

Address of the Secretary General at the 33rd Regular Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), 4-6 July 2012, Castries SAINT LUCIA,

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Your Excellency, Hon. Dr. Kenny Davis Anthony, Prime Minister of St. Lucia and Chairman of the Caribbean Community,
Your Excellencies the Heads of Government,
Your Excellency, Ambassador Irwin LaRocque, Secretary-General of CARICOM,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to begin by thanking you all for giving me this singular opportunity and privilege to address this august gathering. Coming to the pleasant shores of St. Lucia has been for me a particularly uplifting experience. As a son of the ancient West African savannah, I have always been keenly aware of the ties that bind the peoples of Africa to the rainbow races and colours of the Caribbean.

It was in these islands, once dismissed as “the dust of empires”, by Charles de Gaulle of France, that the first successful slave revolt of modern times was enacted. From Toussaint de l’Ouverture to Marcus Garvey, the peoples of the Caribbean were in many ways the forefathers of the latter-day African struggle for political emancipation.

Edward Wilmot Blyden, whose statue adorns the centre of the Sierra Leonean capital, Freetown, was born in the Virgin Islands. An educator, scholar and thinker, Blyden is widely revered as the pioneer of pan-Africanism and herald of the African Renaissance. The socialist intellectual George Padmore and the philosopher C. L. R. James were the mentors and counsellors to Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of my own native Ghana. The Nobel laureate Sir Arthur Lewis spent time in Ghana in the late fifties, helping Nkrumah to design our country’s first national development strategy.

The peoples of Africa and the peoples of the Caribbean are linked together not only by blood; we are in the same boat as a matter of historical destiny. Indeed, the recent lessons of world development point to the fact that all poles of growth need their Diasporas. Indeed, the Global African Diaspora Summit held in Sandton, Johannesburg, in May 2012, underlined the importance of the Caribbean and the Pacific as parts of the African Diaspora. What matters today is how we transmute this social capital into opportunities for investment, growth and prosperity.

I bring with me tidings of hope from Brussels, the capital of Europe. As we endeavour to serve you and our nearly one billion people, we at the Secretariat are continually guided by the Spirit of the Georgetown Agreement and the time-tested ideals which inspired the establishment of the ACP family of nations.

Your Excellencies,

I am happy to report that during May 2012, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) took place in Horsens, Denmark, with great success. With the emergence of the Lisbon Treaty and the increased co-decision making authority of the European Parliament, the role of the JPA has assumed increased significance. This is particularly important in areas such as the Multi-Annual Financial Framework allocations from the EU Budget, reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and its implications for ACP agriculture trade as well as accompanying measures for sugar, bananas and other commodities. The JPA has proven to be a very useful institution that enhances political dialogue while allowing our parliamentarians to engage with their European colleagues in shaping the course of EU development policy.

Last month we were in the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu for the 95th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers. Incidentally, that meeting was presided over by the Honourable Mr. Alva Baptiste, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of St. Lucia. Vanuatu provided a great opportunity not only to dialogue among ourselves but also to reach better understanding with our European colleagues on how to take the ACP-EU partnership forward. Among the most important achievements was the Resolution on a common position for the Rio+20 meeting on global sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

Permit me to use this auspicious occasion to announce that the 7th Summit of ACP Heads of Government and State is scheduled to be held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, during 13-14 December 2012. The Summit will be held under the theme: *"The Future of the ACP Group in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities"*.

This summit will be of historic import to the future of the ACP as we seek to consolidate on our achievements while mapping the path to a more viable future. And given that the Caribbean – through the Georgetown Agreement – is the birthplace of the ACP, we expect that you will all make a strong showing at the coming summit so that the Caribbean voice will be heard loud and clear.

Your Excellencies,

The imminent demise of the ACP has been grossly exaggerated. The ACP comprises 79 member countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the islands of the Pacific. With the prospect of the new Republic of South Sudan joining us soon, our membership will rise to eighty. We are today the largest trans-regional intergovernmental organisation of developing countries in the international system. There is potential to build on this numeric strength to promote the collective cause of some of the poorest countries in the world – including vulnerable small island states -- with opportunity to establish crucial alliances not only with Europe but with some of the emerging global players in the world economy.

