

Statement by the Secretary General at the 30th session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, 24 November, Paramaribo, Suriname

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H. E. Desiré Delano Bouterse, President of Suriname,

H. E. Donald Ramotar, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

Hon. Musikari Kombo, President of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly

Hon. Rabindre Parmessar, Master of Ceremonies

It is an honour and privilege for me to address your Assembly today. Allow me, on behalf of the Secretariat, and indeed on my own behalf, to thank the Government and people of Suriname for their excellent welcome to this beautiful country. In being here for this meeting we are simply respecting the rules that govern this organization. We have come here in respect of solidarity and we believe this country has a lesson to teach other countries in the world about living together in peace despite differences in race, religion, and cultures.

The Republic of Suriname is becoming a prosperous democracy, thanks to good governance, solid leadership and prudent macroeconomic management. This rainbow nation of colours and races living happily together is also a symbol of the love of liberty. History bears witness to how the rebellious maroons – most of them from Ghana, brought as captured slaves from Africa -- fought a bitter and ferocious fight for their own freedom; and how they established free communities in the deep forests of this great country.

I salute you, Mr. President and I salute all the good people of Surinam for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I must say that this is quite an auspicious occasion, because never before in the history of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly have we had the privilege of being addressed by a Head of State, let alone two Heads of State! This is indeed a positive reflection on how far the Assembly has come from its quiet inception in April 2005 in Bamako, Mali. I wish to join you Mr President in welcoming President Ramotar of Guyana, a very special past member of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly.

Your Excellencies, as I have stated at other times, the ACP Group should no longer be viewed as postcolonial appendage of the EU that has no place in the 21st Century. On the other hand, recent global developments have compelled us to undertake some deep introspection about the past 4 decades of our existence, our achievements and limitations -- and how we can best re-align our organisation so that we can continue to be of relevance not only to our member states but also to the global community of nations as well.

At its inception in 1975, and perhaps even earlier during the Yaoundé Conventions, the ACP Group was primarily intended to be an agent of development through promotion of better trade relations with the EU. After Lomé IV and the emergence of the Cotonou Agreement in the year 2000, our relations have gone beyond trade and development cooperation to encompass issues of political dialogue, environment and culture within the framework of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The other significant development was that the fall of communism in Eastern Europe has done away with an East-West divide which shaped the contours of geopolitical choices in the relations between the ACP and the international development community. The enlargement of the membership of the ACP Group's principal economic partner, the EU, has brought to the ACP-EU relationship countries that do not necessarily share any historical ties with the ACP.

There is no doubting that this factor is likely to influence the dynamics of EU development cooperation and its changing geopolitical priorities. The pressures of globalisation and the emerging fiscal crisis in the Euroland area are also likely to impact heavily on Europe's continuing sense of generosity.

However, we have also taken cognisance of the fact that the ACP Group has since its inception provided a platform for harmonised action and policy in the relations of the ACP Group with the EU. The various cooperation instruments, such as the European Development Fund and the Commodity Protocols have helped to systematically direct EU development effort where it is most needed, without which there would have been serious divisions and unnecessary competition amongst the ACP States. I feel that this is a solid foundation for the continued existence of the ACP Group beyond its relations with the EU.

While we believe the ACP will continue to need Europe as a predictable source of much-needed official development assistance, Europe will also continue to need our natural resources and our markets. The basis for an interdependent relation is self-evident. What matters is the moral content we bring to and the pragmatism with which we drive the spirit of our cooperation with Europe.

Your Excellencies, we recognise that the world out there is changing, and it is incumbent on us to change with it. As an old African saying goes, "when the music changes, so does the dance". There is an honest admission on our part that that, despite the size and geographic extent of the ACP Group, it has not exploited the power of its critical mass or its moral ascendancy as representative of the majority of the poor nations and needs to wholly reinvent itself to be relevant not only for the EU but in the concert of nations.

It was in view of these uncertainties that we launched the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives. During many of our lively discussions on future perspectives, ACP Ambassadors have reaffirmed the need to ensure cohesion and collective focus among members of the ACP family of nations. They have also stressed the imperative of diversifying our international linkages by forging new alliances with the emerging economic powers of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – countries popularly known as the BRICS – and why not, since our European partners are doing likewise. Such new linkages will provide opportunity not only for deepening South-South cooperation but also for leveraging on new opportunities for 'Triangular Cooperation' with the New Europe.

Your Excellencies, in concluding my remarks, permit me to use this opportunity to state that our preparations are on course for the 7th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government which comes up in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, during the period 13 to 14 December, 2012. The Summit will be held under the theme: "*The Future of the ACP Group in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities*". This summit will prove to be of historic importance to the future of our organisation as we consolidate on our achievements while mapping a path towards the future.

I trust that we will see our two Presidents here in Malabo, so that together with your other counterparts, you will make a significant input in this historic meeting, and provide us with the guidance we need to set the course for strengthening ACP solidarity and cooperation in the 21st Century.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas
ACP Secretary General

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