

Opening remarks by the ACP Secretary General at the 5th ACP Meeting of Ministers in charge of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 20 September 2017, Nassau, The Bahamas

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[Protocols]

I join in extending a welcome to Ministers and Heads of Delegation to this our 5th Meeting on Fisheries & Aquaculture. It is with deep sadness that I make reference to the loss of life and devastating damage to property in the wake of recent and current hurricanes in their destructive paths and convey condolences to the Governments and peoples so affected.

Please, allow me to also express the ACP Group's appreciation to Your Excellency Prime Minister, to Minister Wells and the outstanding team of Permanent Secretaries, and staff for the excellent arrangements for the Meeting. This has been done so extensively despite the difficulties and disruptions occasioned by the horrendous hurricane Irma. We are indeed deeply grateful – your resilience is praiseworthy!

I am glad to note the large size of delegations from across the 79 Member States of the ACP Group. It is another true testament to the importance of fisheries and aquaculture for the sustainable development of our countries and regions.

This is a crucial sector that underpins the food security, nutritional requirements and livelihoods of many ACP countries, particularly for Small Island Developing States.

Furthermore, it is useful to note that fish and fishery products continue to be one of the most-traded food commodities globally. Indeed, the participation of ACP countries in the global seafood trade has increased substantially. Let me illustrate. As much as US\$5.3 billion worth of ACP fish exports from at least 65 ACP countries entered the international market in 2014, with most of this for the market of the European Union (EU).

It is also good to bear in mind that while aquaculture development is taking off, the *capture fisheries sector* is confronted with serious challenges. Data on economic loss is very disturbing. For instance, one third of the assessed fisheries globally are overfished and according to World Bank estimates, the sum of net losses, due to overfishing, is at least \$84.6 billion, including \$ 10.4 billion per year from Africa.

Additionally, in West Africa alone, more than \$1 billion is lost each year due to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing; while in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, IUU claims at least \$470 million annually. Further, the actual lost revenue to Pacific Island countries is estimated at \$140 million annually. These concerns together with other unsustainable practices such as pollution, habitat destruction, climate variability and technical market barriers, rigidly restrain many developing countries in their efforts for sustainable fisheries management and development.

Mr. Prime Minister, Excellencies, dear friends ...

Indeed, all these challenges have been recognised at global level and recently expressed clearly in Goal 14 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, *to Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*. (May I once again take the opportunity to commend the outstanding leadership given by our member state, the Republic of Fiji along with Sweden in co-hosting the UN Ocean Conference earlier this year and urge all our member states to implement the Call to Action of that Conference.) It is encouraging that ACP member states intend to take a leading role in ocean governance. The forthcoming Ocean Conference in Malta should be a venue for the ACP's leadership to be evident.

The grave and complex challenges facing our oceans and fisheries cannot be tackled by a country on its own. Given the shared nature of fisheries resources, it is clear to us in the ACP Group that part of the solutions must come through regional and international cooperation even as countries intensify actions locally.

Against this background, we can better appreciate the goal and purpose of our present meeting.

It is precisely to provide a platform for a dynamic policy dialogue to catalyse actions that serve the following goals: 1) advance sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture; 2) exchange information and share lessons learnt by public and private sector agencies; while also 3) providing an opportunity for bilateral networking to seek out financial resources for the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture.

At this gathering we seek to deepen our cooperation and identify areas and strategies to sustain and expand partnerships for the benefit of ACP states and by implication, all developing countries. Also and most important, is to share lessons learnt at national, regional and international levels. This is South-South cooperation in action.

As we convene here today, we must acknowledge that the global governance frameworks that have a direct bearing on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development are also rapidly evolving. This calls for concerted action with partnerships between both developing and developed countries at the multilateral level.

Evidently, since the last meeting of the ACP fisheries ministers in 2015, substantial landmark international developments have materialised. This includes the adoption of Goal 14 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (COP) 21 and the entry into force of the FAO Port State Measures Agreement. I wish to also mention, and am somewhat encouraged, that the renewed commitment in the ongoing negotiations at the WTO may lead to a realistic multilateral outcome on fisheries subsidies.

In this context, it may be timely to highlight that ACP cooperation has proved useful in some very tangible ways. We have sought to use every occasion in these global fora to highlight the issues of great concern to our member states, and developing countries as a whole, in particular, preparing the climate change negotiations for COP 23, the UN ocean conference and the ongoing negotiations at the WTO on fisheries subsidies. Our goal is to ensure that the resultant multilateral outcomes reinforce the development aspirations of ACP states.

We recognize that there are still many challenges to sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture, but, the ACP Group remains determined to play a catalytic role to enhance the sustainable flow of benefits from the fisheries and aquaculture sectors for development of our countries and particularly coastal communities, so heavily dependent of fisheries and marine resources.

To this end, I believe it is necessary to enhance the capacity building activities, deepen our policy analysis and continuously explore ways to secure funding from our partners for this purpose.

As we courageously and rigorously engage in strategic planning for concerted action, I trust these thoughts are of some assistance.

Many thanks for your kind attention. Once again, welcome!

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