strengthens our commitment to stand up for you.

Furthermore, we understand that we have an obligation to do better by implementing the programme you have just approved with greater determination and expertise.

For me, this is a great mark of confidence!

**Ladies and Gentlemen, Members
Dear Friends**

Beyond the solemnity of my heartfelt gratitude, I would like to express my awareness of the magnitude and the difficulty of the task which awaits me, which awaits us.

I would also like to tell you that I know that I can count on our collective strength to meet the challenges we will be facing.

By being passionate about the campaign,
By clearly committing yourself to the vote,
By massively expressing your confidence in our list,

You have taken on your responsibilities in the most striking way.

By doing so, you have laid the foundations for the more inspiring, more daring and more impactful GICAM that we hope for.

Regardless of the sectors of activity, the size of the company, the nationality of the capital, you have virtually opted to continue the modernisation of our Association.

This is the message that you clearly conveyed to me during the encounters I had with each of you during this campaign. In this regard, I would like to thank you for your words of encouragement and friendship. Naturally, I am sensitive to this and I intend to make it the catalyst for tomorrow's actions and struggles.

**Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Friends,**

This is an opportunity for me to pay a vibrant tribute to my campaign manager, the youngest member of our Board of Directors: Jacques Jonathan NYEMB. I am proud of you, Jacques Jonathan. Thanks, you did a great job. Your skill, your intelligence, your youth and your humility, have been precious assets for our campaign team. THANK YOU.

These thanks also go to all members of this great campaign team. With talent and team spirit, this group of highly committed men and women, did a tremendous amount of work to ensure an effective campaign. With unwavering enthusiasm, they sometimes sacrificed nights and weekends to meet never ending deadlines. I would like to tell them how invigorating it has been for me to be surrounded by them. I am particularly grateful to them for the work accomplished.

This election marks the end of the term of office of the current Board of Directors. I would like to express my sincere thanks and my gratitude to its members for the time devoted and the energy expended, as well as the quality of the work carried out. I am grateful to them for their sense of responsibility and their courage, for having upheld the business ideal, even in particularly difficult times.

I express my deep gratitude to those members of the Board who are leaving us at this stage, but on whom we shall still be able to count. Thank you to our dear 1st Vice President Sanda Oumarou. His experience and sound advice shall be missed. Thank you to our dear friend André Kwam who will continue to chair the SME and Private Sector Financing Commission and who shall henceforth lend support our new SME strategy, among other duties. Thanks also to Mélanie Bell, Pierre Kam, Olivier Eldin, René Libong, Franklin Njie Ngoni. Finally, thank you to Elisabeth Medou Badang who, during her term of office, joined Orange, France, as well as to Ibrahim Talba Malla, who has been called to join the Government.

Dear Friends,

It is my duty to give our meeting of today the importance that befits it with regard to the continued deterioration in the cost and quality of the business environment in our country on the one hand and to what you represent, you , members of GICAM and the main people affected by this situation, on the other hand.

Did you know that you represent one thousand companies that are direct members of GICAM and indirect members through over twenty professional associations and unions?

Did you know that you are active in all sectors of agriculture, industry, trade and services, and you represent, according to sectors and branches of activity, 65 to 98% of national turnover and added value?

Did you know that the community of members that you constitute accounts for:

- **a turnover of close to 10 000 billion CFA francs, or 77% of the combined turnover of the companies in the formal sector,**
- **45% of total GDP,**
- **70% of tax revenues,**
- **40% of the State budget,**
- **a workforce of 221 000 permanent employees,**
- **a wage bill of nearly 1 100 billion CFA francs, or about 105% of the wage bill of the public sector,**
- **internal taxes and duties of about 2000 billion CFA francs.**

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, members of GICAM, you will agree with me, that it is my duty to tell you today because these figures speak for themselves!

That is why, my dear friends, I would like to urge you, each time you cross the threshold of your company, both on arrival and at departure, to bear these figures in mind! They are striking proof of the size and diversity of the network that you constitute. They measure the contribution that is yours to the creation of wealth and jobs in our country. They make you an economic and social force that must be recognised for the central role it plays in our society.

This force and network of companies gives GICAM a solid foundation and unparalleled national and sub-regional level representation. It must be supported.

It is a privilege to defend and represent you and this adds enthusiasm to our mission. This shows how proud we are to be your spokesperson.

Defending you means several things, and above all, it means realising that companies are in danger in our country today!

Defending you means becoming aware of the daily horrors to which you and your companies are exposed!

