

Welcome speech by Secretary General Dr. Patrick I. Gomes at the opening of the International Conference on Artisanal and Small-scale Mining and Quarrying (ASM18)

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On behalf of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), I am proud to welcome you to the 'International Conference on Artisanal and Small Scale Mining and Quarrying'. The ACP Group is an organization established by the Georgetown Agreement in 1975 with 79 member states (48 from sub-Saharan Africa, 16 in the Caribbean and 15 in the Pacific).

One of the greatest paradoxes of our time is epitomised in the ACP region where there is suffering amidst plenty. This is particularly so in the minerals sector, where ACP countries are endowed with abundant mineral resources, yet are characterised by chronic poverty, low human development and overall under-development; causing the categorisation of 39 as Least Developed Countries. Nearly two-thirds of the 79 ACP States are either mining countries, or have mining potential, which if exploited rationally, could contribute to inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development. Against this backdrop, the ACP Framework of Action (FWA) on the Development of the Mineral Resources Sector, which is based on an holistic and very ambitious approach, was endorsed by the ACP Group of States in 2011, after an ACP Ministerial meeting in December 2010. This Framework of Action was heavily informed by the African Mining Vision adopted by the African Heads of State and Government in 2009. The vision stresses, amongst others, the need to enhance Africa's negotiating strength and to improve the capacity to manage mineral wealth.

In the framework of the implementation of the ACP Framework on Minerals Resources, an ACP-EU Development Minerals Programme, was developed. The ACP-EU Development Minerals Programme has demonstrated the importance of local minerals and materials such as sand, salt, marble and gravel in contributing to inclusive and sustainable domestic development in many ACP countries. The Development Minerals sector if managed well can spur economic transformation, financial inclusion, job creation, and human development that respects the objectives of sustainable development.

The ACP Group of States supports Regional Integration in ACP countries, and welcomes the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) which may allow tomorrow a freedom of movement not only of goods, but people, from Cape Town to the Mediterranean Coast. The work of rationalization undertaken by the African Minerals Development Center (AMDC) to align local content to the African Mining Vision (AMV) appears essential, knowing that the multiple efforts of the various multilateral development agencies have not so far made it possible to slow down the migratory process, and to retain the populations, not by force but by an offer of future prospects and fulfillment of their vital needs. The Caribbean and Pacific countries have in turn expressed their willingness to join the AMV, it is of paramount importance to pay more attention and give the means to the ACP Mineral Regional Specialized Organizations.

All who are present at ASM18 have together thousands of years of experience in the extractives sector. Let us harness this enormous potential, and best practices and capitalize on this fantastic opportunity by participating energetically and sharing openly, listening attentively, and most importantly, applying our learning optimally in our home countries.

Let ASM18 be an opportunity to articulate the collective vision for the future!

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