

SPEECH: Secretary General's address at the 9th Pacific ACP Leaders Meeting, 6 September 2011, Auckland, NZ

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Pacific ACP Leaders,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure for me to once again attend this meeting. I wish to express my profound gratitude for the opportunity to address you. I have taken it as a special task during my term of office to strengthen the link between the ACP and its respective regions and sub-regions, thus the reason for the ACP Group seeking observer status at the Forum.

Chairman

It's now 36 years since our founding fathers signed the Georgetown Agreement committing them to building an alliance founded on solidarity, interdependence and international dialogue.

Our enduring partnership with the European Union has served us well over the past 36 years. From Yaoundé through to the four successive Lome Conventions, the focus has been Trade and Development Finance.

The advent of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2000 was considered as ambitious and innovative and would enhance political dialogue and encourage development cooperation. It was seen as a unique model of North-South cooperation that should serve as a prototype for other similar relationships.

The Second revision of the Cotonou Agreement in 2010 emphasised enhanced cooperation on a broader global agenda that includes food security, conflict prevention, migration, regional integration and sustainable development.

Increasingly however, it appears that the never ending chain of global changes and internal dynamics within Europe have seriously tested the relevance of the partnership framework.

A key driver in this process has been the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, under which the EU has embarked on fundamental institutional transformation to strengthen its position as a global player.

- The enlargement of the EU has shifted the EU's strategic interests to its immediate neighbours in the East and the Mediterranean.
- The negotiations for economic partnership agreements with six separate ACP sub-regions have put increasing pressure on the cohesion of the ACP Group.
- New actors, such as the African Union, entered the scene at the beginning of the new millennium as privileged partners of the EU.
- There is also a growing trend towards regional differentiation, reflected in the formulation of specific EU support strategies for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific which has further undermined the unity of the ACP Group and intensified doubts on the relevance of the ACP-EU framework

The ACP seemed to have growing difficulties to project itself as a Group. This is even further compounded by the increasingly divergent economic and political interests among ACP countries, which was not the case at the start of ACP-EU relations in 1975.

Further complicating these internal dynamics is the rising into prominence on the world economic scene, of the emerging economies coupled with shifting wealth which has opened up new avenues of cooperation for developing countries.

As distinguished leaders are aware, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement will come to conclusion in 2020. Europe is anxious to diversify its global linkages with its neighborhoods in North Africa and Eastern Europe and with the emerging economies of Asia and Latin America. The time is now **then** to reflect on the future perspective of the ACP Group.

For the ACP Group to remain relevant it is incumbent on us to clearly define ACP's core principles and added value and to find a *raison de etre*, for the continued existence of the Group beyond 2020 in partnership with Europe and other Partners to realize the Goals of the Georgetown agreement.

We are therefore, confronted with an urgent challenge to improve the delivery capacity and to invest in developing a stronger ACP profile based on added value and complementarity with other emerging initiatives. We must re-invigorate the Group to be able to withstand the global challenges of old and face new challenges such as climate change, energy crisis, food crisis etc.

While we appreciate the support we have continued to receive from our EU partners, it is evident that we must take our future into our own hands while embracing South-South cooperation and the opportunities opened up by the emerging economies if we are to win the fight against poverty and be integrated into global trade in a harmonious manner.

The urgency of the situation compelled the ACP Council to establish the Working Group on the Future Perspective in November last year.

The Working Group has met regularly and issues which have been at the forefront of the reflection, includes but not limited to opening up of the partnership to other developing countries to form a wider global alliance. Triangular cooperation is also an option. But very clearly the status quo is definitely not an option. I wish to invite Pacific ACP Leaders to actively engage and contribute to the process of reflection on the future of the ACP Group. In 2012 the Republic of Vanuatu will host the ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Council; I believe it will be a timely and opportune moment for the Pacific to contribute to this discussion and reflection.

We must take the lead in the process and decide on our own future proactively, rather than to be caught by surprise in the eve of the expiry of Cotonou in 2020.

Chairman

The Negotiation on the Economic Partnership Agreement has stalled, and countries and regions have expressed concern at the lack of progress and we understand the challenges the ACP Regions are enduring in this process.

The ACP Secretariat is exploring feasible alternatives to EPA. In October the Heads of regional organizations will be invited to Brussels to consider and reflect on these options at the same time look into the magnitude of resources that may be required to implement full EPAs in the event that EPAs will be concluded within the period of the next financial framework and before the end of Cotonou.

The ACP Secretariat will also organize an ACP Trade Ministers meeting in Brussels just before the WTO Ministerial in Geneva to coordinate and formulate an ACP Position.

While we hope to continue to count on Europe's generosity, we must take full responsibility for our own development. We must not only increase our capacity for effective governance, we have to take bold steps to effect far-reaching institutional reforms that promote accelerated growth within a framework of inclusive and sustainable development.

In conclusion chair, I wish to recall the ultimate objective of our partnership that our founding fathers set in Georgetown, to generate wealth and opportunities that would allow our populations to escape from the shackles of absolute poverty, ensure harmonious integration into global trade, while establishing economic and political institutions that secure the common peace, security, good governance and enhance human development and environmental protection for present and future generations.

Chairman, I thank you for your indulgence and the opportunity to address you.

Dr Mohammed Ibn Chambas
Secretary General
African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States

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