

Statement by the Secretary General at the 19th COS-Cotton Meeting, 2 July 2014 - Brussels, Belgium

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Honourable Chairman,

Honourable Vice-Chairman, representing the European Union Member States,

Your Excellency, the Commissioner in charge of Agriculture, the Environment and Water Resources, ECOWAS,

Excellencies,

Representatives of the European Commission,

Representatives of International Organisations,

Distinguished participants, observers and guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ACP Secretariat is delighted to welcome you to this 19th Session of Cos-Coton which marks the 10th anniversary of the partnership between the European Union and Africa on cotton.

The present session of Cos-Coton is taking place in a particular context marked by the outcome of the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali, the signing of the 2014 US Farm Bill (with provisions for cotton) into law by President Obama and the operational implementation of the Support Programme for Consolidating the Framework of Action for the EU-Africa Partnership on Cotton.

Distinguished participants,

A brief historical overview shows us that in July 2004, while the cotton dossier was at an impasse at the WTO, our European Union partners, and African cotton-producing countries as a whole, guided by the well-known pragmatism of the agricultural world, agreed to formulate a partnership framework in order to find innovative solutions to the African cotton issue, a sector that is vital to the economy of many ACP countries.

This partnership, which has both a built-in "Trade" and a "Development" dimension, aims to establish equitable trade relations in the context of the WTO, through the Doha Development Agenda and to improve the competitiveness and added value of African cotton sectors by optimising the impact on the producer country's revenue.

Allow me to seize this opportunity, as we celebrate a decade of our special cooperation on cotton, to reiterate to the European Commission, the appreciation of the ACP Secretariat, as well as the producer countries for its constant support for the commodities sector in general and particularly that of cotton.

In fact, estimated at €400,000,000 (four hundred million) the European Union's support and that of its Member States for the African cotton sector represents almost 70% of the total assistance given to the cotton sector by the major donors from 2004 to 2014.

I am also very grateful to the International Organisations who have supported and implemented regional and continental strategies, in order to respond to the challenges facing the cotton sector and to find a solution to increasing poverty in rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years after the forum in Paris in July 2004, the cotton dossier, as addressed in the WTO, has still not found a satisfying solution, despite recognition of the relevance of the fight led by ACP cotton-producing countries.

Allow me to commend the progress made at the trade level at the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali in December. While I am satisfied that some of the C4's concerns were included in the Bali package, the efforts deployed to find a solution to the cotton problem, at the trade negotiations level of the Doha Round, have not yet met our expectations.

The issue of agricultural grants, notably on cotton, are therefore a major challenge to all the members of the multilateral trade system. The grants in favour of the cotton industry continue to have an impact on the trade in fibres. According to recent

statistics from the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), in 2013/2014, cotton industry grants, notably direct support to production, crop insurance subsidies and minimum support price mechanisms are estimated at \$6.5 million US.

Distinguished delegates,

You may remember that the Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in December 2005, set aside an ambitious, speedy and special treatment for the cotton dossier in order to bring a definitive end to the grants which have caused ACP cotton-producing countries to suffer.

It is only fitting that a session be dedicated to this issue during the 19th Session of Cos-Coton. The privileged witnesses to these negotiations, present here today, will further instruct us on the final developments on this matter, and above all, on the prospects for a definitive solution. We will have an opportunity to assess the decisions coming out of the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference on Bali and above all the consequences of the new 2014 US Farm Bill (with provisions for cotton).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The "**cotton** dossier" is not only a decisive test for the "development dimension" of the Doha Round of trade negotiations, but above all, it calls for us to envisage a new approach which takes the challenges of the new cotton sector into account.

Our conviction, which we reaffirm with force, is that the development of our economies is possible with cotton, once we are directed towards domestic processing to create added value.

In this regard, a more regional approach to the issues seems necessary. In this respect, I welcome the ECOWAS Commission's willingness to play a major role in supporting cotton policies in West Africa. The presence of the Commissioner for Agriculture is proof of this willingness.

Distinguished delegates,

Before I conclude my statement, I sincerely wish to encourage the brave stakeholders of this sector, who despite multiple difficulties and the steady decline in their buying power, continue to believe that there is a better future on the horizon for cotton. Cotton, the thread that binds time, men and civilisations together, must continue to play a role as a catalyst to combat poverty.

Thank you.

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