

# STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES AT THE GROUP OF SIDS' LEADERS VISIO-CONFERENCES PROGRAMME

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Distinguished Ambassadors,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,

It is indeed an honour to have been invited to participate in this event today, which is at a unique time in the history of the Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States (the OACPS). The 79 members strong OACPS, represents a population of about 1.1 billion peoples scattered across the Blue Planet.

We have just a few short weeks ago initialled the new OACPS – EU Partnership Agreement, comprising a Foundation Agreement and three regional Protocols, one each for Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

The negotiations, which lasted 2 and a half years, were at times intense but we are happy the agreement addresses OACPS challenges, issues and opportunities, and importantly the unique challenges and concomitant vulnerabilities of the thirty-eight (38) Small Island Developing States of the OACPS situated in four of six OACPS regions.

### OACPS SECRETARIAT FULFILLING THE OACPS MANDATE

Excellencies, I can attest that throughout the course of the negotiations, our OACPS political hierarchy remained engaged and were very vocal about the responsibility of all Parties to acknowledge the unique characteristics and issues of OACPS' Small Island Developing States.

This message has permeated SIDS issues throughout the final negotiated OACPS-EU Foundation Agreement text and in the three regional protocols.

It is self-evident in the Articles throughout the entire Agreement which:

- Support the principles of **Multilateral Engagement** with our international partners.
- Acknowledge the **challenges and vulnerability of Small Island Developing States, as well as the Environment and Climate Change.**
- Call for **Global Health Security** and Governance, particularly relevant in today's ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support **Inclusive Economic Growth and Development** and uphold the right to secure livelihoods, the right to **Democracy and Human Rights.**

AND

- Defend the rights to protect the **most vulnerable** echelons of our societies, **including women and youth.**

### SIDS PRIORITY ISSUES- OACPS HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT for SIDS ISSUES

At the level of the OACPS we pursue the SIDS Agenda through the OACPS SIDS Forum, which is an established subsidiary and consultative organ under our revised constitution – the Revised Georgetown Agreement which brings together the 38 OACPS SIDS members who have much in common including inter alia, their small size, narrow resource base, multiple forms of poverty, and for some, debt distress from impacts of the climate crisis, disaster risks from natural hazards, and more recently impacts of other exogenous shocks such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of the OACPS SIDS Forum, I acknowledge the efforts of the outgoing Coordinator of the SIDS Forum, H.E. Jose Filomeno de Carvalho Dias Monteiro and the incumbent Coordinator, H.E. Joy Ann Skinner, Ambassador of Barbados for their dynamic leadership. Our Brussels-based Ambassadors have identified the following as Priorities for OACPS SIDS in 2021:

1. Access to Finance

- 2.Addressing Debt and Debt Sustainability
- 3.Climate Action
- 4.Ocean Governance and Blue Economy
- 5.Developing a Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index
6. Health-COVID 19 Action Plan

We are conscious that we need to actively monitor SIDS interests within the context of other key multilateral instruments such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the SAMOA Pathway, and our own revised Georgetown Agreement adopted in 2019. The recently concluded OACPS-EU Foundation Agreement of our new partnership with the EU for the next twenty years is also no exception.

Under the new Foundation Agreement, concrete action in support of SIDS, will require coordinated sharpened diplomatic skills, advocacy and policy dialogue if we are to effectively address SIDS vulnerabilities in the trade, services, tourism, agriculture and financial sectors.

Of paramount importance will be our joint efforts to develop a **Composite / Multidimensional Vulnerability Index**, and regular, open engagement between the EU and OACPS SIDS Representatives of governments, private sector, and civil society organisations, including community and indigenous groups, religious leaders, universities, research institutions, women and youth organisations.

The challenge for OACPS SIDS is to focus on building resilience. We have taken careful note of recent public statements of commitments and offers of assistance to vulnerable developing states to transition to low carbon pathways, made by developed countries leaders in last month's Global Climate Summit. As we prepare for COP 26, it is crucial that we join forces and apply OACPS' climate diplomacy and advocacy action on SIDS Priority Issues, as we reiterate and reinforce the common but differentiated responsibilities of the EU and all our global partners.

The OACPS Secretariat stands ready to facilitate this process.

#### **OACPS-EU NEGOTIATIONS AND BUDGETARY CHALLENGES OF OACPS SECRETARIAT**

Excellencies, I have tried to illustrate that the OACPS –EU negotiations have prioritised the special characteristics of SIDS and the need to provide special supportive measures to address their unique vulnerabilities.

The negotiations have kept our Member States and their Secretariat fully engaged over the past two and a half years. While the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges we did not let it interrupt the momentum and commitment to negotiate and deliver a new partnership agreement to our constituents.

While that chapter has closed and we look forward to signature and ratification of the Agreement in 2021 the work of determining implementation modalities is underway to ensure that the OACPS regions and member States benefit from this important Partnership with the EU.

I thank you

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**URL source:** <http://acp.int/fr/content/statement-secretary-general-organisation-african-caribbean-and-pacific-states-group-sids-lea>

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