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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

Brussels, 15 September, 2021/OACPS: On the occasion of the International Day of Democracy, held every year on 15 September, the Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), H.E. Mr Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, underlines the importance of democracy as an ideal which recognises that every human being has the same fundamental rights and freedoms: ranging from freedoms of thought, belief, expression and movement to participation in political, economic and social engagements.

Consistent with the objectives stated in the Georgetown Agreement (Revised in 2019), Secretary-General Chikoti refers to the need to, “consolidate, strengthen and maintain peace and stability as a precondition for improving the well-being of the peoples of the OACPS, in a democratic and free environment.” While welcoming the progress made by Members of the OACPS in democratisation, Secretary-General Chikoti also regrets that much remains to be done. In several of our Member States, it is clear that serious shortcomings exist with regard to democratic governance, rule of law and respect for human rights. The most basic, universally-recognized political and social rights, including the rights of women, children and the most vulnerable, especially, the disabled and the elderly, are not respected.

In addition to numerous reports of blockades, violations of human rights and a decline in democracy in some of our countries, in recent years; the Secretary-General further notes that unfortunately, inequality and injustice have escalated following the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, violence against women and girls increased during the period of confinement. The fight against the pandemic has also served as a pretext to violate certain fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and movement, as well as freedom of assembly and association.

To achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 - Peace, Justice and strong Institutions, the OACPS relies on democratically-elected bodies, the most significant being the OACPS Parliamentary Assembly and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Given the substantial link between the rule of law, respect for human rights, inclusive governance and democracy, Secretary-General Chikoti is convinced that Member States would benefit from consolidating democratic, rules-based governance and justice in a perspective of sustainable development. He calls on leaders to renew their commitment to these values, by implementing political and institutional structures that guarantee the participation of all stakeholders in public life, as well as respect for human rights, the rule of law and the state.

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