



The US Ambassador to Cameroon recognizes that there is a huge opportunity in Cameroon Economy and affirms that now is the time for Cameroon to take-off economically.

Business in Cameroon: Recently, in an interview with CRTV, you said that, at the request of the Cameroonian army, US military personnel would be present in Cameroon to provide advice and training to Cameroonian military. How many US military experts are present in Cameroon alongside the national army?

Michael Stephan Hoza: We can't say the exact number, but the number of American personnel is consistent with the number the government wants to have in Cameroon. Let me just state that the security support here in Cameroon at the government's invitation has indicated the need for training between both militaries. We both have a lot to learn from each other and so we jointly agreed on the number and then we brought the troops here. That number will be open as the fight against Boko Haram continues, but bear in mind that it isn't just to fight against Boko Haram. The partnership is also one of understanding so we always have advisors working closely with Cameroonian security forces to fight piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. We are opening a new term to have personnel working with them on wildlife protection as well.

BC: How many US experts had been sent by Cameroonian government to US?

MSH: Well, that's a good question for the Cameroon government, but it's a sizeable number of men and women who already have come together with the Cameroonian security forces. They are strictly professionals. We are very much enjoying working and partnering with them, because they are very professional.

BC: How many US Companies are present in Cameroon?

MSH: At least 27 US Companies are operating in Cameroon. If you were at *Promote* and went to the American shops you would have seen this. The American Chamber of Commerce, which was also there, is increasingly becoming a vibrant organisation for promoting American investments and business in Cameroon. I was very pleased as I was accompanied by the Minister of Finance. I thought it was exceptional. It was my first time, but people told me it's better every time. I saw the American Companies there with their varieties of products and more and more arrivals. We have one American businessman who arrived with particular products which are connected and can be put anywhere in Cameroon. You can plug-in your cell phones, televisions, laptops wherever you want. He sold all his entire stock that he brought with him before the end of the week of

Promote

. That's the kind of business we would like to see.

There were representatives of American marketing shops who spoke about American market technology. It was a great opportunity here in Cameroon. We see Cameroon as a great partner and a strong member of the 21st century. This is truly a great time for Cameroon and its young, very dynamic, bilingual work force. They speak both English and French. We were very impressed with that.

BC: You feel optimistic about Cameroon's vision for the future....

MSH: We would also like to see exactly what Cameroon has planned for the future. The government has a vision for the future. There is an infrastructure plan for the country. There is great vision in the Ministry of Agriculture which has a great vision for the country. The Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development (Minepat) and the Ministry of Fishing and Animal Husbandry have a great vision for the country.

Other wonderful plans are to open up the economy to greater growth in the private sector, to create jobs necessary to meet the demands to help other Cameroonians who are looking for their own opportunities to pursue their happiness in Cameroon.

Many US companies are focusing on Cameroon. This is truly Cameroon's moment. Now is the time for Cameroon to take-off economically. Now is the time for Cameroon to take part; to fully become a global economy and start the necessary job creation for youth for the next 10-20 years. American companies want to be part of that. The important thing is that we value and hold them to certain principles. We want to see quality products with the very best prices. We want to see employment for Cameroonians. We want American companies to come here and start up projects and hire Cameroonians. We want to see transparent financial business practices which are the one way for businesses to ensure profit margins and all the plans.

Lastly, we would like companies to have good corporate social responsibility. We are very proud of the ties we have made. There are partners in Cameroon, including the Cameroonian organisation that is responsible for all of these companies and is a great force. Each year, we have very good practices. In speaking with the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife, he asked the authorities to begin reforestation by planting more trees than they cut down. We also saw the company Cotco. This is a cooperative of companies that we associate with the pipeline and corporate social responsibilities programs to build good relations with the community in which we want to operate.

BC: If you were asked to advise US companies to invest in Cameroon, which sector would you suggest?

