

Statement by the ACP Secretary General Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas

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On the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the 7th Summit for ACP Heads of State and Government, Malabo - Equatorial Guinea, 13 December 2012

Your Excellency, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea,

Your Excellency, John Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, and Outgoing Chair of ACP Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,

Honorable Ministers,

EU Commissioner Andris Piebalgs,

Your Excellencies, Heads and Representatives of International and Regional and Sub Regional Organisations,

Excellencies Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

On my own behalf and behalf of the ACP Secretariat, I wish to join His Excellency, John Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, and Outgoing Chair of ACP Heads of State and Government to welcome you all to the warm and pleasant shores of Malabo. For centuries, this island stood at the confluence of the infamous Atlantic trade in human souls that traversed the wide expanse of the Gulf of Guinea. Millions were taken against their will and carted off to North America, the Caribbean and the islands of the seas.

Millions of the sick and dying were thrown over board, into the depths of the perilous seas. It was by far the greatest holocaust ever recorded on the bleak pages of human infamy.

Your Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, ever since the idea of holding this Summit in Equatorial Guinea was broached with you, you accepted it whole heartedly, and assured us that you, your government and people would warmly welcome us to your beautiful country and put everything at our disposal to ensure a successful meeting. Indeed, you have exceeded all our expectations. We are grateful to you for the wonderful hospitality extended to each delegation and the first rate facilities of Sipopo placed at our disposal to ensure what will certainly be a historic Summit.

To His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, may I extend to you, Sir, our felicitations on your election as President of the Republic of Ghana in what have been characterised by all the observers, local and international, as credible and transparent Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Ghana, once again has established its democratic credentials. The process of democratic consolidation in Ghana is clearly on course and it is with this in mind, that I wish to appeal to our compatriots of the National Patriotic Party the (NPP) and, in particular, its Presidential candidate, my brother and friend, Nana Akufo Addo to put the supreme interest of Ghana above any and all considerations in determining the path to chart in the post-election period.

May I also express our profound appreciation to the Government of Ghana for hosting the last Summit of the ACP and providing leadership to the organisation over the last four years.

Your Excellencies,

I have always said that if the ACP did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it. The peoples of Africa, the Caribbean

and the Pacific are linked together not only by the ties of blood; we have a shared historical experience and belong together by virtue of a common destiny.

It has been a long and eventful journey since the Georgetown Agreement of 1975, and indeed, our last Summit in Accra. We have weathered many a storm. Some have questioned our relevance and continuing role in the changed world of our post-Cold War twenty-first century.

Your Excellencies,

I am persuaded that there will always be a place for solidarity amongst the nations -- for the pursuit of international justice -- for fraternity and cooperation. While some are talking about *'the clash of civilisations'*, we at the ACP stand for the *'dialogue of civilisations'*, without which the very future of humanity stands in mortal peril.

And because this is so, there will always be a place for an organisation such as the ACP as the largest coalition of developing nations.

Your Excellencies,

We meet at a time of challenges as well as opportunities. The global financial crisis which broke out in Wall Street in the autumn of 2008 has shaken the very foundations of the Bretton Woods international economic order as we have known it since 1945. For many of our countries, this has meant falling revenues from international trade as well as dwindling remittances from Diaspora communities.

There are also pressures on capital flows from foreign direct investment, tourism and official development assistance. We face a world of increasing vulnerability not only from the pressures of competition but also from the ravages of Climate Change.

But there are also opportunities. The ACP constitutes the largest trans-hemispheric grouping in the world, with its rainbow diversity of colours, races and nations. We are young nations, with dynamic and vigorous populace. We have a rich reservoir of natural resources. Our cultures constitute part of the heritage of humanity. We are the voice of the voiceless – the guardians of a world governed by law and morality and not by might.

We are also among the most rapidly growing regions of the world. Several of our countries have recorded growth rates in excess of 10 percent. The remarkable transformation of our host country Equatorial Guinea is a case in point. Within a decade, the country has made giant leaps in economic development, including infrastructures and human capital -- education, training and health services.

Today, Equatorial Guinea enjoys a per capita income of US\$17,000, by far the highest on the continent. It is obvious that these feats could not have been achieved without the vision and purposefulness of the national leadership. It is this same vision that will ensure that the fruits of growth are equitably shared on the basis of inclusive and sustainable human development, and with the view of building a free, democratic and prosperous society.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Seventh Summit is anchored on the theme of challenges and opportunities facing the ACP in the future. The choices we have to make centre on certain critical imperatives. Among these is the need to reposition our organisation to be an effective player on the international arena. There is also the challenge of reforming the Secretariat and our principal Organs, including the way we do business.

For several decades, the ACP has been defined principally by our relationship with Europe. You will agree with me that the world has changed. We too have changed, and so has Europe, with its enlarged membership and new institutional architecture and changing geopolitical priorities.

One of the contentious issues in our relations with our EU partners in recent times is the EPA negotiations. Even for the Caribbean region that has already reached an agreement, issues still remain regarding implementation. As you know, the Commission had imposed a deadline of January 2014 for the finalisation of those negotiations and sought to penalise those that, for one reason or the other, are unable to reach an agreement within that arbitrary deadline.

It was particularly reassuring that the European Parliament took a more prudent approach by extending the deadline to January 2016. It is our ardent hope that both the EU Council and the Commission will be persuaded to change their hard line position. We believe that the best agreement we can reach with Europe is one that is based on a spirit of mutual understanding and trust, devoid of any form of coercion.

The political will and flexibility required to conclude the long drawn out EPA negotiations must now be demonstrated concretely by both sides. The outstanding issues need to be resolved to allow for the conclusion of comprehensive EPAs that are development friendly, deepen regional integration and do not leave any ACP country worse off.

