

Discours de S.E. Dr Patrick I Gomes Secrétaire général du Groupe des Etats ACP à la 52ème session de l'Assemblée parlementaire ACP le 30 novembre 2018 Cotonou, Bénin.

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Hon. Joseph Owona Kono, President of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly,

Honourable Members,

Excellencies ACP Ambassadors present,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all to this 52nd Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Benin. We are grateful for the hospitality accorded to us since our arrival in this historical city of Cotonou.

We cherish Cotonou as a sparkling jewel in the treasures of the ACP Group. Yours is a heritage on which we wish to build a post-Cotonou Agreement – truly people-centred and inclusive.

As we all know the expiring ACP- EU Partnership, was signed here in Cotonou on the 23rd June 2000. Indeed, this session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly is being held at a pivotal moment when the ACP Group of States and the European Union, have embarked on the negotiations for a new Post- Cotonou Partnership Agreement. It is thus my pleasure once again to address you, and update you on the progress so far made in these negotiations as well as other developments undertaken by the ACP Group, with the technical support of the Secretariat, since your last Meeting in October in Brussel, this year.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

Following the formal opening of the Negotiations at the Meeting held on 28 September 2018 in New York between the ACP Chief Negotiator, Hon. Robert Dussey, from Togo., and EU Commissioner Mimica, the ACP Ambassadorial Central Negotiating Team held its 1st Session of the 1st Round of Technical Negotiations with the EU Senior Officials on Thursday, 18 October 2018 at ACP House. The issues discussed included:

- Working Modalities;
- Comparison of the ACP Negotiating Mandate and the EU Negotiating Directives;
- Status of the Agreement; and
- Establishment of a work schedule for the Negotiations.

The tone and substance of the first round of discussions was indeed very encouraging.

The 2nd Session was held on 5th November 2018 at ACP House, followed by 3rd and 4th sessions on 18 and 26 November respectively. I left the CNG Ambassadorial level in session as they were preparing for the 5th Session of our Ambassadorial CNG to meet EU/EC Senior Officials on Thursday 29th November aiming to agree on the Skeleton structure of the New Agreement. The aim is to reach agreement on the Six Parts, their Titles, Chapters and, in some places, Articles of Chapters by the Holiday break on 21 December. [for instance, a Chapter entitled Human Rights, Democracy and Governance will have

an Article 1. Human rights, democracy and rule of law.]

A report will be made to the upcoming 108th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers on December 13-14, 2018, followed by a meeting of the Chief Negotiators on 14 December. This will offer further guidance and adjustments as may be needed for a progression into the next Rounds of Negotiations.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

Let me now bring to your attention other developments undertaken, which are key to the future of the ACP Group of States.

As an update on the Review of the Georgetown Agreement, our Constitutive Act of 1975, that was once amended in 2003, I am pleased to advise that an Editing Committee made a presentation to the COA meeting only on Tuesday 27 November and comments will be incorporated for an interim Report to the Council of Ministers at their forthcoming meeting in two weeks.

We are aiming to ensure that the process is member-state driven and at this stage, the Editing Committee has worked with submissions from the 6 ACP regions. The document, once cleared by the COA and submitted for consideration by Council, it must still be circulated for a period of six months, among all member states for comment before it shall be tabled at a meeting on the Council of Ministers for adoption.

It is meant to be the Constitutive Act of a new ACP Group, for itself and of itself, with a distinct identity as an inter-governmental and trans-regional, international organisation defending the rights of all its peoples and States, at global, continental, regional, sub-regional and national levels. So it was proposed by the COA that the ACP be called the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACP).

With respect to the impact assessment study of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly and the ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly, this is near completion, and the Consultant had an opportunity to discuss and exchange views with some Members of the Parliamentary Assembly during your Session in October in Brussels. The preliminary findings of the study include the following observations:

- The lack of consistency in ACP Members attending Meetings of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), as there are more or less stable EU membership compared to the delegation of different ACP Members by some ACP countries in consecutive JPA Sessions. This in one part could be due to the outcomes of the Parliamentary Elections in those ACP countries, which are held at different times of the year.
- The lack of empirical data and detailed annual reports listing matters considered, follow-up, outcomes and impacts of the ACP PA and the ACP-EU JPA. Hence, a need to consider commissioning annual and periodic reports highlighting the work, outcomes and achievements of the ACP PA and ACP-EU JPA.
- The ACP-EU JPA is a consultative and advisory body under the Cotonou Agreement without any formal decision-making powers. There is therefore a need to enhance the oversight role of the ACP PA in the context of the revised Georgetown Agreement, as well as a strong Parliamentary Dimension of the new Post Cotonou Agreement with a preservation of the JPA structure. This is consistent with the ACP Negotiating Mandate for the new ACP-EU Post-Cotonou Agreement, which has called for an enhanced engagement of political dialogue through the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