MSH: Well we are looking at a range of sectors. We think there are great opportunities across borders. Specific cases are being found and brought to us. The potential here for electricity generation is increasing significantly for a number of companies. Drinking water is also very important. We find that Yaoundé and Douala and some parts of Ngaoundere and Garoua need infrastructural development for the health and well-being of Cameroonian citizens. So we have companies working on water, energy generation and road construction. We have just signed contracts for the installation of 55 steel bridges to be built by American companies and installed

by Cameroonians to help farmers get their produce to market. So, the range of areas for American companies runs across the board. We hope to see rapid growth in Internet connectivity and telecommunications, because, with the Internet, you can create jobs. Today, if you really want to grow your economy and create jobs, you have to be connected to the Internet with good access for everyone. That's where the innovation comes in. That's where the young Cameroonians can put their ideas to real task.

BC: How do US Companies in Cameroon judge doing business in our country?

MSH: It's probably easier than some places in America. Frankly much easier than some places in America, but we're not complaining. Some find that it's like some places in America, but we won't say what is a greater or a lesser difficulty. We got the Cameroon government to say what can be done in the mining system. We think this is a promising improvement. We think the business climate is improving very much. We have seen an increase in good business practices and invitations to American companies to come. We would like to work with the Cameroonian authorities to find legislative means to improve the business climate.

BC: Is it your own opinion or the opinion of the US companies?

MSH: You have to talk with US Companies to have their individual opinion. Some are frustrated while others are quite happy. So we're trying to remove everything that is frustrating Cameroonians. If we work together with the Cameroonian government, I am sure we can.

BC: Can you give us some facts and numbers about economic cooperation between the

US and Cameroon?

MSH: We had 250 million last year in exports and roughly the same in imports with Cameroon, but I can't tell you the trend is going up. We have had major equipment sold to Cameroon as well as contracts signed for things like bridges. We are looking at other ways to sign on water projects in Cameroon. In terms of the number, it's still a lot so there is room for growth. I think we are ready to open new markets for Cameroonians. Nevertheless, it's changing rapidly. The Cameroon government sent a delegation to the United States last year during President Obama's African Leaders Summit and trade agreements were presented to Cameroonians by American investors to help Cameroonian investors find markets in the US.

We have seen immense success in Cameroon in terms of Cameroonians penetrating the US markets and the Cameroon chapter of the entrepreneur program. Take a look at some of the US considerations such as The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and some of the events for a particular sector in the market. Manufacturing companies and business plans are working to find ways to introduce good jobs in Cameroon. These are win-wins for everyone.

BC: How many US Citizens currently live in Cameroon?

MSH: We have 7,000 US citizens residing here in Cameroon. Many of them have dual citizenship. Their living in Cameroon simply reflects that the close ties between the two countries are very, very strong. These ties continue to grow as we foster programs for Cameroonians in the US. We have exchange programmes for professors. We have another program in which we send Cameroonian medical professionals to the US and we bring American medical professionals here to Cameroon to help fight diseases and keep our people healthy. It's the most important link that really builds our relationship.

BC: How many visas are issued by the US Embassy in Cameroon and how many visa

applications do you receive daily?

MSH: Over 10,000 non-immigrant visas are issued every year to Cameroonians. This is significant because Cameroonians go for tourism, education, business and for major programmes. We hope that the visa process is clear, simple to follow and easy to do. You just go online, fill out the forms and get an appointment, come to the embassy and apply for a visa. It isn't something that is difficult or complicated. It's a transparent process, and, as I said, over 10,000 applicants are awarded visas each year.

BC: Some people think that there are some embassies in Cameroon, including the US Embassy, where it is not at all easy to obtain a visa...

MSH: Well, now our visa application process has been improved. This is why they might be denied. On the other hand, we hope the process at the American Embassy is clear and transparent. If your visa application is denied, an explanation is given. Often, after that, the visa is approved. So, we are here to promote Cameroonians' travel to the US.

Interviewed by Beaugas-Orain Djoyum