Defending you means taking risks, all kinds of risks, and I'm ready to take them. The magnitude of your vote spurs me and represents the best shield against adversity, wherever it may come from.

I think it would be useful to take the time to illustrate this assertion with a few examples:

1 ° While the legislator has set the corporate tax rate at 33 % applicable to profit, it is common for companies to find themselves paying corporate tax at the effective rate of 100% or 500% or 800% or more because companies making losses pay tax. These taxes, I am tempted to call tax on losses! Why? Because the same legislator has decided that this corporate tax cannot be less

than the equivalent of 2.2% of turnover. This is a very common aberration in Cameroon which, against all economic and fiscal logic, which promotes taxation of the activity instead of the generated profit. This is unfair! This is absurd! We don't want it anymore! Therefore, we believe that this taxation is essentially **confiscatory and counterproductive!**

2 ° How is it possible that a newly created company is obliged to pay 5% of its turnover as minimum tax? This tax system which taxes everything in a totally disproportionate and dispersed manner, is very similar to a **predatory** system which, by nature, devours everything in its path!

3 ° How is it possible that the challenge of a debt in the context of a tax dispute could prevent the pursuit of normal ongoing business operations due to non-issuance of the tax clearance certificate? How is it possible that, for this reason, a company finds itself unable to pay a supplier abroad hence it is unable to secure its supplies, to gain new markets, to export, and so on, and even unable to be paid by its customers? And this is the case even though the said company is up to date with its self - assessment declaration and payment, which I stress, represent 88 % of tax revenue? This is why we believe that our tax system basically works by **ambush!**

4 ° How is it possible that the funds to guarantee of the sums claimed in the context of a tax, administrative and judicial dispute are so high, at 15%, then 35%, then a deposit of 50% of the principal and penalties and late payment interest? And how can we accept that the tax authority does not accept that these consignments are replaced by bank guarantees, even though they do not constitute tax revenues in any way because they must be restored to the taxpayer as soon as he wins his case ?

5 ° How did it come about for companies to receive revenue orders from Mayors claiming, often on the basis of questionable authority , the following local taxes : (i) Temporary occupation of the public road (OTVP) , without effective occupation of this road by the companies, (ii) the rights of occupation of parking lots , without explanation of the observed infringement, (iii) the advertising fee on points of sale , whereas the tax on advertising was abolished and that only a stamp duty exists on advertising.

6 ° Who can understand why companies simultaneously receive customs control, tax control, a CNPS control, a control of the Ministry of Commerce, a control from the Ministry of Industry, a control from the Ministry of the Environment? And so on and so forth...

7 ° How can we justify the fact that a company is subject to 92 inspections carried out by several administrative units in the space of a year? That is totally unbelievable!

8 ° How is it possible that copyright management companies claim rights from companies, without the slightest legal basis?

9 ° How do we justify the payment of staggering sums of the state fee relating to advertising displayed on the domain considered as public road and outbuildings by many communication and marketing consulting companies? This has become a real headache for them. Why do advertisers receive invoices for CPE, even though only the manager is authorised to collect and remit royalties and taxes to the Tax Administration? Why do consulting agencies have to pay CPE fees on behalf of their clients, knowing that professions of advertising management and consulting agency are incompatible?

10 ° How can we explain that the changes that have taken place in the management of the container terminal at the Douala Port Authority have resulted in the sudden increase of fees charged to users?

11 ° How is it possible that BEAC, in a difficult post- Covid19 context, is preparing to increase the transfer commission rate from 0.75% to 1%, a sharp increase of 33.33 %?

12 ° How can we expect to achieve an acceptable level of competitiveness for our companies and our economy with insufficient and deteriorated power supply, coupled with serious degradation of the entire telephone and internet network at a time when the digital race remains one of the major challenges of the emerging millennium?

13 ° How can we not be offended by administrative hassles of all kinds, including the cumbersome process and delays suffered during the recovery of invoices due by the State?

14 ° And how can we not deplore the increasing number of toll gate stations as well as controls on roads which are already severely degraded, all of which are likely to discourage both investors and the population?

15 ° How do we ensure an effective functioning of justice when urgent summary proceedings drag on before the courts for periods that sometimes exceed one year?

16 ° How can we understand that a litigant having obtained a favorable judgment cannot obtain a copy of his decision within a reasonable time allowing him to continue the execution?

17 ° How can we ensure access to justice, and ultimately its efficiency, when the costs of proceedings are set in an arbitrary, opaque and excessive manner by the heads of jurisdiction and / or the registrars?

