

Statement of H.E President John Dramani Mahama

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

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

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Secretary General of the ACP

Heads and Representatives of Regional and International Organisations

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honoured to address the Seventh Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government, taking place on the warm and pleasant shores of Malabo.

Permit me therefore, on behalf of the ACP group and in my own name, to thank the Government and brotherly people of Equatorial Guinea for the warm hospitality accorded us and for the excellent facilities placed at our disposal, since arrival in this beautiful city. I am indeed, convinced that with these efficient organisational dispositions and the warm conducive hospitality, we can confidently anticipate very useful outcome of this Summit to enable us to maximise our individual as well as collective potential and resources to achieve a more meaningful and mutually beneficial partnership among us all.

Your Excellencies

You will recall that in 2008, Ghana hosted the Sixth Summit of this august body in Accra, by virtue of which we assumed the Presidency of the ACP Summit. After an enlightening and exciting tenure, Ghana is happy to confidently pass on the mantle of leadership to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, our current host.

My Brother President Nguema,

Your commitment to host this Summit under the current global financial and economic challenges is a manifestation of your dedication to the cause of promoting sustainable economic, social and political developments within the ACP Group. Thanks to your visionary leadership, Malabo has become a centre of international diplomacy and a fine destination for summits, conferences and international cultural and sporting events.

I wish to also acknowledge, with gratitude, the assistance and cooperation of the Secretary General of the ACP, Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas and his staff, during Ghana's tenure of office as President of the ACP Summit. Dr Chambas, your leadership and commitment have made the ACP a more credible intergovernmental body.

We are also grateful to the European Union and its institutions for sustaining our development partnership even at a time of unprecedented financial crisis, which has negatively affected a number of European countries including Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Spain. We believe that a strong and prosperous Europe is in our long-term collective interest. We, therefore, hope that the leaders of the European Union will evolve bold and prudent solutions to deal with the current crisis. We are also hopeful that, inspired by the current period of austerity, characterised by budgetary cuts, the EU will sustain its development cooperation efforts with the ACP.

Your Excellencies,

Since our last Summit in Accra, a number of our Heads of States and Government have left us. I can mention Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, President John Atta Mills of Ghana, President Bingu Wa Mutharika of Malawi, Prime Minister of Barbados David Thompson, President Umar Musa Yar'adua of Nigeria, President Levi Mwanawasa of Zambia and King George Tupou V of Tonga.

May I kindly ask you all to join me in observing a moment of silence in their memory and of others I might not have recalled.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our two-day Summit aptly centred on the theme, "The future of the ACP Group in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities," presents us with a unique opportunity to reassess the values and core objectives of the organisation. As we deliberate on this very important theme, I deem it appropriate that we remind ourselves of the outcomes of the 2008 Accra Summit and the progress made thus far, in implementing the key elements of the Accra Declaration.

You will recall that the Accra Declaration, while reaffirming the broad objectives of the ACP, focused particularly on promoting human security and sustainable human development. It underscored the fact that development could only be attained within a peaceful atmosphere, through peaceful dialogue, ensuring human rights and embracing the ethos of democracy, as a means of preventing and resolving conflicts.

More than before, it is now clear that commitment to a future of enduring peace and prosperity hinges on the establishment of strong institutions which guarantee the rule of law, protect civil liberties and ensure the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections.

Your Excellencies,

In a rapidly changing world with increasing complexities, the attainment of tasks ahead of us will not, by any means, be an easy process. The impact of natural disasters arising from climate change, armed conflict and soaring food and oil prices continue to exert a heavy toll on the livelihoods and collective welfare of millions of our peoples. The recent upheavals which we have come to know as the "Arab Spring" illustrate the link between youth unemployment, growing inequalities and dwindling life-expectancy on one hand, and conflicts on the other. Failure to resolve political disputes also contributes to building new tensions which provide fuel for old conflicts.

The conditions of fragile statehood in some of our countries are often exploited by unprincipled adventures for criminal activities such as piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking and gross human rights violations. These, in turn, provide fuel for further conflict which easily spills over into neighbouring countries. The current crisis in northern Mali is a case in point. It is, therefore, imperative that we find a just and lasting solution to the current impasse so that Mali can be restored to the path of normalcy.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am optimistic about the future of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific as more countries strive on the promising path of democracy. Ghana has just emerged from a keenly contested general election which has further strengthened our democracy. As we draw lessons from such events, it is our hope that the bright sides of our experience will inspire many ACP States.

Excellencies,

It is gratifying to note that several ACP countries are experiencing unprecedented growth rates which are well above the global average, thanks to the boom in global commodity markets and the business opportunities opened by the emerging economic powers of China, India and Brazil.

