

Statement by the Secretary General at the Opening Ceremony of the Southern Africa Regional consultations of the Eminent Persons Group, 2 September 2014, Luanda Angola

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Your Excellency, Honourable Georges Rebelo Pinto Chicoti, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Angola

Your Excellency, Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG)

Honourable Ministers

Professor Sebastiao ISATA and other Esteemed Members of the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) here present (Madam Patricia FRANCIS, Professor Ibrahima FALL and Mr Peter GAKUNU)

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Highly distinguished personalities, resource persons, delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honourable Minister,

At the outset, let me express my profound pleasure in welcoming you this meeting that has brought together leading personalities from the ACP Southern African region, with the objective of consulting on the future of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Group beyond 2020.

Through you, Honourable Minister, I would like to thank His Excellency President José Eduardo dos Santos, the Government and the Peoples of the Republic of Angola for the warm welcome and generous hospitality that has been accorded to me and indeed all the delegates here present, since our arrival in this beautiful country - Angola.

I particularly would like to thank His Excellency the President for offering Angola to host these consultations, and for providing financial assistance to the Secretariat in support of the EPG work. The facilities placed at our disposal are excellent and this will make it possible for us to have a productive meeting.

I also wish to thank you, Honourable Minister, for accepting to grace this meeting by taking time off your busy schedule to come here this morning to deliver an opening statement.

In addition, I thank the ACP Southern Africa Ambassadors in Brussels, particularly their incumbent Coordinator, Ambassador Grace Mutale Musonda KABWE of Zambia, and her predecessor, Ambassador Mpeo MAHALE-MAILLOA of the Kingdom of Lesotho, who jointly with their colleagues from the region, have played a key role in making this consultation process a reality.

Some of these Brussels-based Ambassadors are with us today. I recognize Ambassador Outlule of Botswana.

We also have in our midst, His Excellency Ambassador Dr. Ousmane SYLLA of Guinea who is also currently providing leadership to the ACP Group, in his capacity as the Chairman of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors. I am informed that Ambassador Patrick GOMES, Ambassador of Guyana and Chairman of the ACP Ambassadorial Working group on the Future Perspectives of the ACP will be joining us tomorrow.

I invite the Brussels team of Ambassadors to take a lead and contribute to the debates as they are more familiar with the ACP Group, its mandate and its processes.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

As I have had the occasion to say in other regions that have concluded the consultations, it is worth reminding us that the ACP Group embraces 79 member countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the islands of the Pacific. I am privileged and honoured to head its Secretariat in Brussels and we operate with an elaborate network of institutions and stakeholders.

Our grouping is a product of history dating back to the Rome Treaty 1957 when the former French African colonial dependencies were brought into Association status with the European Economic Community. The membership was later expanded in 1973 when Britain acceded to the Community, bringing with it her erstwhile colonial dependencies that were now members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

With the further expansion of the European Economic Community that brought Spain and Portugal into the European system, the former Portuguese and Spanish colonies in Africa and the Caribbean also became members of the ACP Group.

The ACP Group emerged largely as an association of countries that share particular ties with the former European colonial powers and that are bound to Europe through history, economics and trade arrangements. But the ACP does not define itself solely in its relationship with Europe.

Indeed, the Georgetown Agreement of 1975 sought to establish the ACP as an intergovernmental body bound together by a shared sense of South-South solidarity and commitment to the pursuit of equity in world economics and international trade and in the use of dialogue as the primary instrument of international cooperation.

The ACP is the largest trans-regional intergovernmental organisation of developing countries in the international system. The collective strength of the ACP Group derives from decades of inter-regional solidarity, international trade negotiations, development finance cooperation, political dialogue and relations with other international organisations.

There is potential to build on this numeric strength to promote the collective cause of some of the poorest countries in the world, with opportunity to establish crucial alliances not only with Europe but with some of the emerging global players in the world economy.

At the various levels these relations need to be nourished to allow for greater intra-ACP cooperation and coordination, and a more cohesive, proactive and vibrant Group.

Indeed, the call for solidarity, greater visibility, relations with other international groups, streamlining of the core business of the ACP and empowering its Secretariat has been a constant theme of all of the Summits of ACP Heads of State and Government since the last two decades.

The membership of the ACP Group has grown and nearly doubled without a single Member having pulled out since its inception in 1975. Currently the Group has 79 Members and we are praying that the political and security situation in South Sudan, which currently has an observer status, will be resolved soon. This will enable the country to accede and raise the Membership of the ACP group to 80 developing countries.

The call for action to justify the ACP's relevance today is also an urgent reminder that the global context in which we have operated hitherto has been radically transformed. At the same time, it is a call to reaffirm our solidarity and the inherent dynamism and durability of the ACP "family of nations".

It is for this reason that the Eminent Persons Group on the future of the ACP beyond 2020 was formed and launched on March 25, 2013. It is comprised of 12 distinguished luminaries and statesmen from the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The Group is chaired by Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, former President of Nigeria who is with us here today.

Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge and applaud the leadership that President Obasanjo has provided to the work of the EPG. His Excellency has demonstrated exceptional dedication to the EPG in spite of his other challenging responsibilities and commitments in service to his country - Nigeria, the African continent and indeed the ACP Group. President Obasanjo, please accept our deep gratitude. We are confident that Your Excellency will ably steer the Eminent Persons Group to deliver on its mandate.

Other Members of the EPG have equally been deeply committed to accomplishing the task assigned to them, namely that of independently reviewing the 79-member ACP Group as an international organisation and to offer the future perspectives that the Group should pursue post 2020 when the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, commonly known as the Cotonou Agreement comes to an end.

To enable them come up with an evidence-based and realistic and credible report, the EPG initiated these regional consultations. The objective is to gather key contributions from the stakeholders that can inform and guide the EPG members when compiling their final report. At the same time, inputs from ACP peoples from all walks of life are strongly encouraged, through online discussions on a webpage that the ACP Secretariat has opened on its website.

The final report of the EPG will be presented to the 8th Summit of Heads of State and Government when it is held in the near future.

That is why we are here today. We would like to hear your views in your various capacities as government officials, parliamentarians as well as non-state actors drawn from the private sector and civil society. And for that reason, I encourage and urge you to be frank and candid because it is only by being open that the EPG and all of us will comprehend what you want your organization to be and to do for you in the future.

The regional delegates and resource persons gathered here today have among them a lot of knowledge and great experience in various fields. We believe that their collective wisdom will help to make this consultation process a great success.

I wish us all a fruitful and productive meeting and thank you all for your kind attention.

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