18 ° How can we also ensure access to justice when procedural costs are sometimes required by the courts, in cases for which the law expressly provides that the procedure is free?

Dear Friends,

Alas, this enumeration is not exhaustive! This is just a tip of the iceberg as far as the costs, burdens, harassment of all kinds, and the bureaucracy companies face every day, are concerned. These shortcomings naturally give rise to a series of complaints, which constitute one of the projects of our list. That is the need to break free from these practices as well as the hesitation of their proponents who thrive on such excesses.

Our message in recent years has been to say that the programmed suffocation of our companies should stop ...

It is illogical to toss companies around, stifle them until they lose their ambition to grow and expand in the sub-regional and international markets in the light of the entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and still expect them to contribute effectively to the development of the economy.

Pushed to extremes, torn between a high cost of doing business, a generally hostile and uncooperative administration, as well as the lack of solid State support to face the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, business owners are confused and don't know where to look for support.

As a result, if nothing is done to remedy these impasses, there is a real risk that companies will no longer be in a position to pay taxes.

Whereas, our companies have solid assets to promote, provided the environment is conducive.

Despite difficulties of all kinds and in spite of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy of our business leaders has remained more or less alive, proof of the extraordinary resilience of our private sector.

Business owners have refused to give up; they fight, they use their passion, their creativity and their patriotism to hang on.

But how long can they survive in such adversity?

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear Friends,

It is for these reasons that it is urgent that a new page be written in the relationship between the private sector and the State.

In the dialogue between the State and the private sector, a new mindset is required, a new way of viewing entrepreneurs.

They cannot thrive when the general opinion of them is that they are fraudsters and cheats meanwhile, only a few of them fit this description.

Therefore, I believe that the crises we are experiencing must be considered as frank opportunities to be able to break away from postures and reflexes that discourage the mind and the approach to business.

We believe in a dialogue that is both constructive and effective, because we cannot build an economy on the rubble of denial, opacity, rejection and condescension.

I believe in the virtues of State-Private Sector dialogue because I am convinced that not everything can be steered by the State.

If the State could be a good trader, or an industrialist, this would be known and would have been happily implemented under other skies ...

If rules enacted without consultation with users were effective, that would also be known ...

Bad rules, whatever their scope of application, cause the user to adopt them, for the sake of survival, as an escape route ...

The sincerity of dialogue is what makes it possible to respect its results.

The State needs a well - informed, solid and representative private sector, able to account for the reality of business life, and able to say how, in spite of storm and fog, it is still possible to avoid shipwreck and regain calmer waters.

That is why we will continue to call for the cancellation of the CBF and push for the establishment of a new consultation structure. This new structure shall combine the requirements of an effective and fruitful dialogue, including: the political will of the parties to walk together, the legitimacy and the representativeness of the private sector, the sharing of the agenda and calendars , proven expertise , transparency and genuine monitoring and evaluation.

We are all the more justified in putting this proposal on the table as we would like to salute the pragmatism of the Prime Minister, Head of Government, for his pro-business attitude and the dynamism he champions. I can assure him here that he will have our full support whenever he takes measures that strengthen the competitiveness of enterprises.

All subjects will be discussed in this new structure since they have an impact on businesses.

**Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Friends,**

It is in relation to this concern that we impose on ourselves a **right of interference**. This right is born from simple logic: **State action can have a negative impact on the competitiveness of businesses**.

This is what we experience regularly, and we are paying a heavy price for it!

In fact, when the State persists in creating or managing companies which are continuously and structurally in deficit, there is a misuse of the collective tax effort to subsidize these deficits. This generally results in an increase in the tax burden and it is the national community, starting with businesses, that bears the cost.

The same applies to the size and functioning of the government and administrative machinery, which calls for the streamlining of the lifestyle of the State and rationalisation of public expenditure. It is surprising, to say the least, to note that, in spite of the recession and the very uncertain prospects, the State has still not taken real measures to monitor its operating expenses.

These are two examples, but you can imagine that there are others. All of them show that, in the competitive world that is ours, the expression competitiveness of the State is not used loosely. It is located upstream of the competitiveness of companies, which is considered necessary by both the employers and the State.

This means that this right of interference should not offend the State.

GICAM is in no way a supporter of any co-management with the State, far from it! We are not the champion of sterile and unproductive criticism of State action. The Public Powers legislate and decide. They are our main partner. We work with them in a logic of complementarity and, as such, we give ourselves the means to be a force of proposal.