Another contentious issue relates to the question of *differentiation*. The new EU development policy, *Agenda for Change*, contains many aspects which are innovative and welcomed by us, particularly its focus on energy, agriculture and food security, climate change and sustainable development initiatives and infrastructure development. Its insistence on impact and a results-based development approach are also laudable. But it also aims to concentrate resources on countries falling within the Least Developed category; it would seem, at the expense of the more affluent middle-income nations. While we agree that more has to go to the poorest of the poor, we do not think it is fair to punish countries that have become more prosperous through responsible public management and diligent application.

It is a truism that many of our countries remain highly vulnerable not only on account of Climate Change but also on account of their marginality in international economic relations. We will continue to dialogue with our European partners on the necessity of balancing the needs of the poorest of the poor against the continuing vulnerability of the relatively more affluent among us.

Your Excellencies,

During 2013, preparations will begin in earnest on the financial programming for EDF-11. The Commission has announced a ball park figure of €32 billion for the period 2014—2020, as contrasted with the €22 billion which covers the years 2007—2013. This would be subject to further negotiations with member states and the EU Parliament. We will be dialoguing with our EU partners not only on the performance of EDF-10 but also on the quantum and quality of development assistance.

We acknowledge that Europe remains by far the largest donor to the ACP countries. The bulk of EU aid comes in the form of grants. Europe has been particularly strong in the areas of public sector management, budget support and capacity building.

But we also acknowledge that the emerging economic powers of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – the BRICS – offer a new window of opportunity. They bring a different attitude and mindset. Instead of seeing our nations as problems to be solved, they see the ACP as an opportunity to be explored for mutual benefits.

We believe that Europe and the ACP will continue to be the model for North-South cooperation in the coming decades. But we need to change the way we do business. Old attitudes will have to be changed.

The lessons of world development make it clear that development assistance works best when it is anchored on national priorities and the specificities of national conditions. Our nations have ambitious undertakings in the areas of regional projects, infrastructure development, energy, Climate Change and sustainable development. We also believe that more attention needs to be given to private sector development as the primary motor and engine of long-term development.

As we look towards EDF-11, we are concerned not only about the volume of aid but also its quality and relevance to our development aspirations. While we acknowledge that Europe currently faces unprecedented fiscal challenges, we hope that they will not relent on their prior commitments to supporting our efforts towards meeting the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals.

We are also concerned by the fact that the two revisions of the Cotonou Agreement in 2005 and 2010 have been devoid of any financial protocols – a situation that we consider to be anomalous.

It is our conviction that how Europe treats the ACP in the coming years will not only define its moral stature on the world stage; it will determine its place as a voice of Enlightenment and Reason in our emerging twenty-first century international order.

Your Excellencies,

In a world of increasing uncertainty, we must be prepared to think outside the box – to come up with bold and courageous alternatives to ensure that the ACP not only survives but flourishes in the years ahead.

Particular attention needs to be given to how the Secretariat budget is financed so that it can more effectively serve the needs of our nearly one billion people. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to appeal that we please expedite action in paying our statutory contributions as at when due. As at the 1st of December, the Secretariat had only received 59 percent of contributions due from member states.

The recent report of the UNDP financed technical study on the ACP stressed, among other things, the need for our organisation to strive to attain financial independence from the European Development Fund that is used to run the Secretariat. In furtherance of that aim we are launching a process that will enable us achieve the Four Pillar Assessment requirement to qualify for the status of a full international development organisation that is able to mobilise financial resources in its own right.

I am also constrained to report that the current headquarters building in Brussels, which is more than thirty years old, no longer fits our needs, for all practical purposes. We shall therefore actively pursue the decision of the ACP Authorities to work closely with the EU Commission for relocation to another building.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to also touch on the issue of the ratification of the Revised Cotonou Agreement. As at 6th December, 43 out of 79 countries have ratified. On the European side, 13 out of 27 have ratified.

As these figures indicate, both the European Union and the ACP have not attained the requisite two-thirds of ratifications for the Agreement to enter into force. It is again my duty to appeal to Member States to do the necessary to complete the ratification process as soon as possible.

Your Excellencies,

The Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives is considering several bold and innovative ideas: reform of the Secretariat and the Principal Organs, the vision, mission and efficacy of our institutions, design of an ACP Flag, composition of an Anthem and Revision of our Headquarters Agreement with the Kingdom of Belgium.

We are also considering the feasibility study on a proposed ACP Free Trade area. A Concept Note has also been prepared on an ACP Bank for International Trade and Investment (BITI). The EU Commission has funded a technical market study which has already produced an interim report. A final report is due during the first quarter of 2013.

Additionally, I have taken the initiative to establish an ACP Eminent Persons Group (EPG) which will work during 2013—14 to come up with new ideas and concepts to further strengthen our organisation and to provide guidance for the future.

Your Excellencies,

In concluding these remarks, let me underline one simple fact: All is possible if we put our hearts and minds into dreaming big dreams and envisioning great visions.

The African-American civil rights leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr once said that if a person does not stand for something, he/she will fall for anything. We have to be clear as to what we stand for and the vision we have for our 80 nations. We stand for certain immanent, universal values of civilisation: solidarity, internationalism, good governance, the rule of law, non-discrimination, respect for international law, belief in the sovereign equality of all nations large and small, commitment to international cooperation and conviction that poverty is a curse which must be eviscerated from the lives of our people.

In the words of a medieval sage, "If not us, who? And if not now, when?"

Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you very fruitful deliberations.

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