The key principles underpinning intra-ACP cooperation are anchored on commitment to diversity as a source of strength and a shared vision of a common future. We stand for democracy and a rights-based approach to development – for solidarity – in forging a common front in tackling the challenges of a world defined by ever-increasing interdependence, and rapid and constant evolution. Equally important for us is commitment to the pursuit of a fair, open and rules-based multilateral trading system that accords the highest priority to development issues.

Mr. Chairman,

When the Lomé Agreement was signed in 1975, it was widely greeted as symbol of hope in a divided world; a model of North-South cooperation based on dialogue rather than confrontation. Its successor, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, signed in 2000 for a period of 20 years, has provided an element of continuity and predictability in a world of increasing uncertainty.

The EDF has been the main vehicle for ACP-EU development financing, in addition to the private sector window available from the European Investment Bank. Total resources made available under the 10th EDF to cover the six year period 2008 – 2013 amounted to €22.682 billion. It is pleasing to note that we are already poised to begin discussions with our EU colleagues on EDF-11. During year's end 2011, the Commission proposed an amount of €32 billion for the 2014—2020 EDF-11 funding cycle, subject to further negotiation with EU Member States.

The ACP-EU partnership remains the best model there is for the contractual approach to world development based on interdependence, dialogue and mutually shared responsibilities. But there are aspects that have not worked very well. The EDF has been strong on the public sector but rather weak in the area of private sector development. While financing instruments such as budget support have been well received by a good number of countries, concerns have been raised about their long-term development effectiveness.

There is also the fact that old attitudes seem to die hard. Unlike the Chinese, the European mindset continues to view the ACP as a problem rather than an opportunity. With Europe's aging population and its current fiscal and institutional challenges, we believe the rapidly growing economies of the ACP constitute a potentially huge market and investment opportunity that could help restart the engine of growth in Europe.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the principal concerns facing ACP-EU relations is obviously the slow progress that has been made so far on the EPA negotiations. While you in the Caribbean have already finalised an agreement, the African and Pacific regions are yet to do so. The EU meanwhile is proposing to withdraw Regulation 1528 that had guaranteed entry for exports from the ACP countries by January 2014. It would appear that the Commission, with its decidedly inflexible posture, is predicating any continuing relations with the ACP on the finalisation of the EPA negotiations.

It also seems likely that ACP countries that are in the high and upper middle income categories will also miss out on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) following an EU proposal to revise the scheme in a manner that will graduate them out of the benefits.

Such inflexibility is rather unhelpful to the necessary progress that needs to be made towards finalising the EPAs. The US African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) and the progressive trade policies of the Chinese towards developing countries show that the WTO does not foreclose a more flexible approach to international trade relations.

Your Excellencies,

During last year, the EU Commission launched the *Agenda for Change*, a new framework for EU development policy in the years ahead. The aim is to streamline the EU's development assistance and to ensure greater effectiveness and development impact in light of recent economic and geopolitical changes. The key priorities centre on energy, private sector development, infrastructures and good governance.

A major concern in this connection has been the new discourse on 'differentiation', by which the EU is seeking to remove high middle income countries and countries with a GDP larger than 1% of total global GDP from its Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

We are aware that Europe itself is facing an unprecedented fiscal crisis. It seems clear that they are determined to rationalize the deployment of financial transfers to developing countries in a manner that could significantly undermine resource flows to high middle-income countries, many of which are in the Caribbean. We at the Secretariat have strenuously sought to explain to our European colleagues that over-reliance on blanket GDP figures do not tell the full story of poverty in our countries. Nor does it do justice to crucial challenges such as Climate Change and the structural vulnerability of many of our apparently more affluent ACP countries.

I therefore want to use this opportunity to reaffirm our solidarity with Caribbean on this issue and to assure you that we would do our part to ensure that some of the countries in your region do not end up being punished unduly because they have been able to ensure growth and prosperity through discipline, sound governance and prudent economic policies.

