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**103RD SESSION
OF THE ACP COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**WELCOME STATEMENT BY
H.E. Dr. Patrick I. GOMES
ACP Secretary-General**

Tuesday 26th April 2016 Dakar, Senegal

Your Excellency Mahammed Boun Abdallah DIONNE, Prime Minister of the Republic of Senegal,

Your Excellency, Léon Raphael MOKOKO, Minister of Planning and Integration of the Republic of Congo, and President of the 103rd Council Session,

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by expressing my deep sense of honour in welcoming you to the 103rd ACP Council Session. Let me acknowledge with deep appreciation the presence among us of His Excellency Prime Minister DIONNE of Senegal. This is yet another manifestation of the importance the Republic of Senegal continues to accord to the ACP Group, since its formation in 1975. Indeed, as far back as 1974, the then Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of Senegal, Mr. Babacarr BA, acted as spokesman for the group of countries that became the founding members of the ACP Group a year later. That we are holding the 103rd Council session in the historic city of Dakar is therefore no coincidence, and through you Prime Minister, we would like to express our deep appreciation to your colleague Minister of Economic Planning and Finance in making the resources available for this meeting and of course, to His Excellency President Macky SALL, the Government and People of

Senegal, for whose gracious hospitality we are profoundly indebted.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In addressing the 102nd Council in November, I drew attention to the fact that the year 2015 was important in the history of our Group, as it marked the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Georgetown Agreement, which brought into existence the ACP Group. As we look ahead however, it would be no exaggeration to describe the year 2016 as a pivotal one in defining the future of the ACP Group. This is because our Leaders are expected to make definitive pronouncements regarding the future direction and structure of the Group at the Eighth Summit of our Heads of State and Government, scheduled to take place in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, on the 31st May and 1st June. Moreover, the presentation of the Report of the Eminent Persons Group by Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, will mark a major milestone in our renewal and transformation.

Additionally, 2016 is significant because the process of reflection that began last year on ACP-EU relations after 2020, will gather momentum in the course of 2016, with broad outlines of the aspirations and expectations from each side becoming clearer.

In order to ensure a successful Summit, as well as bring our Group even closer to our regional configurations and regional economic communities, the Secretariat has undertaken various efforts including participating in regional summits, organising events at the Secretariat, and holding high level engagements both in Brussels and beyond. Details of these are presented in my Report. These efforts are of course complementary to those of the Ambassadorial Working Group on the 8th Summit, as well as those of the authorities of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies

If there is one appeal I would like to make to the 103rd Council of Ministers, it is for all delegations to do their utmost to encourage our Heads of State and Government to attend the Eighth Summit, and to participate actively. It is only through our collective efforts that we can ensure a successful Summit. The task – the challenge and date with destiny - to reposition and reinvent the ACP Group requires the commitment and unequivocal political support at the highest level by our Leaders. Let this be manifested in Port Moresby at our Summit.

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my deep appreciation for the extensive collaboration and support I have

enjoyed from the Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, the distinguished Ambassador Roger Julien MENGA of the Republic of Congo, as well as the Bureau of the Committee of Ambassadors, and indeed the Committee itself. I am also highly appreciative of the efforts undertaken by none other than His Excellency Ambassador Amadou DIOP and his team, to ensure that we are successfully hosted here in Dakar today. Excellence, merci beaucoup!

Finally, it would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the high level of professionalism and commitment demonstrated by the staff of the Secretariat in the discharge of their responsibilities, to ensure the smooth execution of the Secretariat's mandate.

A special word of appreciation goes to the National Organizing Committee in Dakar, whose tireless efforts enabled the excellent arrangements for this meeting.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies

May I, once again, welcome you to the 103rd ACP Council session, and wish you successful deliberations. Thank you for your kind attention.▣