

Secretary General's welcoming statement at the ACP Ministers of Trade meeting, 24 October 2012, Brussels

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Honorable Ministers, Our Special Guest, Mr. Pascal Lamy Director-General of the WTO, Permanent Secretaries and Directors-General of Ministries responsible for Trade matters in ACP States, Excellency Ambassadors, Heads and representatives of ACP regional integration organizations, Distinguished participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all to Belgium, Brussels and to ACP House, for this meeting of ACP Ministers of Trade.

Most of you have come from far – from as far as the Pacific, the Caribbean and Africa representing your countries. We also have in our midst, a number of ACP Ambassadors based in Geneva.

Your presence here is a demonstration of the importance and seriousness that your respective governments attach to the aspirations of the ACP as a Group, namely to improve the lives of our peoples. It is indeed an honour for me to host you at ACP House.

May I take this opportunity to thank Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, the Attorney General and Minister for Industry and Trade of Fiji for agreeing to chair this meeting and Co-Chair the Joint Ministerial trade committee Meeting. The delegation of Fiji is showing exceptional leadership in this area as the Ambassador of Fiji is also the Chair of the ACP Subcommittee on Trade and Commodities. At the international level, Fiji has been honoured to Chair the Group of 77. This is a clear testimony that Fiji is respected in the community of developing countries. It is our trust and hope that the situation in Fiji will be normalized soon, so that relations between Fiji and the European Union will resume to the full benefit of Fiji.

Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,

We are reminded that Article 38 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement establishes the ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Trade Committee (JMTC) and provides for it to meet at least once a year.

The Cotonou Agreement revised for the second time in 2010 enhanced the mandate of the JMTC to enable it to address any trade related issue of concern or interest to the ACP States, including, most importantly, the monitoring of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). In this regard, the ACP-EU consultation process has been more clearly defined with the JMTC playing a key role in addressing or resolving difficult issues.

The previous meeting of the JMTC was held on 12 December 2011 and you will have the opportunity to approve the minutes of that meeting.

The objective of the next, 11th Meeting of the JMTC, which will take place at Centre Borscehtte Conference Centre Brussels on Friday morning is to address issues related to ACP-EU trade relations. These include progress on the negotiations and implementation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), other pertinent issues arising from the current ACP-EU trade arrangements and developments in the international trade scene.

It should be recalled that the JMTC, is not anticipated to be a negotiating session of technical issues as such but a political engagement to address ways of strengthening ACP-EU trade relations. It is for this reason that we invited all ACP Ministers responsible for trade issues to come to Brussels to participate at these meetings. I am delighted to see that a considerable number of ACP Ministers are here with us today.

On the EU side, the EC Trade Commissioner, Mr. Karel De Gucht will head the delegation, with expected participation of EU Commissioner for Development – Mr Pielbags and possibly the Minister from Cyprus (the current President under the rotating EU Presidency).

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests,

One of the key issues that you will discuss is the state of play on the EPA process. The Senior Officials received reports from all the regional EPA configurations on the progress made in the negotiations as well as the implementation by the Caribbean region which concluded full EPAs and those countries in the Pacific and Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) configuration that are implementing the interim EPAs. I am happy to learn that in some regions good progress was recorded and there is a

possibility to conclude negotiations in the near future. For other regions, there remain some contentious and unresolved issues.

With regard to the proposed amendment to the Market Access Regulation 1528/2007 by the European Commission, the issue is yet to be resolved. You are no doubt aware that the European Parliament voted on 13 September 2012, to defer to 1 January 2016, as the implementation date for excluding certain countries from the list of beneficiaries under Market Access Regulation 1528/2007.

I wish to call upon the European Commission and the European Council not to vary the decision of the European Parliament to at least stick to the date of 1 January 2016. The ideal situation for the ACP States concerned is to allow for the negotiations to continue without the pressure of time so that the outcome will be an agreement that satisfies all sides, and whose implementation will stand the test of time. The Senior Officials have made some recommendations on the EPA issue which will put before you for your consideration.

Honourable Ministers,

Another subject for your consideration is on the EU Communication on Trade, Growth and Development which was issued in January this year. At your meeting last year, European Commissioner De Gucht gave a flavour of what was expected to be issued. We now have the document and have studied it carefully.