I should also mention that the Secretariat continues to follow a strategy of embedding a vision for the ACP Group of States to be a global player and address geopolitical changes of the 21st century, with great scope for deepening South-South cooperation and advancing regionalization. These aspects are being in part addressed through the on-going work on the Revision of the Georgetown Agreement, and by the institutional architecture enabling the establishment of the ACP Information Centre for South – South and Triangular Cooperation, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. This is strong demonstration of the commitment to be engaged by a permanent presence of the ACP in a member state.

The Centre was officially opened on 5th October by H.E. Teodoro Obiang NGUEMA, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. In his opening statement, the President underlined:

- The increasing recognition of the role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation for the ACP Group, and that the Centre will help promote face to face encounters for trade and business promotion amongst ACP countries and countries of the South;
- That Equatorial Guinea will continue its engagement as a promoter of South-South and Triangular Cooperation, noting the importance of the Centre as a significant contribution from Equatorial Guinea; and
- That the launch of the ACP Centre took place during the celebrations of the 50th Independence Anniversary of Equatorial Guinea.

The launching of the ACP Centre was an important political event for the ACP Group of States especially by marking a tangible milestone in the promotion and implementation of South-south and Triangular Cooperation.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

Another topic that I would like to provide an update on, is with respect to the enhancing of the financial sustainability of the ACP Group. The financial situation of the ACP Secretariat continues to be of a concern, noting the need to execute the

statutory functions of the organs of the ACP Group.

A number of ACP Member States are yet to meet their annual financial contributions to the 2018 budget of the ACP Group, despite the steps taken by the Secretariat in terms of follow-up letters and/or bilateral meetings. The Secretariat continues to appeal to the ACP Parliamentarians to use their oversight role in reminding their respective Governments to meet their financial obligations to the ACP Group of States. On the other hand, the Committee of Ambassadors is continuing with the work of establishing the Endowment and Trust Fund (ETF), which will need the support of ACP Parliaments, particularly with respect to resource mobilization.

Closely related to this is the need to ensure that adequate financial resources are ear-marked for the ACP to implement the new Agreement being negotiated. This will only be possible if the present EU Budget for 2021 -27 can have an allocation designated for ACP.

As it is now, and with the EDF being budgetised, we face a tremendous challenge. This is a task we must all be engaged in... All our forces fully joined and ready to engage.. Your EU counterparts must be persuaded to challenge the current proposals that speak of funds for the 5 Neighbourhood (i.e. the North African) countries and in general, for Development & International cooperation.

Funds are proposed for thematic programmes (human rights, justice, climate change and gender equality, for example) and the bulk are geographic, in which sub-Saharan Africa is mentioned so too are the Americas, in which the Caribbean will be placed and Asia can find a place for the Pacific Islands. This is a clear fragmentation and reducing the allocation of resources to hand-outs in a pick and choose manner when the language of the Agreement is about partnership and playing a global role together.

Let me say to you this very, very serious. The EU Parliament has advocated that the EDF be within the EU Budget for accountability and oversight by the elected representatives of the people. But at the same time the European parliamentarian Norbert Neuser, as rapporteur of the report of the Budget Committee called for ring-fencing the funds for external action of the EU. If there will be no EDF, a predictable, long-term, co-managed allocation, has to be available as an integral part of the new agreement.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

In conclusion, let me wish you fruitful deliberations at this 52nd Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly as well as the 36th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in this beautiful city of Cotonou. I am sure the brave and bold ideas, Honourable Members, you will provide at these Sessions, will greatly contribute to the process of the Post Cotonou Negotiations. Your indispensable contribution will be an enormous force in the strengthening of the solidarity and unity of the ACP Group of States, and will enable our countries to achieve the 2030 sustainable development goals in ACP States.

I end with the words of Shakespeare – There is a tide in the affairs of men,

Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat. And we must take the current when it serves

Or lose our ventures. (Julius Caesar Act 4 scene 3- of Brutus & Cassius).

I thank you for your kind attention.

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