

Statement by the President of the 105th session of the ACP Council of Ministers, H.E. Dr. Abraham Tekeste, Minister of Finance and Economic Cooperation of Ethiopia, 3 May 2017, Brussels

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Your Excellency the President of the UN General Assembly, Ambassador Peter THOMSON

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellency, Secretary-General GOMES,

Excellencies, Ambassadors

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you warm greetings from His Excellency President TESHOME, His Excellency Prime Minister DESALEGN, and the Government and People of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Land of Origins. It is a great honour for me to be presiding over the affairs of our 105th Council Session.

The timing of our 105th Council Session is of great significance for a number of reasons, some of which I wish to elaborate on.

I. Following the decisions taken by our Heads of State and Government at their Seventh and Eighth Summits in 2012 and 2016 respectively, we have received clear marching orders to undertake the reforms needed to transform the ACP Group into an effective global player, fit for the twenty-first century, and responsive to the emerging priorities of our Member States. We must therefore do more to advance and strengthen intra-ACP cooperation especially through South-South Cooperation, ensure a more balanced partnership with Europe based on shared values and mutual respect, while at the same time taking steps to diversify our partnerships and strengthen the self-financing capacity of the Group, through introducing innovative financing mechanisms. At this point, I would like to underscore the need for establishing and strengthening ACP institutions, so that our group will get solid and sustainable financing sources. These institutions will also enhance the comparative advantage of the ACP group over other organizations and thereby contribute towards strengthening the bondage of our group.

II. Our Council Session last November mandated the Committee of Ambassadors to accelerate preparations for negotiations on a post-2020 Agreement with our principal interlocutor, the European Union, in line with Article 95 of our Cotonou Partnership Agreement. As you are aware, several factors are likely to impact on the outcome of these negotiations. These include a more inward looking and protectionist governments, changes in the membership and priorities of both Europe and the ACP Group since the negotiations for the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, the recent triggering of Article 50 of the EU Lisbon Treaty, signaling the start of formal negotiations for the United Kingdom to exit the EU (Brexit), and the strengthening of regional economic communities and regional integration organizations, including the African Union, thereby underscoring the need for the ACP Group to demonstrate its comparative advantage. In fact, we have to be ready to fundamentally reform our cooperation with the EU after 2020 aiming at deepening our relationship in various/differentiated fronts rather than sticking to the traditional cooperation areas.

III. Beyond the ACP and Europe, the inward looking and protectionist tendencies in the United States of America that create uncertainty, and their impact on development cooperation programs, is likely to affect global financing and result in greater competition among international organisations as alternative delivery mechanisms for development programs and projects. Nonetheless, Agenda 2030, AAAA, the Paris agreement on Climate change (Cop 21) and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an excellent opportunity for the ACP Group to carve out a niche for itself in the packaging and delivery of development programs at the global level.

In this connection, the ACP Group must take full advantage of the upcoming UN Ocean Conference on SDG 14, to champion the interests of our Member States, and to support a valuable Member State of the ACP Group – Fiji – which is undertaking tireless efforts at the global level to put the interests of SIDS and other developing countries at centre stage. The Ocean Conference also offers our Group a valuable opportunity to enhance the visibility of ACP.

Honourable Ministers

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Within the ACP Group itself, Member States continue to face the ever-present challenges to our development aspirations, including limited structural transformation of our economies, and lack of adequate job creation for our youth, climate change related problems such as the recent droughts in Eastern and Southern Africa, and the cyclones in Haiti and Madagascar. The scourge of terrorism continues to rear its ugly head in ACP countries, resulting in deaths and displacements of the local population. Although the migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean tend to capture the news headlines – and for good reason – the greater burden being experienced in ACP countries continues with little notice. My country for instance, along with neighboring Kenya, host millions of refugees from neighboring countries, while Uganda hosts almost a million from its neighbors.

And then there is the phenomenon of internally displaced persons, millions of whom can be found in Nigeria and in Sudan, for example. In fact, a recent study by ECOWAS found that seventy percent of migration in West Africa is internal, while only fifteen percent go to Europe. We must therefore take steps to address migration from the perspective of the source countries, our Member States, with the root causes at its core, as well as harness the full benefits accruing from the Diaspora – remittances, investments, skills and knowhow.

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I am certain that you have heard all this before. It is therefore high time that we turn the rhetoric to reality, so that the voice of the ACP Group can be heard not only in Brussels, but its actions seen and felt in far-flung provinces in all ACP Member States. The principle of unity and solidarity of the Group that is enshrined in our Georgetown Agreement must be translated into a manifestation of consistent political commitment, through high level attendances and active participation in statutory meetings of the Group, timely payments of our financial obligations, implementation of the decisions taken by our governing organs, and advocacy of ACP interests and positions in multilateral fora. Thus it is critical that we go beyond the pronouncements and deliver on our commitments. The underlying message must be clear – we must deliver more and better, because our citizens demand no less.

The long pronounced need for reform of the ACP institutions need not be delayed any further. That means a critical review of our systems and processes, institutions and working methods. The aim of such a review needs to be to strengthen systems/structures that are working reasonably and to change or reform systems/structures that need correction. Our decision making and implementation organs need to be more responsive in supporting the emerging priorities and emergency situations our Member States are increasingly having to deal with – the Zika and Ebola virus outbreaks, the issue of so called non-compliant tax jurisdictions, cyclones in Haiti and Madagascar, Article 12 and 96 Consultations in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, Brexit, etc.

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Many of the aforementioned challenges also present opportunities for the ACP Group to manifest its comparative advantages, accumulated through decades of experience in negotiating and implementing partnerships that cover multilateral trade, economic cooperation, and political dialogue. The current occupancy of the Presidency of the UN General Assembly by Fiji, and the current membership of Senegal and Ethiopia in the UN Security Council, serve to underscore the positive contributions by ACP countries at the global levels.

In concluding my statement, please allow me to thank the Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, my own compatriot, His Excellency Ambassador Teshome Toga CHANAKA, as well as the Committee of Ambassadors as a whole, for all the hard work undertaken to implement the Decisions we took during our previous Sessions. Our appreciation also extends to the staff members of the Secretariat, led by Secretary General Gomes, who continue to provide the requisite technical support to our Committee of Ambassadors.

Honorable Ministers,

Excellencies,

I thank you for your kind attention, and wish us all successful deliberations.

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