It would seem to us that this is one of a set of interlinked documents touching on the EU's efforts to define its future policy in the area of trade and development. The other documents are those issued on budget support, agenda for change, and the future EU trade policy.

I would invite Honourable Ministers to familiarize themselves with the contents of these communications so as to be informed of what to expect in their future trade relations and development cooperation discussions with the European Union.

Here too the Senior Officials will present you with their conclusions and recommendations on these matters.

Another issue of interest that will be discussed with the EU side touches on EC's negotiation with third countries. Our major concern has been the fact that preferences granted and those expected under the Economic Partnership Agreements are being continually eroded by the conclusion of free trade agreements with third countries.

This happens when the EC gives concessions in products of ACP's export interest such as textiles and clothing, tuna loins and canned tuna, sugar, bananas, rum and cut flowers. However, we are well aware that preference erosion is inevitable. So the question before Ministers is what we should do about it. I believe that the Senior Officials may have some answers for you to consider.

Honourable Ministers,

Other issues that are before you for your consideration relate to

- the accompanying measures support programme for selected products such as bananas and sugar,
- the reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy after 2013,
- Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade measures of the European Union affecting products such as cocoa, kava, tobacco and indeed all fresh produce.
- WTO issues, including how to secure the centrality of developments in the negotiations and how to deal with emerging issues and challenges in the multilateral trading system, (and on this topic we will benefit from the presence of our Special Guest Mr Pascal Lamy who will share his thoughts with us), and
- Trade related capacity building programmes

On all these topics, the Senior Officials report is rich with recommendations which you will be invited to deliberate on and come up with appropriate conclusions.

Finally as we reflect on the future of the ACP Group, proposals have been made on how we can strengthen intra-ACP Cooperation. The ACP Summit of Heads of State and Government at its meeting in Accra Ghana suggested that a study should be carried out on the feasibility of establishing an all ACP free trade area. Your meeting last was informed that the draft terms of reference were in preparation. Finally, the study was conducted by a Consultant who was commissioned with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Senior Officials will be reporting on their discussions on this matter and Ministers will be requested to debate the best way forward. We anticipate giving an update to the forthcoming ACP Summit to be held in Equatorial Guinea from 11 – 14

December this year. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to request you remind your respective Heads of State and Government of the importance of this Summit whose theme is

To end let me say how pleased we are to have Mr Pascal Lamy, the Director General of the World Trade Organization being with us here today. We must thank him for taking time out of his busy schedule to come and interact with Ministers. He has on many occasions honoured our invitations to come and brief Ministers of global trade issues. I am informed that this time he has come to Brussels purposely for meeting with you. But I am not surprised because Mr Lamy has been a friend of the ACP Group for many years.

Some of you may recall that he was instrumental in establishing the duty free quota free market access for least developed countries, a preferential scheme that has enable increased exports to the European Union. This is something he also championed in the WTO leading to the 2005 Hong Kong Ministerial decision calling for extension of duty free quota free market access for LDC by all developed countries and by developing countries in a position to do so.

Some of you also recall that it was Mr. Pascal Lamy who as the European Commissioner for Trade proposed the creation of the all ACP Institutional Trade Capacity Building Facility better known as "Trade.com Facility". This programme was funded with an amount of Euros 50 million which was later increased Euros 60 million. Unfortunately, the Programme which was very useful and quite popular because of its fast response mechanism to request for assistance from ACP States and Regions has come to an end. The ACP Secretariat and the European Commission are working on the modalities for setting up a replacement Programme but this may take time.

But perhaps one area that has not gone so well is the EPA negotiations, which were launched during Mr Pascal Lamy tenure as Commissioner. May be with hindsight, he might be in a position to advise the ACP Group and the EU on how to successfully conclude the EPA negotiations. But I do not want to put him on the spot, especially knowing how difficult it has been for him to work with WTO Members to conclude the Doha Development Round which is equally in a state of paralysis.

With these few remarks, I am happy to welcome Mr Lamy to address the Ministers, to be followed by an exchange of views.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas
ACP Secretary General

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