



(Check against delivery – Spoken text shall prevail)

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL

H.E. Dr. Patrick I. GOMES

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE 41ST SESSION OF THE ACP-
EU JOINT COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

DAKAR, SENEGAL

Thursday 28th April 2016

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Senegal M. Macky SALL

Your Excellency Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and Chairperson of the ACP Eminent Persons Group

Your Excellency Mr. Bharatt JAGDEO, former President of the Republic of Guyana, and Vice Chairperson of the ACP Eminent Persons Group

Your Excellency M. Léon Raphael MOKOKO, Minister of Planning and Integration of the Republic of Congo, co-President of the 41st ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Council

Your Excellency Ms. Lilianne *PLOUMEN*, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Council

Honourable Ministers,

Your Excellency Commissioner MIMICA

Excellencies, Ambassadors

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocols respectfully and dutifully observed

I am honoured and humbled on this auspicious occasion, to be afforded the opportunity to welcome you all to our 41st ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Council, as well as the High Level Event to celebrate 40 years of ACP-EU Relations. May I at the outset, extend sincere thanks to those who have made it possible for us to be here today, in this beautiful and historic city of Dakar, in the land of *terranga*, the Republic of Senegal. I refer to His Excellency Ambassador Amadou DIOP and his team at the Senegal Embassy in Brussels, the Local Organising Committee of the Republic of Senegal, the ACP and EU co-Secretariats, and the European Commission.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me to pay special tribute to His Excellency President Macky SALL of the Republic of Senegal, not only for his presence here today, in spite of the well known pressing demands for his attention, but particularly for his continued commitment in championing the cause of the ACP Group.

Your Excellency, as is well known, you have personally played a pivotal role in concluding the EPA negotiations between the West African region on the one hand – one of the staunch regions and foundation pillars of the ACP Group – and the European Union on the

other. Those negotiations had been deadlocked for some time prior to your decisive intervention. At a personal level, you have accorded me the high privilege of granting me an audience whenever the occasion warrants it, and I have on each and every such occasion, benefited from your wise counsel. Thank you Mr. President for your dedication to the ACP cause, and for putting at our disposal today the excellent facilities here at CICAD.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

May I share a few remarks about the relationship between the ACP Group and the EU, our principal interlocutor, and with whom we have enjoyed forty-one years of an unrivalled partnership. During these forty-one years of this special partnership, based on shared values, and adapted in the face of changing circumstances and priorities, we have witnessed significant contributions towards the development aspirations of ACP countries, commercial benefits to European enterprises as well as significant milestones in our shared quest to play a significant, if not decisive role, in the global political and development agenda. While our partnership at the CoP 21 in Paris last December provided the platform for the formation of the “Ambition Coalition” that played such a decisive role in ensuring a successful outcome, it is worth noting that this was just a replication of the decisive role played by the ACP Group in multilateral trade

negotiations, from Hong Kong to Nairobi, and often with the support of the EU. It is clear that the strength of our collective numbers has been brought to bear time and again, even though there is scope to leverage this great asset in a more consistent and strategic manner.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I join others who submit that if the unique ACP-EU partnership did not exist, it would therefore have to be invented.

It is therefore no coincidence that as we embark on the path towards defining the nature of our future relationship, we are organizing this High Level Event this afternoon, not only to celebrate forty years of this historic relationship, but also to engage in an informed and enriched debate about our relationship after the expiry of the current Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2020. To this end, I would therefore like to acknowledge the presence of such eminent personalities as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and the Head of the UN Office for West and Central Africa, former Secretary General of the ACP, H.E. Dr. Mohamed Ibn CHAMBAS.

And since we have several eminent personalities here with us today, but I realize it might take me the whole morning if I were to continue

trying to acknowledge the presence of each and every one of them individually. Therefore, Excellencies Eminent Personalities, I welcome you all, and look forward to a robust yet informed debate. The business of our Joint ACP-EU Council will also require understanding and considerable flexibility to address contentious issues as related to the Economic Partnership Agreement – but we are strongly encouraged that the sense of goodwill and mutual benefit will prevail.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate how happy and privileged we are to have with us today His Excellency President Macky SALL, and we look forward to welcoming him soon among our midst once again, hopefully at the 8th Summit of our Heads of State and Government in Port Moresby.

I thank you for your kind attention.
