

Opening statement by the President of Council and St. Lucia Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation, at the 95th session of the ACP Council of Ministers, 11 June 2012, Port Vila VANUATU

Opening statement by the President of Council and St. Lucia Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation, at the 95th session of the ACP Council of Ministers, 11 June 2012, Port Vila VANUATU

**Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Colleagues
Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries
Ladies and Gentlemen**

On behalf of the Government and people of St. Lucia and of all the nations of the Caribbean region – and indeed on my own behalf – I welcome you to the 95th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers. Meeting in this warm and pleasant land of Vanuatu is quite an uplifting experience indeed. On behalf of everyone assembled here today, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government and people of Vanuatu who have done their utmost to put at our disposal all such excellent facilities to ensure the success of this meeting.

Colleagues, as we all know, solidarity is one of the foundational principles underpinning the spirit of the ACP family of nations. In making this long journey to these far-off islands of the seas, we are reaffirming once more our deep sense of collective solidarity. I congratulate you all.

Like my own Caribbean region, the Pacific Islands face unique challenges; challenges deriving from geography and the constraints of size. We are mostly islands, some of which are remote and constrained by small size and limited resources and subject to the buffeting of sea waves and the anger of the gods as manifested in rising water levels, tornadoes and rainstorms.

I am delighted to note that despite all these constraints, a good number of our Small Island Developing States are registering major strides in terms of economic development. For those of us who are visiting these shores for the very first time, we note the great strides that have been made in building the domestic infrastructure and in the development of tourism and other key economic sectors.

Honourable Ministers, we meet at a time of ferment in international economic relations. What has been termed the Great Recession has taken its toll on national economies in rich and low-income countries alike. In North America, Europe and the rest of the advanced industrial economies, recovery has been rather painfully slow. The impact is being felt in many of our ACP economies in terms of reduced tourism income and earnings from remittances from nationals working abroad. At the same time, we are encouraged by the resilience of our countries. We are gradually seeing the return to growth in several of our countries, especially in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is salutary that democracy is also being consolidated in a good many of our countries, in spite the obvious challenges. Speaking for the Caribbean, I am happy to note that democracy is taking deep roots in our political culture. Our biggest challenge is to expand the possibility frontiers of welfare and to generate jobs for our teeming youths. Equally crucial is confronting the challenge of Climate Change and the risks posed by natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and the likes.

For all our ACP nations, our biggest challenge is to address our global marginality in trade, development and international finance. I believe that our continuing engagement with Europe within the framework of the Cotonou Agreement is a part and parcel of strengthening our integration into the global economy on the basis of equity and international social justice.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, if history is any guide, our relations with Europe are likely to endure in the years ahead. But I hasten that we cannot continue to take those relations for granted. Europe itself is changing both in terms of geopolitical priorities and institutional architecture. This makes it all the more pressing that we explore all the possibilities of reinventing the ACP as a group and ensuring a more solid basis for our relationship with the EU. Equally imperative is the need to diversify our international economic relations by exploring South-South linkages with the BRICS and other emerging economic powers.

This 95th Session of the Council of Ministers has several important items on the Agenda. Not least are the prolonged negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement with Europe, which are yet to be finalised with Africa and the Pacific. Equally important is the building of a common position with our EU partners on the impending Rio+20 Conference. Among the other issues are the exploration of alternative scenarios and institutional reinvention of the ACP and developing a common position on a successor to the Tenth European Development Fund. We also have to forge a common front so we can speak

with one voice with our EU colleagues at the Joint Council.

Honourable Ministers, it goes without saying that most of us attend these meetings with strong briefings from our home governments. We all have duties to defend our national interests and to promote the perspectives of our home governments. But I hope we shall also bear in mind that, ultimately, politics is the art of the possible. We must keep ever before us a vision of the common good and our sense of collective destiny and purpose. To be able to shift your position – to be flexible – is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is a sign of moral courage and political sagacity. Working together in unity and trust, I believe we can achieve a great deal in the next couple of days. Let us therefore march together in solidarity and hope.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Hon Alva Baptiste
Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of St Lucia
President of the ACP Council of Ministers

Tags: [Press releases](#) ^[1]

Source URL: <http://acp.int/content/opening-statement-president-council-and-st-lucia-minister-foreign-affairs-international-trad>

Links:

[1] <http://acp.int/category/story-type/press-releases>