

Opening address by the Secretary General at the 100th session of the ACP Council of Ministers, 10 December, Brussels

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[Protocols]

Permit me to begin by expressing how deeply honoured I am for the privilege of addressing this noble and august 100th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers. I warmly welcome you all to ACP House, which is, indeed, your House!

Let me also extend a warm hand of welcome to our Special Guest, H. E. Mr. Li Yong, Director-General of UNIDO who has graciously agreed to address Council on the topic Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development.

Only last week, we returned from Strasbourg, France, where the 28th Session of the Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) and the 36th Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly took place. It was a well attended and successful meeting, in spite of the previous challenges we had encountered in trying to hold the meetings in Brussels. The JPA represents an important aspect of our ACP-EU cooperation system, availing our legislators on both sides an opportunity not only to debate and exchange views but also to pass resolutions and influence the course of cooperation and development to the benefit of our peoples.

Honourable Ministers,

We meet at a time of considerable challenges as well as opportunities. Many of our ACP countries are making bold efforts at consolidating democracy and the rule of law while building robust economies that will ensure growth and prosperity in the years ahead. Peaceful and transparent elections have been held in several of our countries this year.

Even in countries such as Mali and Central African Republic where we had some political difficulties, hope is being restored. More recently, in Burkina Faso the youths took the future into their own hands by forcing a regime change based on their convictions about the rule of constitutionalism. We continue to follow events in that country and to urge the transitional administration to ensure a smooth return to democratic rule in line with the just aspirations of the great Burkinabe people.

With regard to the rest of the world, the BRICS countries are showing signs of strong recovery, particularly South Africa, which is also a much valued member of our organisation. Among the advanced industrial countries, Britain and the United States continue to show strong prospects for growth. However, recovery remains slow in our Eurozone partner countries. In Iraq and Syria, the raging fires of terror and war continue to rampage across once prosperous nations. Also, the showdown between Russia and the West over Ukraine is a geopolitical challenge that does not augur well for world peace and long-term global recovery. Falling oil and commodity prices cannot be particularly good news for some of our oil-exporting countries.

It is clear that bold action is needed on a global scale to restore growth and to bolster the institutions of global governance for the benefit of billions of people on our planet.

Mr. President,

Much work remains to be done. Some of our small island states continue to be threatened by Climate Change even as poverty and youth unemployment continue to exert a negative impact on the development prospects of many of our member countries. In spite of the heroic efforts at reform, some of our countries remain saddled with high levels of unsustainable debt and other fiscal challenges. In West Africa, the scourge of Ebola has exacted a severe humanitarian toll on countries such as Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Nigeria and Kenya, terrorism and insurgency constitute a menace to human livelihoods as well as long-term growth and ethno-communal harmony.

However, we have good cause to be optimistic that the prospects for our ACP countries remain strong. Long-term recovery will be dependent on the advanced industrial countries ensuring they take bold steps to rebalance their fiscal bases while cooperating with the BRICS and other emerging economies in boosting the institutions of global governance and ensuring an open international trading regime that works in the interest of rich and poor countries alike.

Equally important is the need to rally the world community together to tackle the monster of Ebola while finding lasting solutions to the crisis between Russia and Ukraine and addressing the onslaught of the movement that calls itself "the Islamic State" in Syria and Iraq.

Mr. President,

Whether it is violent conflict or terrorism, viral diseases or climate change, global challenges by their very nature require

cooperation and collective action on a global scale. No one nation could solve these challenges on its own – even if that nation has the exorbitant privilege of being a *'hyper-power'*, to borrow a term first used by former French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine.

I make bold to say that our ACP-EU partnership is an important pillar of that consensus building – of that dialogue of civilisations -- which is so crucial to humanity's survival in our era. Since Hugo Grotius, considered by jurists as the father of international law, Europe has prided itself in its universalism and its commitment to the ideals of the Enlightenment. Our long-standing partnership provides an opportunity to test Europe's commitment to those ideals. Together, I believe we can join the rest of the world community of nations in creating the momentum for a more prosperous, more just and more peaceful world.

The ACP has come of age. As an intergovernmental organisation, we have weathered many a storm and overcome many a hurdle. We are a trusted development partner to Europe. We are widely consulted on some of the key development agendas that have to be tackled by the international community. In international forums, the ACP continues to speak with authority. We have made our voice to count and we have stood up to be counted when it matters the most.