Nevertheless, we are not oblivious to the incessant challenges in our quest to attain our development goals. Although a good number of our countries have made significant progress in poverty alleviation, several will unfortunately, not attain their targets for the Millennium Development Goals.

The global financial crisis has no doubt, led to a strain on the already fragile economies of many ACP states and also put additional pressure on aid budgets in donor countries, notably, the EU's overall financial inflows to our countries and minimised donor commitments for social protection. The consequent rising poverty levels are, admittedly, gravely undermining progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

We therefore, urge our development partners to continue to live up to their declared commitments. We also acknowledge our collective responsibility to double our efforts in our pursuit of economic reforms which will lead to the acceleration of growth to enhance the welfare of all our peoples. It is therefore fervently hoped that this Summit will have the benefit of our collective wisdom and insight in mapping our more innovative strategies to proffer solutions to some of our critical development challenges.

Without prejudice to the WTO trading regime and any existing international trading agreements, I believe the time has come for us to boldly take our future into our own hands. Leveraging on our collective solidarity, we must pursue new approaches that deepen intra-ACP trade, while accelerating regional integration schemes that boost trade and investment.

Your Excellencies,

One of the thorny issues surrounding our cooperation our EU friends is obviously the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations. After a long and difficult decade of negotiations, we are still a long way from reaching an agreement. Even the Caribbean region that has successfully reached a deal with the EU, is still struggling with how to do about implementing its own EPA.

We believe that deadlines set for the EPAs are unfortunate since they will adversely impact the economies and trade systems of our nations. We also believe that the insistence on outright liberalisation and discontinuation of customs revenue collection required by the EPAs, undermine a major source of revenue which is so critical to the development of many of our countries. We are further concerned about the fact that EPAs in their present form, appear to undermine rather than promote regional economic integration.

Europe and the ACP are bound together by ties of history, culture and geopolitics and our trade and economic linkages will remain interlocked for the foreseeable future. Sooner or later, we will have to each a trade agreement with Europe. This agreement should be reached in harmony, in fairness, in the spirit of mutual agreement and partnership.

Your Excellencies,

As we contemplate the future of the ACP, permit me to draw your attention to the following critical challenges which we need to address:

1. Consideration of an ACP institutional mechanism to address emerging and contemporary developments such as terrorism, environment and energy, among others;
2. Change in the configuration of the European Union with the coming into effect of the Lisbon Treaty and the European External Action Service;
3. Emergence of regional organisations in the three ACP regions and their relationship with the EU;
4. Opportunities opened up by the emerging economic powers (BRICS);
5. Potentials of South-South and Triangular Cooperation; and
6. Creation of an ACP-wide Free Trade Area (FTA).

Your Excellencies,

We are living in critical times and undoubtedly with difficult times ahead. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that the current institutional architecture of the European Union does not accord a privileged status to the ACP Group. Furthermore, the current global financial crisis continues to test the commitment of donor countries to their aid commitments.

We therefore have to put in place those economic and political fundamentals which would transform our economies and ensure development, in order to renew hope for the people of ACP Group of States. We need to train our people in the relevant technology and harness their knowledge to overcome our over-reliance on agriculture and raw materials for our economic sustenance through our own South-South Cooperation. These must be complemented by sound macroeconomic policies within an environment which guarantees the rule of law, respect for human rights and good governance for our people.

Critical to our survival in the coming years is the imperative of re-examining the ACP Group and honestly identifying the inherent weakness in our operations. We must re-strategise with boldness and vision, if we are to overcome the current challenges and make the ACP more relevant and effective as a vehicle for achieving solidarity and eradicating poverty.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have faith that we can overcome these challenges, if we bring our collective wisdom and solidarity to bear on them.

Colleague Heads of State and Government,

You may be aware that the process for the selection of the next Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) opened on December 1, 2012. A unique opportunity is presented to us ACP countries to have one of our nationals occupy this important and strategic position as far as trade is concerned.

In this regard, Ghana has presented, with the full support of the African Union, the candidature of the Hon. Alan Kyerematen. The Hon. Kyerematen is a former Minister of Trade of Ghana with proven competence in trade issues and extensive diplomatic and negotiation skills. I hope this Summit will demonstrate ACT solidarity by throwing its support and significant weight behind this sole African candidate for the Director General of the WTO position.

Your Excellencies,

As I hand over the Presidency of this Summit to President Nguema Mbasogo, I do so with a firm conviction that this Summit, under his inspiring leadership, will be crowned with success. While wishing you a successful tenure, I am optimistic that the

Seventh ACP Summit will yield positive outcomes, which will guide the ACP Group into a bright future.

Thank you and may God bless you all.

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