

Statement by the President of the ACP Council of Ministers Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana at the 20th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly on 4 December 2010 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

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- 1.Hon. Co-Presidents,
- 2.Members of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 3.Hon. Charles Michel, Belgian Minister for Development and President-in-Office of the EU Council,
- 4.Hon. Members of the JPA,
- 5.Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to the Government and People of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the warm hospitality they have extended to me since my arrival here. It is commendable, that for a country that has experienced so much in the not so distant past, they have so graciously offer to host this important Meeting.

Hon. Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for the opportunity to make an address to your distinguished Assembly as President-in-Office of the ACP Council of Ministers. I bring you greetings from the President of Guyana, H.E Bharrat Jagdeo, who sends his best wishes for the success of your meetings. As you know, Guyana, shares a very long association with the ACP Group of States and ACP-EU Partnership Agreement. You will recall that the Capital of Guyana, Georgetown, gave its name to the constitutive act of the ACP Group of States.

Co-Presidents, Members of the JPA

Allow me to state that the ACP Council of Ministers holds the role of this Assembly in very high regard. For this reason, I am very pleased that the recent revision of the Cotonou Agreement not only preserved, but strengthened the provisions relating to the JPA and ACP national parliaments. Having had the opportunity to observe you working over the last two days, I am confident that this Assembly will maintain the tradition of robust and frank debates on the critical issues affecting the development of our respective States.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the JPA is the mutual exchanges and solidarity it has been able to inculcate between the peoples of the ACP States and the European Union. This dialogue of ACP-EU representatives who together constitute one fifth's of the world population, and who are culturally, politically, and socially heterogeneous, remains the greatest example of North-South dialogue. Our countries might be at different stages of development but at the end of the day we all desire a better life for our peoples. This Assembly allows, both in the formal sessions and in the corridors, for you to discuss the issues at hand but also to understand the situations and points of view of each other better. We must not underestimate what personal friendships can achieve.

Co-Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen

Just over 3 weeks ago, I was privileged to preside over the 92nd Session of the ACP Council of Ministers. That meeting had been preceded by meetings of the ACP Ministers of Trade and the 9th ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Trade Committee (JMTC) which were held between 20 and 22 October 2010. As usual, our major concern was, among others, on the EPA negotiations.

I therefore want to share with you the perspectives of the ACP Council on the current status of EPA negotiations, which we consider to be the most comprehensive re-alignment of ACP-EU relations since the Lome Convention.

You will recall that the ACP entered into EPA negotiations under the premise that EPAs would be tools for development through trade. We never envisaged the latter as being an end in itself, and that is why we have been very concerned to see the trend that these negotiations have taken. We contend that the conclusion and smooth implementation of comprehensive and balanced Economic Partnership Agreements, that would help to speed up the sustainable development of the ACP States and the strengthening of regional integration, must remain a joint and shared aim of the ACP and the EU.

The demands of ACP States in this regard are very legitimate, as they are founded on the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement. However, as my predecessors in the ACP Council have stated in various fora, there is a big difference in policy pronouncements at EU level and actual practice at technical level during negotiations. For this reason, we feel that there is

need to issue new policy guidelines for the negotiations.

Co-Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ACP Group welcomed the willingness expressed by Mr. José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, during the EU-Africa Summit held in Lisbon in December 2007, to hold discussions at the highest level to propose guidelines for ACP and EU players involved in the EPA process. In response to this gesture from the European Commission, ACP Heads of State and Government at their 6th ACP Summit held in Accra, Ghana, in October 2008, called for ACP-EU political discussions at the highest level possible to unblock the technical impasse in the negotiations. Two years later, and even with the unwanted addition of a global financial and economic crises, I regret to say that we are yet to have such a dialogue.

Co-Presidents, Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen

ACP Ministers have always insisted that there will be costs associated with the implementation of EPAs. During the 9th JMTC meeting, ACP Ministers reminded their interlocutors, inter-alia, of the need for increased mobilization of resources with jointly agreed binding modalities, the joint definition of financing mechanisms and structures, scrutiny of the development matrix by both sides, and the inclusion of development criteria by which to assess the effective contribution of the EPAs to the development of the ACP States.

We maintain that while the provision of resources and support in the framework of Aid for Trade is highly appreciated, the EU cannot make reference to this in the context of the support requested for the EPAs because this is a general-scope mechanism.

The Council of Ministers urged the EU to maintain Regulation 1528, which essentially provides for, with the exception of arms, the preservation of trading benefits such as duty free access and no tariff rate quotas for all products to be maintained until the establishment of Economic Partnership Agreements. The withdrawal of Regulation 1528 would run counter to the primary aim of the EPAs, which is to provide stable and increased market access for ACP exports.

Indeed we believe that application of Regulation 1528 should be extended to non-LDC ACP States which are still in the negotiating process, to avoid weakening them and completely cancelling out the development efforts made so far. Furthermore, the ACP Group stresses the need to differentiate between Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Aid for Trade, which is that it should be predictable, additional, adequate, effective, and free from unwieldy conditionalities. It should be in form of grants in order to meet the needs of recipient countries, many of which have already streamlined trade in their national development strategies.