Honourable Ministers,

Like any other organization, the ACP in its nearly four decades of existence, has had its triumphs as well as tribulations. As we face a future of greater uncertainty, we recognise the need to reposition our organisation as a more credible and more effective player on the global arena.

As everybody knows, Europe's 2009 Lisbon Treaty makes no express reference to the ACP-EU partnership. It seems evident to us that the emerging New Europe does not necessarily wish to accord us the status of a privileged partner that we once took for granted. And as the recent European elections have shown, the political pendulum is swinging decidedly to the Right. Aid fatigue is creeping in. The Eurozone countries are facing an unprecedented fiscal crisis of their own. Growth has remained painfully slow. In those circumstances, Europe's generosity has been remarkable. But it is a generosity that we can no longer take for granted.

It was in awareness of these new realities that the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives was set up. The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) under the Chairmanship of former Nigerian President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was set up under a resolution of the 7th Summit of the ACP to pool together the wisdom of some of our best statesmen and women and to forge a brave new future for the ACP. The EPG has been at work from last year and all of this year. Consultations have been held in all our six regions. The EPG has also met with European officials at the highest levels. The Drafting Committee of the EPG has put together an interim report which will be presented to this Council as a prelude to presenting the final report during the next Summit of Heads of State and Government when it does take place.

I was present at most of the EPG's regional consultations. I can say without any fear of contradiction that if the ACP did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it! I felt encouraged by the realisation that most of our peoples and stakeholders value the ACP as a coalition of the world's poor – as the moral conscience of a world that is sometimes dominated by might rather than right – and by force rather than the precepts of law and international morality.

The thinking that has infused both the Working Group and the EPG have been premised on the need to revitalize, reconfigure and reposition the ACP Group into an operationally effective international organisation in order to better serve the needs and ambitions of its member States. Central to all these questions is where we should be heading after the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020. One thing on which we are all agreed is that it definitely can no longer be business-as-usual.

According to an ancient African saying, a wise man will not set sail on someone else's star. As we seek to reinvent the ACP, it seems evident to me that we can be most effective when we do not repeat what other institutions are already doing; but when we focus on what we do best – in those niche areas that leverage on our highest comparative advantage. This would require focusing on our core competencies and repositioning the Secretariat as a knowledge institution that does more than just convening meetings. It will require strengthening the Secretariat and mobilising more substantial resources than currently obtains.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It would be remiss of me if I did not say that our relations with Europe have not always been without their frictions. One of the sore points is obviously the slow progress towards finalisation of the EPA negotiations. While the Caribbean region has already finalised its EPA, it is still saddled with the challenges of implementation. An EPA agreement has been reached with West Africa; awaiting ratification by the respective parliaments. Negotiations with East Africa and Southern Africa have reached an advanced stage while those with the Pacific islands and with Central Africa are still ongoing. We continue to hope that the EU will show greater flexibility and understanding so that all our regions will reach an agreement that they adjudge to be fair, equitable and just.

Your Excellencies,

We remain persuaded that there is a future for the ACP. We also believe that Europe and the ACP will continue to need each other in the foreseeable future. Europe has technology and skills; the ACP has an abundance of natural-resource endowments. There is therefore a basis for interdependence and mutuality of interests.

As principal donor to the ACP, the EU has access to 79 member countries within its sphere of diplomatic and geopolitical influence; allowing Europe to wield what Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye terms 'soft power'; a form of influence which he famously elaborated as the most effective form of power in our twenty-first century.

Honourable Ministers,

I need not remind us that we have a busy schedule ahead. Apart from what I would term the routine issues of trade and commodities and the annual budget, a major topic on your agenda is the appointment of a new Secretary-General who will be succeeding my humble self for the years 2015 to 2020. As you probably suspect, the Bureau has met with the candidates and will be presenting its report to Council. The appointment is to be made from a shortlist of three highly qualified candidates from the Caribbean region, whose turn it is to hold the position according to our long-standing principle of rotation. The coming years will be of crucial importance for the future of the ACP. I am sure you will bring together your collective wisdom in choosing the right candidate who will steer the affairs of our organisation with boldness, wisdom and sagacity.

