

Inaugural statement of the Secretary General Dr. Patrick Gomes to the ACP Committee of Ambassadors, 2 March 2015, Brussels

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[Protocols]

The event for which we are gathered this evening takes place in the year that makes the milestone 40th Anniversary of the creation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States by the Georgetown Agreement on June 6, 1975.

Four decades in the life of this unique intergovernmental organisation must mean many things. At least, tribute must be paid to our Member States, their Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Ambassadors, Officials, and staff of the Secretariat who have served faithfully for many years and continue to do so today. The collective efforts and wisdom of all members of the ACP Family have contributed to the growth from 46 countries to now 79 and with the hope soon of 80, as South Sudan completes Observer Status.

But the mere growth in numerical strength, significant as this has been, will not suffice for the next 40 years. Rather, our focus, concerted energy and unequivocal commitment will do well to be firmly centred on the next 5 years of this decade, on which a new Management of the Secretariat is embarking.

The 100th session of the Council of Ministers in December last year, entrusted the great honour and formidable task that I should serve as your Secretary General. Indispensable to the success of that task will be a team of the highest possible caliber, experienced and unreserved by their commitment and proud to give their best to realise the goals and objectives stated in the Georgetown Agreement.

May I, Mr. Chairman, recall the context and pillars on which the ACP is founded.

In the supporting environment of the then Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), with fortitude and foresight, our founding pioneers included in the 15 objectives, two on which can dwell:

- Promote and strengthen unity and solidarity among the ACP States, as well as understanding between ACP peoples;
- Aim for the promotion of a fairer and more equitable new world order.

These and related objectives remain pertinent and urgent in today's turbulent times but their means of implementation will vary. The coherence and complementarity with which they are to be pursued are essential.

I am strengthened in my conviction and commitment that the Team of 2015 must not burden itself with fragmentation, or piecemeal allocations of the EDF Intra-ACP resources in policy-making aid project implementation.

Our solidarity and self-confidence must be strengthened for the challenges ahead.

Indeed, it is the unequivocal declaration at the highest level by the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in December 2012 that reinforces our courage and should remove from all quarters, the lingering self-doubts of the ACP's future.

As stated in the relevant paragraphs (64 and 65) of the Sipopo Declaration: This is what our leaders have said:

"We are fully conscious and firmly convinced that, at this historic juncture in the existence of our unique intergovernmental and tricontinental organisation, the demands for fundamental renewal and transformation are no longer mere options but unavoidable imperatives for strategic change."

The declaration continues:

"On the basis of the Georgetown Agreement, we resolutely reaffirm our determination to stay united as a Group grounded in the values of peace and solidarity, unified action and the identity that characterise us; and we are committed to continuing and sustaining the relevance and effectiveness of our Group by deepening and enhancing the ACP-EU relationship as a unique North-South Development Cooperation model, while developing diversified South-South and other partnerships, with an aim to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development in our States."

These are powerful words, pronounced in 2012 by Heads of State and Government of the ACP Family... unequivocal and

direct. The mandate and responsibility to put these words into action are the core task that I agreed to undertake when I accepted the election of the 100th session of the Council of Ministers.

I expect these powerful words also to guide the collegial working relations with the Committee of Ambassadors, the provision of highly professional technical and corporate services from the respective Departments of the Secretariat and the deepened quality of engagement with the institutions of the European Union, the African Union Commission, our Regional Economic Communities and Regional Integration Organisations.

In this regard, a distinctive and defining feature of the 2015-2020 administration, and a critical challenge to engage the energy and political savvy of the ACP Group, as a whole, must be effective mechanism and modalities by which to participate in diversified partnerships across the Global South by 2020.

This entails structured and sustained relations for joint policy analysis and capacity development and action with Chapters of the G77 and China, observer status with the BRICS and similar trans-regional formations. We must define a possible mechanism to utilize closer collaboration and action with specific organs of the United Nations system.

Although these goals may sound too ambitious – and rightly so, if attempts were made in all those arenas, all at the same time, with the limited resources at our disposal. Our approach nonetheless will be strategic and an appropriate sequencing of actions will be undertaken to ensure a cumulative impact. This requires a Strategic Plan for 2015-2018 which will take into account the Guidelines & Roadmap, contained in the final report of the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives that has been approved by Council in December 2014. The appropriate implementation mechanism of the Report is engaging the attention of Management.

In this regard, the ACP Group with 37 Small Island Development States in its membership, is rightly placed to be an effective player in implementation of the Samoa Pathway, the outcome document of the recent Global Conference on SIDS, so admirably hosted by our member state of Samoa.

More specifically, I propose that a Permanent Forum on SIDS be established by the ACP Group. This could be a joint venture with the UNDP.

Another aspect from the recommendations of the WG on Future Perspectives deserving early attention, concerns “Enhancing the Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilisation of the ACP”. An Ad hoc Task Force for an Endowment and Long Term Development Fund in this important area is being considered. I am encouraged that preliminary discussions with some Ambassadors have received a positive response.

May I take this opportunity to also mention that arrangements are being made for the incumbent Chairperson of the Committee of Ambassadors, and when necessary the President of Council, to have an office designated for his or her use in ACP House. However modest it may be now, in a new Headquarters, wherever that may be, a more suitable facility should be provided.

I wish to conclude with reference to the importance and urgency for an 8th Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Useful as the proposed initiatives are, the holistic and overarching vision within which they can be effectively and efficiently achieved must find resonance and endorsement by the supreme organ of decision-making of the ACP Group. This is the Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Mr. Chairman, allow me therefore to make a very special appeal, a plea, that one of our Regions so endowed will offer to host the 8th Summit at a time the prospective Host Country regards as most appropriate.

That Summit must be a beacon that refines our strategic policy domains for a decade 2020 – 2030 and project a powerful political vision to serve the ACP in the engagement with the European Union on the form and accompanying institutional arrangements to shape the post-Cotonou relations. More significantly, it must provide the narrative and firm moral as well as financial commitment that the maturing self-confidence acquired over the 4 decades of the ACP will reinforce our capacity to grow stronger and address the needs of our peoples, as we also look beyond Europe.

May I conclude with words from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, quoted recently by our distinguished Ambassador Nkosi of South Africa:

“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny, but in ourselves”.

Thank you very much.

Patrick I. Gomes
Secretary General

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