

H.E. CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

Flashback To Years As The Diplomats' Diplomat in the Russian Federation

By virtue of Decree N°2020/453 of 12 August 2020, the President of the Republic, H.E. Paul Biya appointed Mr Ewumbue-Monono Churchill as the new Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cameroon to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. He had notably served in Addis Ababa where he was the Vice-President of the Africa Diplomatic Club and later as Minister-Counsellor/Chargé d'Affaires a.i. at the Cameroonian Embassy in Moscow, prior to his appointment as Ambassador, Technical Advisor to the President of the Republic which he now leaves for Addis Ababa as Ambassador.

Below are excerpts of an Interview of H.E. CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO by SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE While the Diplomat was still in Moscow in 2010.

\*\*\*\*\*

Flashback Interview February 13, 2010...

\*\*\*\*\*

"A Passage in Moscow Is A Condition For Initiation Into The Group of Tough Diplomats"

CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

The Diplomats' Diplomat in the Russian Federation

SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

Welcome to the Success Story E-Magazine, Minister, you are a popular figure in Cameroon's diplomatic circles. Can you tell us how your background has contributed to this perception?

CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

Thank you for the compliments, though I think I might have become popular to some people because of my activism on issues not directly linked to my career as a diplomat. Having said that, I will thank God for giving me the opportunity to do what I had always wanted doing, and which explains my passion for the profession. I would say my journey to the Diplomatic Service started in St. Joseph's college Sasse; one of the first schools to introduce World Affairs History, then CCAS Kumba, the only High School in my days to offer World Affairs History. I then elbowed my way into the International Higher School of Journalism in Yaoundé, where I think my training in Journalism and Development Communication gave me the necessary skills to work as a diplomat more confidently.

After working as an Information Officer in the Ministry of Information and Culture, where I headed the Bureau for Research, I gained admission into the International Relations Institute of Cameroon, where I graduated in 1989. My story is therefore just that of an ambitious youngman who took advantage of the opportunities offered by the system and worked hard to make use of them. But I think my luck has been the opportunity to gather experience at all levels of diplomatic action which included the IMF and the USIA (State Department) in Washington DC, the UN Secretariat in New York for global institutions; the OAU and ECA in Addis Ababa where I experienced pan-Africanism in practice; the Presidency of the Republic and Ministry of Foreign Affairs for national institutions where I was practically involved in policy formulation and implementation processes. More importantly, I have worked with a technical Ministry like MINPAT responsible for International Cooperation, which gave me a practical understanding of the difference between Diplomacy and International

Cooperation, as well as within non-governmental organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

I have also gained experience because of the caliber of my bosses. I have served four Heads of State: President Biya of Cameroon as an Attaché, but also Presidents Ketumile Masire (Botswana), Toumani Toure (Mali), and Sirleaf Johnson (Liberia) as an Administrator for the Panel to Investigate the Genocide in Rwanda. I have also gained experience working as the Secretary for the Group of Ambassadors in Moscow, serving under three different Deans, but more importantly, I have served under three ambassadors, two former members of government and one a career diplomat.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

As a diplomat, who are some of your role models in diplomacy?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

As a diplomat, my first role models are the scholar-diplomats like the American George Forster Kenan with whom I share the same birthday of 16 February. He is arguably my greatest mentor, and I like reading him. Then are other scholar-diplomats like Kissinger, Brezinski, Bolaji Akimyemi, Prof. Shameyoya, etc. I also enjoy stylish diplomats who blend style and substance like Sergey Lavrov, Paul Engo, Ferdinand Oyono, Belinga Eboutou, Eteki Mboumoua, S.K.B Asante, Vernon Mwanga, J-B Beleoken, and of course JR Booh Booh.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

You are currently the Minister-Counsellor at the Cameroon Embassy in Moscow. How do you find Russia?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

I have mixed impressions of Russia both at the personal and professional levels. At a personal level, I have not stopped admiring the richness and diversity of the country's civilization and the speed with which it has transformed its economy. In fact Russia remains a mystery. You cannot understand it. You can only experience Russia. You can only live the Russian experience, and you can only believe Russia. At a professional level, a Minister-Counsellor in Moscow involves a lot of responsibilities which make you constantly alert. Russia's role as a major global player in world affairs as well as its geopolitical location as a Eurasian power has made Moscow one of the most important, if not the most important diplomatic centre in post Cold-War politics. As a global player, Russia's position on any agenda item in all the UN organs and institutions, even when representing an alternative view, is highly respected. This explains why almost every week, a foreign leader is in Moscow for consultations or advocacy. The Diplomatic community in Moscow itself includes over 180 embassies and representational offices of international organizations, which work with 175 media bureaus and 2000 Russian and foreign multinational companies.