This is why the State must be able to consider our right to interfere as the shock of convictions of progress, the awareness of corporate citizenship, the sense of partnership of the Association, and the springboard for better public governance and private governance, both at the service of the economy and society;

The White Paper on the Cameroonian economy is one of the clearest illustrations of our drive.

My dear friends,

The interaction between GICAM and the State is not the only one to be reconsidered.

We also need to rebuild the relationship with trade unions.

Rebuilding this relationship will definitely get the Coalition of Social Partners for Employment off the ground, an alliance which we created in the wake of joint actions conducted in response to the impact of Covid-19 on companies and their employees.

Together with trade unions and the State, we will have to work to revise the Labour Code.

Finally, together we will promote joint action strategies with international bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), whose mandate covers subjects such as industrial relations, employment, including youth employment, as well as social dialogue.

My Dearest Members,

I hope that the victory of 'GICAM in Action: Act 2' List, has not made me the victim of the common illusion that makes us believe in exceptional realisations ...

And even if that were the case, why not dream ???

I dream of structuring a lasting relationship between youth and our employers' Association ...

This is why the creation of GICAM's Young Leader's Circle is being considered and will be operational before the end of the current term of office.

By so doing, we are drawing lessons from the discussions we had with young entrepreneurs and business leaders on December 4th. These discussions focused on the past, the present and the future of the Association, as well as on the challenges companies face.

The creation of the GICAM's Young leader's Circle is clearly part of our shared will to co-construct the Cameroonian entrepreneurial revival which, in our view, is crucial.

In short, it is a shared destiny for companies and the youth. Both are today at a crossroads, oscillating between fears and uncertainties on the one hand, and hopes on the other, even though official speeches give them a central role - spearheads they say! - in the development of Cameroon.

Mr President!
Ladies and gentlemen,
My Dearest Members,

On another level, we will track down the shortcomings that damage the image of the private sector and weakens national march towards development. We will appeal to members to show a citizenship that is inseparable from competitiveness, notably by adopting exemplary ethical behaviour! It is important that we block out corruption and that we scrupulously respect legal, fiscal and social obligations, so as not to hamper economic development.

We will continue to address the issue of good corporate governance. In this regard, **we will put in place, for companies, and with the technical and financial support of AFD Group, a Governance Code which is expected to boost the competitiveness and sustainability of companies in a context of increased globalisation. Thus, a "GICAM +" label will soon be granted to Cameroonian citizen companies under the supervision of a High Governance Committee still to be set up.** Likewise, we will create a GICAM Training Institute for Directors and Managers in order to provide interested parties with the most practical and relevant tools for good corporate governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On a new note, but one which has the interest of companies at heart, while continuing to evaluate the economic and social impact of the security crises that rages on in our country, we will be keen to advocate for the awareness of the culture of peace!

Peace is the best ingredient for economic development.

In fact, we are convinced that the more priority will be given to the imperative of economic and social and business development, the more we will increase our chances of removing the spectre of the threats currently weighing on our living - together and our future. In fact, the quest for high economic performance and job opportunities for all, is one of the engines of a return to lasting peace in our country.

Moreover, we are convinced that each crisis must be an opportunity to challenge and strengthen ourselves and move forward with even stronger faith and momentum.

That is why we appeal to all to work for a rapid return to peace. We need this catalyst to release the energies and talents absorbed by so many dividing elements that reduce our ability to look in the same direction, as well as our will to exist as a nation. In this regard, we can no longer continue to carry out normal economic activities in only 30% of a territory declared economically disaster-stricken.

It is with the development of a culture of peace in which the Association will take its fair share, that the imperative of the growth of companies and the private sector, as well as the requirement of social cohesion, will be highlighted.

Finally, **successfully building a more inspiring, bolder and more impactful GICAM, undoubtedly calls for the transformation of our operational structure.** In fact, this one implements the policies decided by the Board of Directors, it is the interlocutor of the members on a daily basis, and it ensures the continuity of the actions of the Association.

It is therefore an essential link that should be reconsidered in the light of our new ambitions. We will adapt the expertise within the organisation as well as its funding, to the requirements induced by the need for redeployment of members, activities.

As such, we will carry out a skills audit, we will set up capacity - building programmes, and we will reflect on financing strategy.

Dear Friends,

All in all, through these developments, the question of the discontinuities that our country must make on the economic, social and societal levels is raised with particular acuity. As for me, I believe that companies are at the heart of this reflection and of the changes that should result from it.

