

# Statement by the Secretary General at the Pacific ACP Leaders meeting, Rarotonga COOK ISLANDS, 28 August 2012

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Your Excellency, Henry Puna, Hon. Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, and Chairman of the Pacific ACP Leaders Meeting, Distinguished Leaders of the Pacific ACP Countries, Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Mr. Chairman,**

It is for me a singular honour to address this august gathering of Pacific ACP Leaders. I want to thank the Government and good people of the Cook Islands for putting such impressive facilities at our disposal and for their very warm hospitality. I am attending my third meeting of Pacific ACP Leaders, to underscore the importance I attach to strengthening the bonds between the ACP Secretariat and the Pacific Island States.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The more I have visited these shores, the more I have come to love the wide expanses of Oceania -- with its rainbows and colours and rich cultural diversity. In June this year, the Government and good people of Vanuatu hosted us to the 95<sup>th</sup> Session of the ACP Council of Ministers as well as the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the Joint ACP-EU Ministerial Council. Vanuatu provided an immense occasion not only to dialogue among ourselves but also to reach better understanding with our European colleagues on how to take the ACP-EU partnership forward. Among the most important achievements was the resolution on a common position for the Rio+20 meeting on global sustainable development.

Immediately after the ACP Council in Vanuatu, Fiji hosted in Nadi, the third meeting of the ACP Ministers responsible for fisheries, which addressed the theme of "*Partnerships for sustainable development of the fisheries sector in ACP countries.*" The meeting *adopted* a 5 year Strategic Plan of Action, which sets the scene for developing new partnerships for development, exchange of expertise, and trade.

In July, Samoa hosted the Pacific Regional Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Items discussed included regional integration, economic partnership agreement, the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and support for good governance, democracy and human rights. With the emergence of the Lisbon Treaty and the increased co-decision making authority of the European Parliament, the role of the JPA has assumed increased significance. It has proven to be a very useful institution that enhances political dialogue while allowing our parliamentarians to engage with their European counterparts in shaping the course of EU development policy.

I would like to congratulate the Governments and people of Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa for the excellent arrangement and warm Pacific hospitality and for the constructive outcomes of the meetings.

The Pacific Islands have proven to be among the robust pillars of the ACP. Your wisdom and vision have helped us steer through some of the troubled waters of international economic relations while forging a common front for all our peoples.

Visiting the Pacific has been for me an education in itself. I have come to appreciate more than ever before, the inseparable ties that unite us – we the peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands.

*I would like at this juncture Mr Chairman, to bring to the attention of Pacific ACP Leaders some important issues concerning our partnership with European Union.*

### **Ratification of the second revision of Cotonou Agreement**

The Second revision of Cotonou Agreement was signed at Ouagadougou in June 2010. The minimum prerequisite for entry into force of the Agreement is ratification by 2/3 of the ACP Group and unanimity of EU Member States including the European Commission.

As at 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2012, 18 ACP countries and 9 EU member states have ratified the second revision of Cotonou. From the Pacific, 4 countries out of the 15 Pacific ACP member States have ratified.

Honourable Leaders, I wish to reiterate the importance to ratify the 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Cotonou Partnership Agreement within the two years prescribed by the ACP/EU Council in June 2010 at Ouagadougou, which mean that the deadline falls on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012, as failure to do so will have consequences for the implementation of the important pillars of ACP-EU cooperation and partnership. The ACP Secretariat is available to provide the necessary support if required.

### **Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)**

One of the principal concerns facing ACP-EU relations is obviously the slow progress that has been made so far on the EPA negotiations. While the Caribbean have already finalised a comprehensive EPA, the African and Pacific regions are yet to do so. The EC meanwhile is proposing to withdraw Regulation 1528 that had guaranteed entry for exports from the ACP countries to the EU market, by January 2014.

It also seems likely that ACP countries that are in the high and upper middle income categories will also miss out on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) following an EC proposal to revise the scheme in a manner that will graduate them out of the benefits. Such inflexibility is unhelpful to the necessary progress that needs to be made towards finalising the EPAs.

The Pacific ACP Lead Spokesperson on EPAs, the Hon. Minister from Tonga, shared with the ACP Council of Ministers in Vanuatu, the frustrations facing your region, due to non-response by the EC side and failure to hold meetings. This is in spite of the market access offers submitted by PACIFIC ACP countries.

Therefore, the decision by Pacific Leaders to reaffirm their commitment to conclude a comprehensive regional EPA, inclusive of all Members, beyond what has been signed by two members in the region is highly commendable. What is necessary now is for the Pacific region to move as one in order to foster and strengthen regional integration. Enhanced cooperation and collaboration is the right spirit that will enable the region to tackle common regional challenges and surmount all hurdles coming in the way of the regions' economic development.

