

SPEECH: WELCOME STATEMENT BY H.E. Dr. MOHAMED IBN CHAMBAS Secretary-General of the ACP Group at the 93rd Session of the Council of Ministers ACP House, Brussels, Belgium

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(27 May 2011) The President of Council, Honourable Ministers, Yours Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, It is my singular honour and privilege to welcome you all to ACP House and to our 93rd Ministerial Council meeting. I want to thank all of you for sparing the time from your onerous duties and busy schedules to be here with us today. We meet at a time of enormous challenges as well as opportunities. A few of our countries are making good progress in social and economic development, in spite of a rather difficult international environment. Some of our nations are also making successful, even if difficult, democratic transitions. I refer to the recent case of Côte d'Ivoire, where it took the resolute efforts of the international community to ensure that sanity prevails. The capital lesson of recent events in that long-suffering country teach us that no one should take it upon himself or herself to cling to power interminably. We all have a duty to respect the verdict of popular elections, however they turn out. As we speak, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Uganda are in the process of putting in place new administrations following successful elections. Those elections were not without their own difficulties. We note, with regret, that in both countries there were some incidences of violence. In spite of these challenges, we can boldly say that democracy is slowly but surely taking root in the fertile soils not only of Africa, but also of the Caribbean and the islands of the Pacific. Honourable Ministers, We cannot ignore the recent upheavals in the Maghrib and the Middle East; upheavals that have overturned old regimes and continue to send tremors throughout the developing world. These popular uprisings – most of them led by unarmed young people – underline once again the fact that freedom is the birthright of all people. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us as leaders to give our young people hope and to widen the democratic space while expanding the possibility frontiers of welfare and economic prosperity for all our citizens. Honourable Ministers, I need not remind us that we have a busy schedule in the next couple of days. A number of critical issues will have to be addressed. With the exception of the Caribbean, the negotiations over the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Europe have sadly not made the kind of progress we would all love to see. Linked to this is the failure to resuscitate the Doha Round. To all intents and purposes, the international trading regime is not evolving in such a manner as would take on board the development needs of the poorest countries. Where there is a will, the popular saying goes, there is always a way. And because diplomacy is the art of the possible, we must engage with our European impasse in finding a way out of the current impasse. At the core of our deliberations has to be the pernicious nature of poverty and its impact on human livelihoods and development prospects. The continuing fallouts from global recession are taking a heavy toll on the livelihoods of millions of poor people in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Rising fuel and food prices pose a major challenge to some of our member countries. In addition to the abiding challenge of climate change, land-grabbing for biofuels cultivation is threatening to undermine food security and the livelihoods of millions of people. We must therefore commit to bolder action, especially in light of the recently concluded Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries and the upcoming High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness scheduled to be held later in the year in Busan, South Korea. In our dialogue with our European colleagues, we have to put forward bold proposals for reinvigorating our partnership while exploring new frameworks for a future ACP-EU multinational financial agreement post-10th EDF. You would recall that our ACP countries signed the revised Cotonou Agreement without any clear indication of its financial elements. Under the Lomé Conventions, we were always availed some idea of the magnitude of the financial envelope to be provided under the Financial Protocol. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Prudence requires that we infuse our rational expectations with a large dose of realism. The New Europe, with its expanded 27 member countries, is fundamentally a different animal from what we have always known. The new Lisbon Treaty and the ensuing European External Action Service (EEAS) do not accord the ACP the privileged status that we have always assumed almost as a matter of right. 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. A new generation of Europeans views the ACP-EU as being little more than part of a shameful colonial past. As you all know, the Cotonou Agreement ends in 2020. I believe we have little choice but to place our minds in the frame of thinking the unthinkable. It was in view of this that late last year we constituted a Working Group on the Future of the ACP Group under the Chairmanship of the Distinguished Ambassador of Mauritius, H. E. Mr. Sutiawan GUNESSEE. While we face a transformed geopolitical environment, we are also encouraged by the new opportunities for partnerships with the emerging economies of China, Brazil and India. For better or worse, Europe will always be a part of our international development landscape. Europe will not be Europe if it abandons its global responsibility – if it retreats from those ancient ideals of ethics and universalism that has been part of heritage since the Enlightenment. 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, sustainable development. Ladies and Gentlemen, In our world of complex interdependence, Europe's long-term prosperity increasingly depends on those of us who have the natural resources and the vigorous populations and markets so vital to sustaining the living stands of the most advanced industrial democracies. But it is equally true that we will continue to need Europe's technology and its skills

and capital for the foreseeable future. In concluding these remarks, may I remind us once again that the ultimate objective of our joint efforts is to lift the ACP countries from global marginality and to generate wealth and opportunities that allow our impoverished populations escape from the shackles of absolute poverty, while establishing economic and political institutions that secure the common peace and enhance human development and environmental protection for present and future generations. Honourable Ministers, Finally, let me introduce to you our distinguished guest, in the person of Dr. Kanayo F. NWANZE, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). A Nigerian national, Dr. NWANZE served as IFAD's Vice-President for two years before his election as President in April 2009. Prior to that, he served with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in Africa and Asia. He was also for a decade as Director-General of the Africa Rice Centre. Among his achievements, he spearheaded the development of the New Rice for Africa (NERICA), a high-yield, drought- and pest-resistant rice variety developed specifically for the African landscape. This is a no mean achievement, considering how much our people consume rice and how much foreign earnings are expended on rice importation. Dr. NWANZE also transformed the Rice Research Centre from a small West African outpost hidden in the remote backwoods of Bouaké in northern Côte d'Ivoire into what it is today – an international centre of excellence for scientific research and innovation. Under his leadership, IFAD is making new strides in promoting global food security and mainstreaming rural-agrarian strategies in the international development agenda. Kanayo NWANZE earned a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Science from Nigeria's premier University of Ibadan in 1971. He did graduate studies in the United States of America, culminating in a Doctorate in Agricultural Entomology from Kansas State University in 1975. He has an impressive list of scientific publications to his name and is a fellow of some of the most prestigious professional associations in his field, in addition to sitting on the boards of several international institutions. During 2010, he was Chair of the Council of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda on Food Security. He has received several national and international honours, including Commander of the National Order of Merit of Côte d'Ivoire and Officer of the National Order of Benin. It is an honour to present to you this African patriot, this high achieving scion of the ACP family of nations, this scientist of world repute and champion of international development. I thank you for your kind attention and I wish you very fruitful deliberations.

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