Faced with such a challenge, it is **our duty** to continue the work that has already begun.

It will be our duty to say what should or should not be done to grow our businesses and in doing so we will avoid any **exemptions**;

It will be our duty to identify the paths to be avoided so as to avoid discouraging business leaders, and to point out the right paths that lead to business success and inclusive growth;

It will be our duty to act as real catalysts for the indispensable transformation of a Cameroonian economy handicapped by archaisms on the fiscal, administrative, legal and judicial, financial, energy, as well as infrastructure levels;

It will be our duty to make senior officials **aware** of their decisive role in the development and implementation of policies to support companies and strengthen their competitiveness;

It will be up to us to organise, with all the stakeholders, **the General Meetings of Enterprise**, in order to explain and assert the role it plays in the economy and in the country;

It will be up to us to organise the General Assembly of the Informal Economy with the aim of promoting a strategy for the measured reduction of the informal economy;

It will be up to us to organise “GICAM Economic and Social Meetings”, an annual meeting which will bring together members with stakeholders in business development;

It will be our responsibility to promote economic patriotism and support for the local content on the one hand, to encourage the emergence of national champions, and to boost local processing required for endogenous growth, on the other hand;

It will be up to us to ensure a qualitative leap in policies and strategies to support SMEs, especially in terms of their financing and taxation, while taking into account their specific characteristics;

It will be important for us to recall the inadequacy of government support with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic and consequently, the irrelevance of the 2021 Finance Law, particularly due to the absence of real economic stimulus measures commensurate to the stakes;

It will be important for us to remind the Government of the critical need to repay the domestic debt, if necessary, through its securitisation;

It will be our responsibility to propose the signing of a performance contract between the Government and the Employers Association, which we consider to be decisive for the emergence of Cameroon.

**Dear friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I cannot end without introducing to you, with some solemnity the members of the 'GICAM in Action: Act 2' List, that you had the opportunity to discover through the documentation and reports made available during the campaign. For the purpose, I will invite each of them to stand up and go up to the podium at the mention of their name.

We have:

- Alphonse Nafack, President, APECCAM
- Emmanuel de Tailly, Vice-President, CAPA
- Théophile Mouloung, President, ASAC
- Giorgio Giorgetti, President, GFBC
- Grace Fomukong, Secretary General, UCAM
- Reine Essombadje Mbang, Managing Director, EVOLVING CONSULTING
- Laure Kenmogne, Managing Partner, JURITAX CONSEIL
- Mohamadou Bayero, Managing Director, SODECOTON
- Pascal Miny, Managing Director, CAMRAIL
- Eric Njong, Managing Director, BUNS
- Jacques Jonathan Nyemb, Of Counsel, CABINET NYEMB
- Celestin Kamanou Tawamba, Chief Executive Officer, LA PASTA

These people make up the new Board of Directors of GICAM and will take office on 1st January 2021.

To round off this introduction, I must announce that the following positions have been filled as follows:

- **1st Vice-President : Reine Essombadje Mbang**
- **2nd Vice-President : Emmanuel De Tailly**

Although Emmanuel is reappointed to the position he already held, it is quite a different story for Reine, for whom this is a major milestone. Equally, this appointment is a great first in our business history and I cannot hide my satisfaction in this regard.

I do not doubt their intelligence, their dynamism and their commitment to the Employers Association at all times will be their key assets in fulfilling their missions.

Please join me in extending them our warm congratulations!

My dear friends,

As we demonstrate every day, GICAM is an organisation serving a national cause: that of building companies!

With a rich history that started three years before the independence of Cameroon,

Driven by the actions of those who presided over its destiny, and the teams that have served them,

Spurred by the economic weight of the community of members,

GICAM will continue to move forward. It shall show more voluntarism, expertise and efficiency, to attain the ideal of business enterprise and, beyond that, the ideal of our country, Cameroon, which happens to be at a crucial moment in its history.

In my opinion, the future seems conducive to reform, and we must take the risk of planting the right seeds.

We have an obligation to make this commitment our own: **To make Cameroon prosper, we have to make companies prosper! This is the mission that GICAM has set itself for the next term of office.**

To conclude, permit me to wish you a happy end of year 2020 and a happy new year 2021, for your businesses, as well as for you and your loved ones.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you for your availability.

Thank you for your commitment.

Thank you for your trust.

God bless You and Your Families.

Celestin K. Tawamba
President, GICAM