I don't know of any other capital where most of the Great powers like the US, Britain, France, China, Japan, etc send their most resourceful diplomats than Moscow. In fact Kremlinologists are the most prized diplomats in most Western capitals. If our records are anything to count on, a passage in Moscow is a condition *sinon quo non* for initiation into the group of tough diplomats. Personally, I have considered it a privilege to serve in Moscow, and whether by design or chance, it has so far benefitted me professionally. My professional life has been enriched by my stay in Moscow. The Embassy is in itself a diplomatic observatory as it covers *de facto* 27 countries, most of which are new post Cold War breakaway republics of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.

Since I came to Moscow, countries like Belarus, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Serbia, Croatia, Armenia, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia, etc have become realities in my understanding the dynamics of global and Eurasian diplomacy. It is a wonderful advantage for most of us who studied diplomacy during the Cold War years. My stay in Moscow has provided me with an

opportunity to contribute in the development of foundation cooperation relations with these new states, in some cases from the establishment of diplomatic relations.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

It is good to hear these positive views on Russia as most people think it is an obscure posting in the Cameroon diplomatic system.

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

Well, every person is entitled to his or her view but I am talking here strictly as a diplomat. I don't know of any other capital where most of the Great powers like the US, Britain, France, China, Japan, etc send their most resourceful diplomats than Moscow. In fact, Kremlinologists are the most prized diplomats in most Western capitals. I also do not share the view that Moscow is a periphery in Cameroon's diplomacy. In fact three Ambassadors have left Moscow for appointments as Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Cameroon (Nko'o Etoungou in 1965, N'thepe in 1970, and Booh Booh after a brief stay in Paris). There is also H.E Jean-Baptiste Beleoken, one of the baobabs of Cameroon's diplomacy, who served as Head of State Protocol under Presidents Ahidjo and Biya respectively, and Director of Cabinet at the Presidency before his appointment as Minister of Land Tenure and State properties. Cameroon has also been sending high-profile political figures to Moscow as Ambassadors, including a former Minister of Foreign Affairs like Paul Dontsop (1983), and other for Members of Governments like Nkengong Monie (1984), Ngongang Ouandji (1995), and Paba Sale (2008). When a government sends such political heavy-weights to represent its interests in a capital, it tells a lot about the consideration it has for that country. Moscow has been a nursery for some of Cameroon's resourceful diplomat-politicians like Michael Tabong Kima, Francis Nkwain, who served as members of governments and members of political Bureau of the CPDM. More importantly, the Moscow experience has produced some of the country's most talented diplomats like Jean-Marie Happy Tchankeu, Pierre Mvondo She, Victor Ndiba, Henry Fussong, Jerome Medouga, Clement Langue, and Nkou Anatole who served as Counsellors in the Embassy before their promotion as ambassadors and Permanent Representatives.

I think it is good to put this in perspective for the younger generation of diplomats who might be tempted to think serving in Moscow is a punishment and might be inimical to their career development. In fact, if our records are anything to count on, a passage in Moscow is a condition sine quo non for initiation into the group of tough diplomats. Personally, I have considered it a privilege to serve in Moscow, and whether by design or chance, it has so far benefitted me professionally.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

You are the current President of the Union of African Diplomats in the Russian Federation (UADRF). Can you brief us on this association and its role in Russian-African relations?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

The Union of African Diplomats in the Russian Federation, which I have been heading since September 2007 was created in 1994 by diplomats below the ranks of ambassadors to promote solidarity and friendship among themselves as well as project the African culture in the Russian

Federation. The UADRF also helps the Group of African Ambassadors, the Group of Spouses of Ambassadors, the African Women Association, the Association of Foreign Students in Moscow, the Association of Foreign Migrants, etc.

It acts as the technical arm of the Group of Ambassadors for the organization of their events as well as in ensuring their interpretation and other secretarial duties. It is in this capacity that thanks to the suggestion of Ambassador Ngongang, I was made a Secretary to the Group of African Ambassadors, and since then I have worked with two other African Deans: Mrs. Melrose Kai-Banya, the Ambassador of Sierra Leone and later Rogerio Araujo Herbert from Guinea Bissau, which has also been professionally gratifying.

I am actually the 7th president after predecessors from Ghana, Namibia, Mali, Guinea, Madagascar, and Nigeria. Its foundation executive comprised Olusegun Akinsaya as President and Dalo as Secretary, both of whom were ambassadors in Addis Ababa when I was leaving in 2006.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

Talking about Addis Ababa where you were also the Vice-President of the Africa Diplomatic Club, Can you compare Moscow and Addis Ababa and how smooth was the adaptation from one society to the other?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

Like the UADRF in Moscow, the ADC in Addis Ababa was an important forum for socialization among diplomats of the ranks, some of who have also now been appointed Ambassadors. A lot of information is shared through these informal networks which create the bonds of lasting friendship on which the diplomatic community is cemented.

