

Interview with the incoming Chair of the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors, H.E. Mr Mário de Azevedo Constantino

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Brussels, 30 August 2021/OACPS: H.E. Mr Mário de Azevedo

Constantino, Ambassador of the Republic of Angola, took over the leadership of the Bureau of the Committee of Ambassadors of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) from outgoing Chair, H.E. Mr Moses Kouni Mose of Solomon Islands at the meeting of the Outgoing and Incoming Bureaux of the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors, on 16 July 2021.

Ambassador Constantino was presented to the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors at the 933rd Session on 17 November 2020. He replaces the former ambassador, H.E. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, who is currently the Secretary-General of the OACPS.

A seasoned diplomat, Ambassador Constantino has served his country remarkably, both in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at several diplomatic missions for more than 30 years. His postings include assignments in Geneva to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Angola to the United Nations (UN) Office where he was responsible for working with a number of UN offices.

Before his appointment in Brussels Ambassador Constantino held the post of Director of Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of his country.

The Press Office of the OACPS interviewed the new Chair on his views and expectations of the next six months of his tenure.

Press OACPS: Your Excellency, you began your term as Chair of the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors on 1 August 2021. What are the main priorities of your chairmanship?

Ambassador Constantino: Thank you for the invitation to do the interview. I sincerely wish to thank the Ambassadors of the Southern Africa region of the OACPS for giving me the opportunity to chair the Committee of Ambassadors for the next six months. As you are aware, the Republic of Angola's coordination of the Committee of Ambassadors and the Council of Ministers is a privilege for our Southern Africa countries.

It is a great honour for the Republic of Angola to chair these two important OACPS organs. Also, as approved by the 9th Summit of Heads of State and Government, which was held in Nairobi, Republic of Kenya, in December 2019, the Republic of Angola will host the 10th Summit in 2022 and will assume the presidency of the OACPS for the next three years.

With regard to your question, the main priorities of our chairmanship stem from the OACPS' priorities, namely the tasks

entrusted to us by the outgoing Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, the consultations conducted among the Ambassadors of the OACPS' Southern Africa region, and some of the directives of His Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Angola.

More specifically, the main priorities of our chairmanship include the following:

- Follow up on the outgoing Bureau's list of outstanding issues and tasks that have been transferred to the incoming Bureau of the Committee of Ambassadors;
- The list of decisions of the 112th Council of Ministers and the assessment of their implementation status;
- Preparations for the 113th Session of the Council of Ministers;
- Preliminary preparations for the 10th Summit of Heads of State and Government; and
- The implementation of the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement.

These priorities are part of the Action Plan of the Committee of Ambassadors during our six-month tenure. As a consultative organ of the Council of Ministers, we will focus on the initiatives related to the implementation of the new OACPS-EU partnership agreement. This activity will be one of the priorities of the Angolan chairmanship.

Press OACPS: What are the main challenges and opportunities of your chairmanship?

Ambassador Constantino: As you may recall, the 9th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government transformed the ACP Group into an international organisation, established under international law, called the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), with a legal personality. Such a change and transformation have brought challenges and opportunities.

One of the OACPS' main challenges is its financial health. We know that the European Union will fund the Organisation through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, also known as NDICI-Global Europe. Is the financial allocation to the OACPS enough to initiate the type of development that we want, and to reduce poverty in the Member States? This is a question that still needs to be answered.

The lack of financial resources was exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. OACPS Member States must take financial ownership of the Organisation by paying their mandatory contributions and by making use of other voluntary contributions. Instead of putting the entire financial burden on the EU's shoulders, the OACPS Member States must find other alternatives.

One of our best opportunities is the effective implementation of the revised Georgetown Agreement. Article 31 contains a provision on the establishment of a special Endowment and Trust Fund, which must be implemented. Furthermore, as an international organisation, the OACPS needs to find other partners to provide the financial security needed to finance its development programmes and projects. The OACPS must be financially self-sufficient. Without effective financing, all of the Organisation's projects and programmes will become useless.

It is our expectation that our leadership of the Committee of Ambassadors and our presidency of the OACPS will be an opportunity to contribute to deepening the effective transformation of the OACPS and assert the OACPS on the international scene.

Press OACPS: What are Angola's plans for hosting the Summit?

Ambassador Constantino: The Angolan President, Mr. João Lourenço, has created a working group to supervise the activities related to the preparations for the Summit in 2022. The Angolan Minister of Foreign Affairs is leading the working group, which includes the heads of some Ministries. The Secretary of State for International Cooperation and Angolan Communities Abroad is the national focal point.

At the Committee of Ambassadors level, we also plan to set up an Ambassadorial working group to assist the Angolan working group with issues related to the preparations for the Summit. This initiative will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for consideration.

The OACPS Secretariat will also help to facilitate the task. Several activities have been planned for the next Summit, namely: (i) the negotiation and signing of the agreement for the Summit; (ii) the holding of a webinar on institutional capacity building, which was held recently; and (iii) the identification of a general theme for the Summit.

We reiterate our full commitment and are prioritising the work in advance. Therefore, we are currently working with the OACPS Secretariat on drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the hosting of the 10th Summit of OACPS Heads of State and Government, which will be held in Angola during the first half of December 2022.

Press OACPS: COVID-19 continues to be a global threat. In your opinion, what can the OACPS do to help recover the economies of its Member States?

Ambassador Constantino: COVID-19 is a global threat that needs to be addressed through strong global solidarity, as underscored by President Kenyatta at the First Extraordinary Inter-Sessional Summit of OACPS Heads of State and

Government, which was held in June 2020. Effective public management and leadership of the OACPS is needed to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccines continue to reach the most vulnerable populations.

The OACPS must continue to encourage its COVAX partners to honour their commitments. Furthermore, and as I stated earlier, financial autonomy is essential for the OACPS to successfully carry out its programmes. Consequently, the OACPS must continue to strive to seek new partners, including non-traditional donors, in order to mobilise the funds to help OACPS Member States.

Another initiative could be to encourage Member States to identify the neglected and dormant sections of their programmes in order to self-finance and supplement their national budgets. Another approach could be to assist and strengthen the private sector to become an engine of development by creating jobs and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Above all, the mechanisms for checks and balances must continue to be strengthened and applied to ensure the effective management of the limited resources available. This is how we see the OACPS helping the economies of the Member States to recover.

Press OACPS thanks Ambassador Constantino and the members of his Mission for their kind assistance with the interview.

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