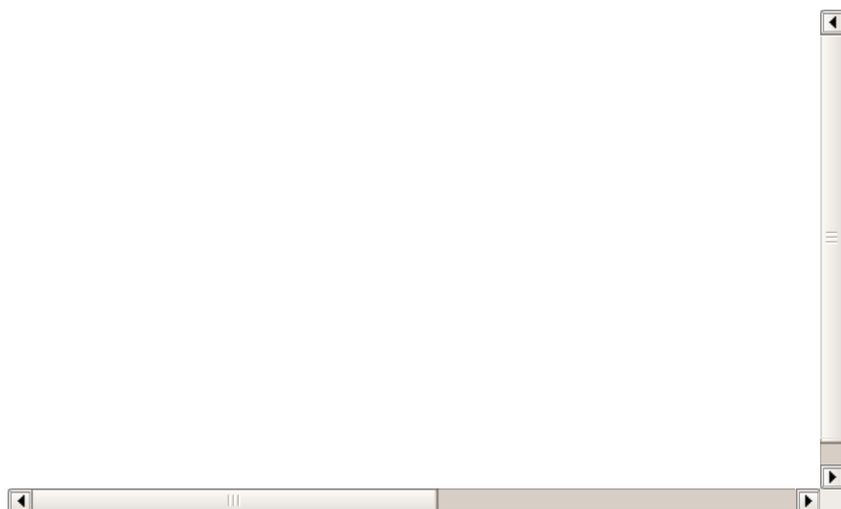


Message of solidarity from the Secretary General on International Women's Day

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Full Text below

Opening remarks by the Secretary General of the ACP Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, on the occasion of the celebration of International Women's Day, 8 March 2012, Brussels

[Pleasantries]

I want to extend a very warm welcome to all of you here who have joined us at the ACP House today to celebrate International's Women's Day. I am indeed very pleased to be surrounded by so many women who have taken time off from their busy schedule to be with us today.

It is indeed a real pleasure for me to address this message of solidarity to you. A day when women around the world will connect to celebrate and honour women past, present and future in many exciting ways. Amazing women celebrities, athletes, political leaders and experts will speak about women's issues today.

International Women's day is many things – a cause for celebration, a reason to pause and re-evaluate, a remembrance, an inspiration, a time to honour loved and admired ones in the world and particularly in our ACP countries. On this day all over the world we consider both the steps forward that have been taken towards better lives for women and progress still required to be made.

This year the United Nations has chosen the theme "Empower Rural Women – End Hunger and Poverty". Given the centrality of rural women to eradicate hunger and poverty, it is important to step up initiatives in favour of rural women's empowerment and focus on women in agriculture. I have no doubt that rural women will play a major role in this year's discussions. Right to Food for all and putting an end to poverty can only be achieved by enabling sustainable domestic agricultural production in every region of the world, and notably in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

It is therefore crucial for us the ACP to impress on our partner the EU that ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement is first and foremost a development-oriented partnership, where core development issues such as empowering rural women to end hunger and poverty should take precedence over other issues. It is also fundamental that ACP countries advance local smallholder agriculture with a special focus on women farmers, particularly in rural areas where the vast majority of the world's poorest still resides.

An important lesson that we have learnt over the years is that for women to advance, democracy has to advance as well. But democracy requires more than an absence of discrimination. It needs governance. And good governance means sharing the power to make decisions - in politics, in economic and social life, in public administration and even in our homes. Supporting women to participate more actively in economic, social and political life is key to reducing poverty and increasing the well being of women and girls, their families and communities. According to the World Bank, investing in the education of girls may yield a higher rate of return than any other investment. Investing in girls' education is critical to achieving the MDGs. As an African educationist from my own home country of Ghana once said, if you educate a man you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a community.

No nation can hope to move forward if its women and children are trapped in endless cycle of poverty, when they don't have the health care they need, when too many of them still die in childbirth, when they cannot read or take a job for which they will receive equal pay for equal work.

As we celebrate International Women's Day this year let us also bear in mind that the struggle is far from over. Women's empowerment should never be reduced to individual success stories. It should be about collective well-being.

If women like Ellen Sirlead Johnson, first elected female president in Africa, Mme. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mme. Postia Simpson, Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mme. Wangari Muta Maathai, Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, have emerged among the crowd and made their voices heard, let us also pay tribute to those women in small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen or heard on any maps of the world, but who are willing to do all they can to lift up their lives and the lives of their families and communities.

We in the ACP will do everything in our means to support the integration of women's voices in decision making in the political, technological and scientific fields, and in culture, to enhance the participation of women in the development of their countries. We are convinced that sustainable development can only be achieved if there is equality for women. Women can only realize their true potential, if they have access to education and are able to play a full role in the communities' decision-making processes.

Their understanding of the environment and its problems, and their role as educators, has to be used to ensure that the environment as a resource is valued and respected, and used for the benefit of all. We in the ACP would like to see an enhanced participation of women in the management of environmental resources and the reduction of environmental risks to women. The ACP Secretariat pledges to work hand in hand with ACP governments, the private sector and individuals to move beyond rhetoric and take action to improve the quality of life of women everywhere.

Progress in women's rights occurs step by step, and each victory becomes a platform upon which the next may be built. Our shared task, men and women, is to keep building until we've raised enough platforms high enough to transform the very horizons of the earth. And in that quest I invite everyone to participate.

I want to end here by saying: Sure God created man before woman but then you always make a rough draft before the final masterpiece.

I thank you for your kind attention and happy celebrations – Happy International Women's Day.

H.E Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas
Secretary General
ACP Secretariat

See also Slide Show of ACP celebration of International Woman's Day



Tags: [SG speeches](#) ^[1]

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