Generally, diplomats put behind their minds that they are nomads, and are on special missions or assignments for their country abroad. Consequently, like soldiers, they too have to adapt to defend the flag wherever it is hosted as a permanent mission. When therefore I came to Moscow from Addis Ababa, I knew I was complementing my African experience with a European experience.

Ironically, as I realized there were many similarities which finally facilitated my adaptation which included a similar historical cycles passing through imperial, Marxist-Leninist, and liberal regimes with democratic and economic transitions. Both countries were also based on orthodox Christianity with ethnic Muslim and Jewish populations. Finally, both countries were federations with highly decentralized institutions.

Professionally however the imperatives were different.

Addis Ababa covered was an important observatory for African bilateralism as it covered 9 countries, but also for pan-African and UN multilateral diplomacy through the OAU, AU, and ECA. On the other hand, Moscow is a global and Eurasian diplomatic observatory with a strong focus on bilateralism but a good background for insights in globalism and geopolitics...

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

Give us examples of business events you have been organizing in Moscow to attract Russian opportunities in Cameroon?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

Such business events are done on a routine basis. For example in April 2007, the Embassy helped in organizing the Group of Cameroon Business Operators in the Russian Federation who had to send a delegation to the First Diaspora Conference in Yaoundé and even animate a roundtable on “Doing Business in Russia”. Since 2009, the Embassy had instituted a Working Group with the Russian Chamber of Commerce and created a Technical Committee with the Russian Chamber of Commerce to organize the Cameroon Days in the Russian Federation.

The Embassy has also been organizing the visits of business delegations to Cameroon in collaboration with the Russian Chamber of Commerce, the most conspicuous has been those of the Expotech in April and June 2008 which brought together over 12 Russian business operators interested in the mining, agriculture, and forestry sectors. The Embassy has also been sending groups of tourists especially those interested in game tourism in the North. Then in June 2009, there was an exploratory mission to organize the First Edition of the Cameroon Economic Days to take place in 2010.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

You have also been publishing on humanitarian affairs, notably on the Red Cross Movement. Why this new attraction for a diplomat?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

My interest in humanitarianism stems from a conviction that I can contribute concretely if I focus on the vulnerable people. Apart from the Red Cross Movement, my involvement in humanitarian affairs includes participation in the Lake Nyos Disaster Research Team

(1986), Civil Protection and the national campaigns on the UN IDNDR in 1994-95, the Presidential Committee on Humanitarian Assistance to the Internally Displaced Persons of the Bakassi Region in 1996-1997. I am Patron of the Cameroon Road Safety Foundation (CAROSEF), which is involved in Road Safety Campaigns in the country and I am currently sponsoring six volunteers in three nursery schools in Buea who assist pupils to cross the roads with heavy traffic.

At the international level, I have worked with the OAU-IPEP to investigate the genocide in Rwanda and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Addis Ababa. I must say that it is through involvement in humanitarian affairs that I come in contact with real, needy, ordinary people at the grassroots. Diplomatic activities and protocol in presidential courts with the “crème de crème” can usually make you build castles in the air and forget that even as a diplomat, you cannot dissociate yourself from human sufferings. I have been inspired by the activities of other statesmen and diplomats like Julius Nyerere, Ketumile Masire, Toumani Toure, Dr. Pierre Tchoungui, and William Eteki Mboumoua.

#### SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

A word to younger Cameroonians who will like to follow your footsteps?

#### CHURCHILL EWUMBUE-MONONO

I have always wanted the younger generation of Cameroonians to be involved in public affairs, but more importantly in international affairs. I remember as a student in IRIC, I published a book entitled "A Comprehensive Approach to International Problems". I am happy that many people of the younger generation had confessed that that book changed their attitude towards World Affairs positively and gave them the tools and methodology to answer questions in this very difficult

subject. I am happy that through such a contribution, many younger Cameroonians were able to get to international affairs.

For over 20 years, I have always been encouraging through counseling, coaching, and recommendations to young Cameroonians who want to get into the two professions I enjoy and to improve on them. There are many journalists and other Cameroonians in international organizations who owe their place thanks to such counseling and orientations.

Today, Cameroonians have more opportunities than we found in our days. There are more schools of Journalism and more media organizations for training. But the greatest challenge for the younger generation today is the sacrifice for public service. Most young people want to make it big and fast without being properly grounded in the professional grill. I remember I opted to be posted abroad when I was at the Presidency and had opportunities for bigger positions in the country because I wanted to be well-groomed professionally as a diplomat before embarking on any other activity.

SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE

Thanks Minister for talking to us.

(\*Culled from Interview published by Success Story E-Magazine of February 13, 2010)