### **Inter-Regional Organizations Coordinating Committee (I-ROCC)**

I am happy to report that following the establishment of the Inter-Regional Organizations Coordinating Committee (I-ROCC) last year, which I have the honour to Co-chair, we will again later this year be convening a meeting of the Heads of ACP regional integration organizations. The objective of the meeting, which builds on the inaugural one held last year, will be for the regions to share experiences and best practices on regionalism and development cooperation.

We expect that the Inter-Regional Organizations Coordinating Committee (I-ROCC) will continue to serve as a forum for dialogue, while supporting coordinated implementation of regional programmes, mobilising resources for regional integration, programming, monitoring and evaluation. In so doing, we expect to strengthen the role of the ACP Secretariat to better serve its member states and regional communities.

## **Agenda for Change**

During last year, the European Commission launched the *Agenda for Change*, a new framework for EU development policy in the years ahead. The aim is to streamline the EU's development assistance and to ensure greater effectiveness and development impact in the priority areas of energy, private sector development, infrastructure and good governance.

A major concern to the ACP Group is the inclusion of the element of graduation, linked to a differentiated approach with respect to access to resources, which in our view is not within the spirit of the Second Revision of Cotonou.

This means that ACP Countries in the high and upper middle income groups, may be excluded from grant aid and may not have an "A envelope," in the next financial perspective.

While most of the countries that are likely to be affected are from the Caribbean, 4 countries from the Pacific are listed in the OECD ODA Recipients list, as upper middle income countries.

We believe that ACP countries that have achieved favourable economic performance should be supported to transition into a more stable and sustainable growth path.

Countries should not be unduly punished because they have been able to ensure growth and prosperity through discipline, sound governance and prudent economic policies.

The issue was extensively discussed at the Council meeting in Vanuatu. We have asked the European Union to refrain from taking any unilateral measures that would modify the legal framework of the Cotonou Agreement as signed in June, 2010. The dialogue on this issue is continuing in Brussels and we hope that a mutually acceptable solution can be found soon.

## **ACP Leaders' Summit**

Permit me to use this auspicious occasion to announce that the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit of ACP Heads of Government and State is scheduled to be held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, during 13-14 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 be of critical importance to the future of the ACP as we seek to consolidate on our achievements while mapping the path to a more viable and sustainable future. You will soon be receiving a formal letter of invitation from the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. I hope that Pacific leaders will make a strong showing at Malabo, so that we can have the benefit of your wisdom and good counsel in shaping the future of the ACP.

I just returned from Malabo a few days ago, where I held discussions with the authorities and had opportunity to inspect some of the excellent conference facilities that are already in place.

## **Future of the ACP Group**

As we look to the years ahead, we recognise the need to reinvent the ACP as a meaningful player on the world stage. As Pacific Leaders may be aware, the Lisbon Treaty which came into force in December 2009 has transformed the institutional architecture of the EU as we have always known it.

Global re-alignments and major shifts in EU policy orientations have given rise to concerns of possible downgrading of the importance of the ACP-EU Partnership.

*The working Group on Future Perspectives* has been mandated to explore various alternative scenarios and to come up with suggestions for repositioning of the ACP within the global arena. It has up to the end of 2014 to complete its work.

As part of these efforts, the UNDP financed a technical study that has come up with some important findings. The next step of this process is to constitute an Eminent Persons Group to guide and conduct consultations on the report in the respective ACP Regions. We will be calling on distinguished Pacific Leaders to participate in this process.

I noticed from your agenda that you are establishing your own independent process to reflect on the future of the Pacific within the ACP group, I commend you for your initiative and being pro-active, and I hope that the other ACP regions will follow your lead, which I believe will enrich the reflections taking place at an All ACP level.

A wise statesman long ago described politics as 'the art of the possible'. I would go so far as to describe the future of the ACP as being laden with possibilities. But I daresay that the future, ultimately, is what we make it. As Secretary-General and servant of your organization, I am keenly aware of the fact that we cannot achieve all these ambitions without support at the highest level. That is why I appreciate the decision of Pacific ACP Leaders to have the ACP Secretariat at the centre not the periphery of their meetings.

I therefore count on your continuing support in the years ahead so that, together, we can create a bold new future for all our people.

*Once again, I thank you for your kind attention and wish you very successful deliberations. **Kia Orana***

**Mohamed Ibn Chambas**  
**Secretary General**  
**ACP Group**

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*(Pictured: ACP Secretary General (seated in front) at the Pacific ACP meeting in Rarotonga, Cook islands and Assistant Secretary General and Head of Macroeconomics, Development Finance and Intra-ACP Programming Mr Paulo Kautoke (back, left)/ Photo by Pacific Island Forum Secretariat/ jhonimae)*

See also:

**[Secretary General's statement at the 43rd Annual Pacific Leaders Forum](#)** <sup>[1]</sup>

**[ACP welcomes Pacific leaders' commitment to conclude trade talks with EU](#)** <sup>[2]</sup>

**[ACP concerned about graduation, differentiation in aid policy](#)** <sup>[3]</sup>

Tags: [SG speeches](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

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