

Opening Remarks by the Secretary General at the Consultation Session on the Future Perspectives of the ACP Group, 17 April - London, UK

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Briefing Text of Opening Remarks Brainstorming on the Future Perspectives for the ACP

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Your Excellencies; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to begin by thanking our hosts, the Commonwealth Secretariat, for convening this important brainstorming session. Not too long ago my good friend Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma launched a dialogue process to reinvent the Commonwealth of Nations to face the arduous challenges of our post-Cold War international order. The ensuing report, "*A Commonwealth of the People*", is a wise and farsighted response to these challenges.

According to an old African saying, "When the music changes, so does the dance". We at the ACP are keenly aware that the music is changing not only in Europe but also in our member states, and, indeed, globally. It was in recognition of this fact that we launched our own dialogue process through the *Sub-Committee on Future Perspectives* chaired by H.E. Dr. Patrick Gomes, the distinguished Ambassador of Guyana to the European Union and the Kingdoms of Belgium and Luxembourg. I am confident that this brainstorming session will further enrich our thinking on how to take forward the agenda of change and renewal.

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, our membership is expected to rise to eighty. It is also encouraging that Libya has made recent enquiries about possible accession to the Georgetown Agreement.

The origins of the ACP date back to the Rome Treaty 1957, when the former French African colonial dependencies were brought into Association status with the European Common Market as it then was. The founding document of the ACP is the Georgetown Agreement 1975 which defines the membership, the institutions and the role and functions of the Principal Organs. The heart of the ACP's activities lies in the operation of the Secretariat and the Committee of Ambassadors and their interface with the European Commission and other EU institutions.

The ACP today is 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, 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; democracy and rights-based development; and solidarity in facing the challenges of a world defined by ever-increasing interdependence, and rapid and constant evolution. Equally important for us is human development and the pursuit of a fair, open and rules-based multilateral trading system that accords the highest priority to development issues.

Your Excellencies,

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, is anchored on three complementary pillars: (i) development cooperation; (ii) trade cooperation and (iii) political dialogue. The Agreement provides a timetable for a radical reform of trade relations between the EU and the ACP States, marking a departure from the old non-reciprocal trade preferences that had existed in the past. A series of deadlines for the progressive abolition of trade barriers and the introduction of WTO compatible free trade were promulgated in Article 37 of the Agreement.

The EDF has been the main institutional focus for ACP-EU development financing. Total resources made available under the 10th EDF to cover the six year period 2008 – 2013 amount to €22.682 billion. During year's end 2011, the EU Commission proposed an amount of €32 billion for the 2014—2020 EDF-11 funding cycle, subject to further negotiation with EU Member States.

Friends and colleagues,

As we face 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 came into force in December 2009. The Treaty seeks a major overhaul of the European system and far-reaching restructuring of its key institutions. What has been rather troubling for the ACP is the fact that the Treaty makes no express reference to the long-standing partnership between the EU and the ACP. It is also unclear whether the EDF will come under the Commission budget and if the ACP countries can feel entitled to a predictable source of development assistance as has been the case hitherto. 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 considerable anxiety among ACP members.

Yours Excellencies,

It is evident that the ACP will continue to need Europe as a predictable source of ODA to finance their development. Europe, on the other hand, will continue to be a key player in many of those countries not only in terms of development assistance but also in the area of humanitarian intervention and political dialogue. Europe has technology and skills, while the ACP has an abundance of natural-resource endowments. There is therefore a basis for interdependence and mutuality of interests. Unfortunately, a good number of the newer members of the EU, particularly the Eastern Europeans, may not appreciate this point. Unlike Britain and France, countries such as Poland and Hungary never had colonies in Africa or anywhere else. They would insist that they themselves were neo-colonies in the defunct Soviet orbit. Some of the newer members of the EU may also see themselves as being in competition with the ACP for EU financial resources. At a time of financial unprecedented fiscal crisis in the Euroland area, the dictates of parsimony may threaten to outweigh the sentiment of generosity.

