

SPEECH: ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ACP COMMITTEE OF AMBASSADORS H.E PATRICK I. GOMES on the occasion of the Symposium on South-South Cooperation, Brussels 31 January 2011

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Excellencies, Distinguished Secretary General, Dr Chambas,
Permanent Representative of the OIF, Mr Pietro Sicuro
Key note speaker Mr Jean-Michel Severino
Distinguished guest speakers,

Representatives of International & Regional Organisations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, on behalf of the Committee of Ambassadors to join the Secretary General in extending a warm welcome to our longstanding partners and distinguished guests.

In spite of your busy schedules some have traveled from as far as Abuja, Brasilia, New Delhi and Pretoria, to be with us. We are thankful and deeply appreciative.

Colleagues and Friends – We meet today for an event, a marketplace to exchange views, to share experiences and thereby enrich and expand the value of the social & cultural capital, the lived experience and time-honoured practice at our disposal in the area of international development assistance.

More importantly, it is envisaged that today, from the platform of accumulated experience and expertise within the 79 Member States of the ACP Group, a process with new partners and innovative thinking will bring us closer to the goals so clearly stated in the founding document of the ACP Group of States.

As stated in the Georgetown Agreement, the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific unequivocally and unambiguously set themselves the overriding task to eradicate poverty from the lives of their citizens. That was in 1975.

Continuing this task, colleagues would recall that we gathered in this room on the 7th June last year, to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the ACP Group by convening a Symposium on: Regional Integration and Good Governance.

Presentations were provided by the Co-President of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Louis Michel, former European Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Mr Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

In the exciting exchanges between our Ambassadors and the presenters, Dr Janneh alluded to the need to explore areas for South-South Cooperation in which the ACP might play a leading role. So it is today we have come together to set that idea on its head and pursue a process to enrich South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

The ACP approaches this complex and daunting task with great humility, but fully cognisant of the vision and expectations of the founding Member States, and more so of today's urgent demands by growing numbers of citizens of the developing world for whom the abolition of poverty and unemployment, access to social services seem stymied by empty promises and excessive bureaucracy.

We must learn from our experience as we build platforms for future relations.

Underlying the unique and extremely valuable North-South Development Cooperation experience of the ACP with the European Union are principles for co-management, structured authorising modalities and now parliamentary oversight, that can no doubt benefit from reflection in a wider context. Such reflection can perhaps offer solutions to improve timely and targeted delivery of assistance for sustained impact at national, regional and intra-ACP levels.

In the ACP we intend to make a difference.

Deliberations in the Sub-Committee on Development Finance, and debates by the Committee of Ambassadors have revealed considerable concern on how to deepen and widen the scope of our contribution to the global debate and praxis of "aid effectiveness". In-house reflection has been ongoing on development financing, more recently on "budget support" and the MDG Initiative of the European Commission. An even wider process of reflection has been embarked upon with the launching of a Working Group on Future Perspectives of the ACP Group as a whole, and an ad-hoc Working Group will prepare for the forthcoming Istanbul Conference on LDCs.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Demographic trends and the expected growth of the world population in the coming years will pose significant challenges as regards poverty, and natural disasters and financial resources.

Additionally, we have observed wide-ranging changes on the international scene, changes in the structure of inter-dependent relationships and the emergence of new geopolitical and geo-strategic configurations.

The recent food, financial and economic crises and their continuing impact are forcing fundamental and far-reaching changes to address poverty and inequities in society. These require that mutual interests be taken into account within frameworks of appropriate systems for cooperation.

It is readily apparent that changes have occurred in the international aid architecture, and that the number, type and focus of actors have increased considerably. In fact, in addition to traditional bilateral and multilateral donors, new groups of players are participating and various sources of financial and technical assistance are available.

This expansion in development cooperation undoubtedly contributes to better diversification of, and increases potentially available resources, with the possibility of fragmented impacts and additional transaction costs. Moreover, this new scenario has strengthened South-South cooperation by expanding its scope and importance, as extensively discussed by UNCTAD in its 2010 Report on The Least Developed Countries. New resources would hopefully be complementary and coherent with traditional North-South Cooperation, thus requiring close coordination, in which the ACP may contribute a distinct value.

The ACP Group can bring to this conjuncture of mutual interests, a comparative advantage that is demographic, organizational and institutional with a social capital embracing many levels – inclusive of civil society, the private sector, legislative and executive arms of government. In terms of numbers and needs, of the 49 Least Developed Countries, 40 are among our Member States that contain a total population of some 700 million.

Our social and organizational capital, its well-established institutions, networks and extensive experience in North-South cooperation indeed suggests that the ACP Group is a veritable repository with highly valuable experience to contribute to an enriched process for development cooperation.

To address today's topic of S-South Cooperation, we are greatly honoured that the vibrant, emerging actors of IBSA - India, Brazil, South Africa - providing innovative leadership for South-South Cooperation, are with us. Their knowledge, approach and experience can contribute to energising and enriching the policymaking processes and delivery modalities for Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action, and our own Annual Action Plans under the Cotonou Agreement. Additionally, may I recognise our specially invited guests from the UNDP, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Partnership of Lusophone Countries and ECDPM.

We are delighted moreover that, with the keen and generous support of the OIF, it has been possible to organise this Symposium.

We wish to learn of actions already taken or underway, as well as to identify the challenges to be met so as to be in a position to creatively utilise all the opportunities available, both through enhanced South-South and triangular cooperation, mindful of global issues and our shared objectives, resources, responsibilities and comparative advantage.

With this in mind, the Symposium has set itself three objectives, namely:

raising awareness of vital issues linked to international aid for development, from the standpoint of both traditional and emerging donors;

exploring possibilities for the ACP Group's effective participation in South-South cooperation programmes; and

devising a process that will enable the ACP Group to contribute to the deepening of partnerships for South-South and triangular cooperation.

My dear Excellencies, Colleagues and friends,

This is the context and historical basis on which our discussions have been envisaged. I trust our discussions will be fruitful, action-oriented and worthy to the memory of the ACP's founding mothers and fathers as to present and future generations.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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