Tomorrow morning at 8.30 am, we will be having an informal breakfast meeting at *Palais de Bozar*. We have invited some high European officials to this breakfast meeting, notably newly appointed High Representatives of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, and the new Development Commissioner Mr. Neven Mimica. They will be addressing us, to be followed by an informal exchange of views. This will provide us with an opportunity to be briefed on the emerging thinking of the Jean-Claude Juncker administration and their approach and policy orientation towards our long-standing ACP partnership.

A major highlight of our meeting is the ceremony of the signing of National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) with some member countries. This will enshrine into law a substantial commitment of financial resources by the EU under the 11th EDF financing cycle.

Mr. President, Honorable Ministers,

How time flies! Only 20 months ago I was appointed by this august body to complete the term of my illustrious predecessor and compatriot, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas when he was appointed African Union and United Nations Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur. He has since moved on and is now the UN Secretary-General's Representative for West Africa.

You gave me the opportunity to serve our organization the ACP Group. I have in the period deployed my best endeavors and brought to bear whatever leverages are at my disposal. It is certainly not for me to judge whether I have succeeded and to what extent. It is for you to judge, and those who will come after me.

To be sure, there have been some mistakes. Perfection belongs only to the Almighty Creator. For my part, I can only say this: I did my duties with a clear conscience and did not betray that which destiny and your good selves had entrusted to my care.

Allow me, in concluding, to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support that I have received from the Secretariat staff when I took over the leadership of this organisation. Among the Ashanti of my own native Ghana, it is said that "When a king has good counselors, his reign is peaceful". I certainly enjoyed the wise counsel of the Assistant Secretaries-General and the staff, which went to making my task easier than it could have been.

Being part of the establishment gave me a better appreciation of the important role of the Secretariat in supporting and facilitating the work of all the political Organs of the ACP under often difficult administrative and financial constraints.

Mr. President, Honourable Ministers,

It is sometimes very easy to forget that all the demands that are made on our Secretariat – all the work of catering to an organisation of 79 member countries with a population of nearly a billion people – is being done by less than 100 people. The support staff and secretaries comprise more than a half of that staff strength, leaving less than 40 people who actually do all the policy-analytic work that keeps the wheel turning.

Contrast this with the European Commission which has staff strength of over 3,000. We run a shoestring budget even by the level of our comparators such as the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)* and the Commonwealth of Nations.

Your Excellencies,

It may surprise you to know that throughout this year we had virtually no budget for missions; a fact that meant the ACP could not be represented at some of the most important international meetings. This has been a particularly difficult and painful experience. It is like sending a farmer to the field at the crucial planting season while denying him the necessary tools to get down to business. I say this without rancour, of course. I only hope that my predecessor will receive better resourcing than we have. In this connection I wish to acknowledge with thanks the generous monetary donations to the Secretariat received from the Governments of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Angola.

Our people say, "*If you climb a tree, you must climb down the same tree*". As I bid farewell to this august body, let me express my gratitude to all of you for your forbearance, guidance and support. I am particularly grateful to all the staff for their unstinting sacrifices, loyalty and commitment. That we managed to achieve what we were able to do under sometimes dire circumstances is due largely to the support, diligence and sacrifice of our staff. I am also grateful to the Committee of Ambassadors and its successive Chairmen in the persons of

- H.E. Mr. Samuel O. OUTLULE, Ambassador of Botswana
- H. E. Fatumanava Dr Pa'o LUTERU, Ambassador of Samoa
- H. E. Dr Diodorus B. KAMALA, Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanzania

and lastly but certainly not the least

· Dr. Ousmane SYLLA, Ambassador of the Republic of Guinea.

These astute diplomats provided the much needed guidance and leadership and I profited from their wisdom.

Equally I acknowledge the great work that was accomplished under various chairpersons of Sub-Committees and Working Groups. Without their hard work and sacrifice we could not have achieved the level of success that was accomplished.

I have enjoyed the friendship of many outstanding personalities that I worked with in these few months and I owe them special gratitude. They taught me to appreciate better what the iconic and legendary leader of our time Nelson Mandela had said while reflecting on the qualities of leadership “A good leader can engage in a debate frankly and thoroughly knowing that at the end he and the other side must be closer, and thus emerge stronger. You don’t have that idea when you are arrogant, superficial and uninformed”.

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies Ambassadors,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me reiterate my words of welcome and profound gratitude for your presence.

I wish you a fulfilling and productive 100th Session of the Council of Ministers.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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