

# **Welcome statement of the Secretary General Dr. Patrick Gomes at the 101st session of the ACP Council of Ministers, 26 May 2015, Brussels**

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*[Protocols]*

Permit me to begin by expressing how deeply honoured I am to welcome you to the ACP House for the 101st Council Session, and for the privilege of addressing this august Council for the first time in my capacity as your Secretary General. May I reiterate my deep sense of appreciation for being entrusted this great honour and yet formidable task, at a critical time in the life of our esteemed Group.

While the challenge in front of us is no doubt formidable, we are convinced that with togetherness, a clear sense of purpose, and the requisite resources, we can take important steps towards enhancing the effectiveness of our Group as a global player in the family of nations.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

As you are all aware, this year is an important one in the history of our Group, in that it marks the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Georgetown Agreement, which brought into existence the ACP Group. Fittingly, the Secretariat is working closely with the Committee of Ambassadors to commemorate the occasion on the 4th and 5th of June (next week), in a manner befitting of the importance it richly deserves. Not only will we have stimulating symposia about our achievements, challenges and future path, with speakers drawn from our various regions, but these will be interspersed with cultural performances and culinary delights that celebrate our cultural diversity. You are of course, all cordially invited to partake of this momentous occasion.

Permit me at this point to make reference to the importance and urgency for an 8th Summit of Heads of State and Government this year. The holistic and overarching vision within which our priorities for the next five years and beyond can be effectively and efficiently achieved, must find resonance and endorsement by the supreme decision-making organ of the ACP Group. This is the Summit of Heads of State and Government.

Mr. President of Council, allow me therefore to make a very special appeal, a plea, that one of our Regions so endowed will offer to host the 8th Summit this year, ideally during the month of November. That Summit must be a beacon that refines our strategic policy domains for the next decade, and project a powerful political vision to serve the ACP in our engagement with the European Union on the form and accompanying institutional arrangements to shape the post-Cotonou relations. More significantly, it must provide the narrative and firm moral as well as financial commitment that will reinforce our capacity to grow stronger and address the needs of our peoples, as we also look beyond Europe. An 8th Summit this year would therefore constitute the crowning glory of our fortieth anniversary.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies

Forty years of the ACP Group also provides an excellent opportunity to leverage and deepen our unique strengths to transform ourselves into a key player in international fora on issues such as global trade, sustainable development, climate change, poverty eradication, women's empowerment and youth entrepreneurship. These strengths of ours include

A membership that has grown from 46 countries in 1975 to 79 countries today, a membership that transcends 3 continents;

A population of over 700 million people, representing 14 percent of the world population;

Our unique socioeconomic and geographical mix of middle income and, least developed countries, small Island developing states, and landlocked countries, thus representing the biggest global platform for developing countries with a permanent Secretariat;

Our track record of making decisive contributions in international trade negotiations, such as on special and differential treatment at the Fifth WTO Trade Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico, in September 2003, and more recently on trade facilitation during the Ninth WTO Trade Ministerial in Bali in December 2013; and,

Our unique experience in north-south cooperation with the European Union, as well as south-south cooperation among ourselves.

Looking ahead, we reaffirm our unflinching commitment towards taking the necessary steps to strengthen and deepen the

cooperation and interaction among ACP Member States, expand our partnerships to embrace the global South, and intensify our efforts to ensure a more balanced partnership with the European Union.

I am well cognizant of the fact that the ambition of the Group must take into account ever evolving global dynamics. Indeed there are other international organisations pursuing similar objectives as ours. But I wish to submit that in many respects, we have a comparative institutional advantage, one that has been successful in converging disparate geographical, cultural, linguistic and historical differences into a Group, bound as we are by common notions of solidarity. This should give us the conviction to speak with one voice in the global community of nations and to demonstrate the maturing self-confidence and self-determination that we possess.

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 Roy Mickey JOY of Vanuatu, as well as the Bureau of the Committee of Ambassadors, and indeed the Committee itself. I am also highly appreciative of the level of professionalism and commitment demonstrated by the staff of the Secretariat in the discharge of their functions, an essential ingredient for my administration to achieve its mandate.

Finally, let me reiterate our deep gratitude to the President-in-Office of the APC Summit, His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, for his continued commitment and active support to the ACP Group, as well as his generous financial donation, which has enabled the Group to manifest its solidarity to its Member States especially in times of need, as was the case with cyclone Pam in Vanuatu.

**Dr. Patrick I. Gomes**  
**ACP Secretary General**

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