We also believe that Europe will continually need the ACP to validate its evolving role as a global actor in international relations. As principal donor to the ACP, the EU has access to 79 member countries within its sphere of diplomatic and geopolitical influence. Cotonou provides a basis for the wielding of 'soft power' by Europe, a form of influence which Joseph Nye of Harvard has famously elaborated as the principal source of power in our twenty-first century. The ACP has sometimes wielded its numerical strength and moral authority in support of EU international agendas, as exemplified by its support for EU representation in the UN General Assembly.

The rise of the emerging economies and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -- the nations generally referred to as the BRICS -- offers a new window of opportunity. The ACP feel that they can leverage on their numeric strength and moral authority to promote their collective interests while building new alliances with the emerging economies of Asia and Latin America. A collective strategy to tap these opportunities has been part of the overall future orientation of the ACP.

Building upon the accumulated wisdom of decades of development cooperation, the Secretariat, within the framework of the 2011—2014 Strategic Plan, "*Renewal and Transformation*"; aims to reposition the organisation as a knowledge institution with increasing executive authority to mobilise resources and implement development projects. The key elements of the organisational repositioning are anchored on the following seven pillars: (i) developing a new Vision and Mission Statement; (ii) administrative restructuring and process reengineering to enhance impact and results; (iii) culture change and enhanced skills development and training; (iv) scaling up the role of Secretariat and its transformation into a knowledge institution and development agency; (v) enhancing the financial viability of the Secretariat; (vi) establishment of an ACP Investment Bank to foster trade and investments in our regional member countries; and (vii) exploring alternative alliances with the emerging economic powers.

The collective strength of the ACP derives from decades of inter-regional solidarity, international trade negotiations, development finance cooperation political dialogue and relations with other international organisations. Indeed, the call for solidarity, greater visibility, relations with other international groups, streamlining of the core business and empowering its institutions have been a constant theme in all of the Summits of Heads of State and Government since Georgetown 1975.

More than anyone, the leadership within the ACP are keenly aware of the new imperatives that globalisation imposes on national systems, in particular the pressures of market discipline and competition. They are also aware that the honeymoon of privileged access to EU markets is over, thanks to the emerging of the rules-based WTO international trading regime. They are also acutely aware of the new uncertainties deriving from the New Europe, with its changing institutional architecture and geopolitical priorities. They know that these imperatives impose the necessity for choice; a choice that will require diversifying their economic and political linkages and embracing South-South cooperation and the opportunities opened up by the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the sore points in ACP-EU relations is obviously the slow progress that has been made so far on the EPA negotiations. While the Caribbean region has already finalised its EPA, 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. Without saying it in so many words, it would appear that the Commission, with an inflexible posture, is predicating any continuing relations with the ACP on the finalisation of the EPA negotiations. It is also clear 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.

There is a feeling within the ACP that the inflexibility of the Commission poses a major stumbling block to progress in the EPA negotiations. They point to the American Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) and the progressive trade policies of the Chinese as being in sharp contrast to the inflexible approach by Brussels.

Equally crucial is the need to reform the workings of the principal institutions and to streamline many of our core functions. It seems evident that the ACP can be most effective when it sets out not to replicate what others are already doing but when it concentrates in those niche areas in which it enjoys a high comparative advantage. This would require focusing on our core competencies and repositioning the Secretariat as an intergovernmental organisation that does more than the role of mere convener of conferences and meetings.

Your Excellencies,

If the ACP-EU partnership did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it. A stepchild of history, it has evolved as a part of the moral economy of the New Europe, providing the EU an unrivalled influence to nearly a billion people and their governments. It is perhaps 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 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, the growing economies of the ACP constitute a potentially huge market and investment opportunity that could help restore the Old Continent to the path of long-term growth.

I am persuaded that Europe will not be Europe if it abandoned its moral obligations – those ideals that have been inherent in her civilisational role since the Enlightenment. At the same time, the ACP must take full responsibility for their own future, building on their own inner resources and collective strength; and leveraging on their moral capital as the largest coalition of the world's poor.

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