Yours Excellencies,

For the foreseeable future, it seems evident that we will continue to need Europe as a predictable source of ODA to fill some of the financing gap in our development efforts. Europe, on the other hand, will continue to be a key player in our countries in terms of development assistance and humanitarian intervention. Europe has technology and skills, while many of our ACP countries have a surfeit of natural-resource endowments. Clearly, there is a basis for interdependence and mutuality of interests that can sustain the partnership in the years ahead.

At the same time, we believe that the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -- the nations generally referred to as the BRICS -- offer a new window of opportunity. They provide an opportunity to mobilise additional resources for development while leveraging on our synergies to enhance South-South solidarity. Last December, for example, we signed an MOU on Technical Cooperation with Brazil. We are also exploring how to firm up our dialogue with China, India and other emerging economies.

Your Excellencies,

As we look to the years ahead, we recognise the need to reinvent the ACP as a meaningful player on the world stage. As you are all aware, the Lisbon Treaty which came into force in December 2009 has transformed the institutional architecture of the

EU as we have always known it. Global re-alignments and major shifts in EU policy orientations have given rise to concerns of possible downgrading of the importance of the ACP-EU Partnership.

The EU's neighbourhood focus with regard to Eastern Europe and North Africa; and its rapprochement with Latin America and the general thrust of its development policy re-orientation has led to some anxiety among our ACP members.

According to an old African saying, "When the music changes, so does the dance". Clearly, the music is changing not only in Europe but also globally. It was in recognition of this fact that we launched the *Working Group on Future Perspectives* chaired by my good friend Ambassador Patrick Gomes of Guyana. The Working Group has been mandated to explore various alternative scenarios and to come up with suggestions for repositioning of the ACP within the global arena. It has up to the end of 2014 to complete its work.

As part of these efforts, the UNDP financed a technical study that has come up with some important findings. The general view is that an independent ACP is the most desirable option for the future. It seems clear that the future of the ACP lies in an innovative, modern and transformed Secretariat that is proactive and interactive. It also goes without saying that financial self-sustainability is essential to ensuring effective fulfilment of our core functions. The simple message is that it can no longer be business-as-usual.

Among the key initiatives that we have come up with in this connection is the proposal to set up an ACP Free Trade Area (FTA) as well as a Bank for International Trade and Investment (BITI). Technical studies are being done to ascertain the feasibility of both projects. The objective of the bank is to help mobilize local as well as international capital to finance trade and investments in our member countries. It is a highly ambitious project that aims to bring Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific in a new alliance of progress and prosperity, leveraging on our inherent potentials and the opportunities opened up by the new economic powers such as Brazil, India, China and the nations of the Gulf.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding my remarks, permit me to note that we face a time of challenge as well as opportunity. What economists have termed *'the Great Recession'* has taken its toll on nations rich as well as poor. In the Caribbean, earnings from tourism and remittances have dwindled, even as some of your countries grapple with debt and rising fiscal deficits. The same is true of Africa and the Pacific. But we have also seen some resilience in several of our countries, particularly in Africa, where growth is forecast to exceed an average of 5.6 percent by year's end 2012. Several countries – among them Angola, Ghana, Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and Nigeria – has registered growth in excess of 7 percent per annum. Indeed, Africa is seen by many analysts as the new global frontier.

In spite of these encouraging developments, we are keenly aware of the new imperatives that globalisation imposes on national systems, in particular, the pressures of market discipline and competition. We also understand that the honeymoon of privileged access to EU markets is over, thanks to the rules-based WTO international trading regime. There is also the uncertainty occasioned by the New Europe, with its changing institutional architecture and transformed geopolitical priorities. As we face these difficulties, we also realise that we have an opportunity to leverage on our inherent potentials while embracing South-South cooperation and the opportunities opened up by the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil.

Equally crucial is the need to reform the workings of the principal institutions and to streamline many of our core functions. I believe the ACP can be most effective when we set out not to replicate what others are doing but when we concentrate in those niche areas in which we enjoy a high comparative advantage. This requires no less than the reinvention and repositioning of our organisation, revisiting our core mandate, leveraging on our competencies and reforming our principal organs to better serve the interests of our peoples.

We cannot achieve these ambitious targets with political support at the highest level. I hope to count on your continuing support. I thank you for your kind attention and wish you all very successful deliberations.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas
ACP Secretary General

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