The European Commission's Aid for Trade monitoring report for 2009 states that EU Aid for trade commitments to the ACP have fallen from 50% to 36%. The ACP calls for additional Aid for Trade to be secured in order to fulfill development aspirations. We also contend that the EU should continue to make the monitoring and evaluation process of Aid for Trade more transparent and informative.

Co-Presidents, Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the last 5 years, there have been momentous global events that have shaken the foundation of orthodox economic thinking and practice of the previous 3 decades. The global food, financial and fuel crisis that the world has experienced, and for some countries continue to experience, have forced us to ask very pertinent questions about the nature of current development policy.

There are perhaps two fundamental lessons that have come out of these crises. The first one is that there is need for a restructuring of international governance for more inclusive, transparent and democratic management of global affairs. During the crises "restructuring of the financial institutions" was the mantra for all of us – developed and developing nations. However, it is with much disappointment that today those words seem to have been removed from the international lexicon.

The second lesson is that despite what we had been led to believe for many years, there is still a strong role for the state in directing the pace and nature of economic development and ensuring the efficient functioning of markets. Developing countries need targeted policies to meet the expectations, demands and needs of their growing populations in terms of food, health, education, and respect for human rights.

The world itself needs policies to address, for instance the impacts of climate change and future energy needs. These two phenomena threaten to undermine efforts to increase food production, and the need to satisfy the energy requirements of especially poorer households.

This is aside from the threat of increasing severity and frequency of cyclones, hurricanes and floods, with the attendant risk of human and animal displacements and outbreak of diseases. Climate change could also lead to the spread of communicable diseases such as malaria, cholera and tuberculosis, with attendant rise in health budgets, loss of productivity and associated economic and social crises.

But if developing countries are to build their economies on the basis of green growth and clean energy, or build resilience to the effects of climate change through appropriate mitigation and adaptation measures, they will need financial support from developed countries to do so. I am not speaking of charity here. In fact, the developed world has a moral responsibility to provide the finances. My own country has signed an Agreement with the Government of Norway in relation to the protection and sustainable utilisation of forests, While commendable we need to see this repeated several times over along with many other measures. We are therefore hopeful that the UNFCCC Meeting in Cancun will yield some positive results.

This optimism is tempered, however, since experience is a good teacher. In this regard, I want to point to the fact that while

there has been movement towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals, progress has been uneven across countries and it is widely acknowledged, as stated in the Resolution of the UN Summit on the MDGs that was held in New-York from 20 to 22 September 2010, that the pledged financial resources have not been forthcoming. How early the funding allocated for mitigation and adaptation measures will be disbursed remains anybody's guess.

Co-Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen

We therefore have a situation where we must act now – both with the MDG's and Climate Change.

I would like to use the example of food security, which is central to Millennium Development Goal number 1, to illustrate the kind of challenges that ACP countries face. The UN estimates that by 2030, the world will need 30% more fresh water, 50% more energy, and by 2050, a further 50% more food. The planet currently supports 6.5 billion people and that is expected to grow to about 9.2 billion by about 2050. Planning for the food security of the future will require more innovative thinking on the part of governments and the food industry alike.

To realize major success in ACP States, requires investment in infrastructure to get food from producers to markets; sustainable management of natural resources like water; development of the right skills; relevant technology to help to adapt the changing climate; and improvement in land rights and access to credit.

There is also a close association between rural poverty and hunger and about half the world's one billion people affected by extreme hunger are small land holders. These small farmers need access to education, knowledge, assets, credit, insurance, and markets, to help break the cycle of poverty and hunger which impacts rural communities worldwide.

Our Farmers must be free to farm and respond to the market and changing consumer demand, and be rewarded for delivering benefits the market alone cannot provide. They must be able to compete on a level playing field. This is why the ACP States have been critical of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which we think does little to improve the underlying competitiveness of the industry within and outside the EU, despite costing more than 40% of the EU budget. We shall be following closely the process of the next CAP reform in 2013. We feel that what is needed is a CAP framework in which a productive, competitive and sustainable agriculture sector can thrive. The message is that if ACP cotton, sugar, beef and poultry farmers can trade freely, the benefits would amount to direct cash transfers to poor farmers far more than ODA can ever hope to achieve.

Co-Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the ACP Group, we also will need to take our share of responsibility at national, as well as at international level, to address these development challenges. We recognise that there are number of policy areas in which we need to intervene at the local level. Through the ACP Secretariat and with the Support of the European Commission, we have initiated a number of projects in our Member states in critical areas aimed at sustainable development and poverty eradication.

As ACP States, we have to shoulder some responsibility for the unsatisfactory or poor economic performance in some of our countries. Some of this is due to the negative impact of political crisis and conflicts. The Central African Region suffered, and continues to feel the effects of such conflicts. Let me take this opportunity to place on record the ACP Group's appreciation of the efforts that Members States of the ACP Group in this region and beyond are taking to restore peace, security and constitutional order, which are the prerequisites of sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude, as I started, on a positive note. The ACP-EU Partnership has survived major global upheavals. Both ACP and EU sides have experienced growth in membership over a period of almost 40 years since the first Lome Convention. I think that it is time to take this relationship further in order to better articulate and advance the cause of poverty eradication and sustainable development globally. As parliamentarians, and in a body as diverse and committed as this one, your political support in achieving this objective is indispensable.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a successful conclusion to your Session.

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