

# **SPEECH: Secretary General's Statement at the 26th Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, 18 November 2011**

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**Mr. President,  
Honourable Parliamentarians,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On my own behalf and on behalf and on behalf of the ACP Secretariat, I welcome you all to the historic city of Lomé. This city holds a special place in the annals of our ACP-EU partnership. The first Lomé Convention, as you all know, was signed here in February 1975 between the then 46-member ACP and the nine member nations of the European Economic Community as it then was. This was long before the accession of countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. It was a time of upheaval in international economic relations, marked by the Cold War and confrontation between North and South over the quest for greater justice and equity in the international system. Lomé has also lent its name to the succeeding Conventions which ended with the fourth agreement covering the years 1989 to 1999.

Then as now, Togo has always risen to the occasion both as host and as an active member of the ACP family of nations.

I want to use this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to President Faure GNASSINGBE and the Government and good people of Togo for once again taking on the burden of hosting the ACP and for showing such warm and gracious hospitality. We are impressed by the ambience in which we are holding this Assembly and the impressive facilities that have been placed at our disposal. Thank you so very much indeed.

**Mr. President,**

As we meet again in these pleasant shores, we remember the triumphs and challenges of a relationship between Europe and our countries that has endured the better part of a half-century. Today, the ACP comprises 79 member countries, with the prospects of the new republic of South Sudan eventually joining and taking our membership to eighty. Europe, on its part, has undergone profound transformation. From the original six member signatories – France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg – the membership of the EU has risen to twenty-seven. The Lisbon Treaty 2010 has altered the architecture of Europe as we have always known it. With its single currency and unified market, the EU today is the largest economic space in the world. With a population of over 500 million citizens, it is also the world's largest international trading bloc.

**Honourable Parliamentarians,**

I am happy to note that a good number of our own ACP countries have registered significant strides in social and economic development. Democracy is gradually taking root in most of our nations, with good governance increasingly the norm rather than the exception. Democracy is virtually embedded in Caribbean political culture while the economy of the region is becoming increasingly sophisticated. In the Pacific, we also see encouraging signs with respect to democracy and good governance. Africa on its part has not escaped the new libertarian ethos that is sweeping across the developing world. The guns have fallen silent in the formerly war-torn countries of West Africa, notably in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. Liberia has recently held a relatively peaceful presidential election as have a good number of other countries on the continent.

**Mr. President,**

It was the great British statesman Winston Churchill who described democracy as “the worst system of government – except for the others”. Democracy is never without its problems. This is as true of the advanced industrial nations as it is of the

fledgling democracies of Africa and the islands of the seas. In spite of its imperfections -- in spite of all the challenges -- I am persuaded that ideals of constitutional government will become a part of our permanent heritage.

I am also happy to note that some progress is being made in terms of social and economic development. Africa, for example, is expected to record an average growth rate of 5.6 percent by year's end 2011. At least 10 countries, notably Ghana, Angola, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea are expected to register growth exceeding 7 percent during 2011. This trend is particularly impressive when compared to a global average of 3 percent and an OECD average of well below 2 percent.

### **Your Excellencies,**

While we have good cause to be optimistic, we cannot also escape the hard realities of the world in which we live; a world in which poverty continues to exert a heavy toll on the life-chances of the vast majority of our people. We are also buffeted by the crisis of climate change and the fallout from a long recession that has devastated the OECD countries, particularly the United States and the European Union.

We are concerned about the financial crisis facing the Euroland area, particularly Greece, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Italy. At the same time, we feel encouraged by the recent bold steps taken by European leaders to shore up the Euro and to lay the foundation for economic recovery. In our world of increasing interdependence, the prosperity of Europe will impact positively on the prospects of our ACP countries. It is our ardent hope that Europe will see the merit of investing in the ACP as a means of jumpstarting its economy and restoring the Old Continent to the path of self-sustaining growth.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since our last meeting in Kinshasa, we have continued to push through the programme of institutional rejuvenation of the Secretariat. Our Strategic Plan for the 2011—2014 period, *'Renewal and Transformation'*, has provided the platform on which we have sought to reposition the Secretariat to deliver on its mandate while better serving the Principal Organs, which includes this august Assembly. There has been some improvement in the work culture even as we have tightened financial control systems. We are also moving towards greater professionalization through implementation job reclassification, reforming staff regulations while enhancing professional development opportunities.

Throughout my engagements with colleagues in other international institutions and with member states and our European partners, I am encouraged by the fact that the ACP Secretariat is increasingly seen as a credible and effective international actor in the global development arena.

However, we are not resting on our oars. As we move into the second and last decade of the Cotonou partnership which ends in 2020, we face a world of unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities. While the Caribbean have finalised an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU, it is to be noted that the negotiations with the rest of our sub-regions in Africa and the Pacific have proven more protracted than any of us would have wished. We are all aware of the new deadline that the Commission has set for the conclusion of these negotiations. I therefore hope that this JPA will be a catalyst to finding a way out of the current impasse. It is our expectation that the European Commission will demonstrate flexibility in the negotiations to ensure EPAs that are development-friendly and that enhance regional integration.

Equally important is the question of development cooperation. As we explore the framework for a successor to the EDF-10, we hope that the JPA will help in galvanising the momentum for constructive engagement between the EU and the ACP to ensure that the quality and quantity of resources from the EDF meet the development needs of our member countries.

Historians of ideas will tell us that Europe's global identity is rooted in certain ideals which have informed its character since the Enlightenment.

I believe that Europe will not be Europe without an ethic of global responsibility, in a world rendered small by the forces of technology and globalisation.

I believe that Europe will not be Europe if it abandons its responsibility to its African, Caribbean and Pacific development partners; a partnership that goes back to the very foundation of Europe itself as enshrined in the Rome Treaty of 1957.

Soon after our meeting in Lomé we will be proceeding to Busan, South Korea, for the Fourth High Level Meeting on Development Effectiveness. I am pleased to announce that the ACP has agreed a joint position at Busan that speaks with boldness and clarity on the need to carry the international development agenda to a new level.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In strengthening the role of the Secretariat to better serve its member states and regional communities, we organised during the month of October a meeting of the heads of ACP regional organisations. The objective was to share experiences and best practices on regionalism and development cooperation. Out of this meeting we were able to agree on the establishment of an Inter-Regional Organisations Initiative.

I have been mandated to help steer the initiative which is to serve as a forum for dialogue while supporting coordinated implementation of their programmes and mobilising resources for regional integration and intra-ACP financial programming, monitoring and evaluation.

### **Honourable Parliamentarians,**

As we face the future, we realise we must take bold steps to reinvent the ACP as a credible and effective actor on the international arena. Early in the year, the Working Group on the Future of the ACP commenced its work in earnest. The initial Chair was H. E. Ambassador Satiawan GUNNESSEE of Mauritius. After completing his distinguished stint of service in Brussels for eight years, Ambassador GUNNESSEE returned to his native Mauritius in the summer. He has been succeeded by H. E. Dr. Patrick GOMES, Ambassador of the Republic of Guyana.

In the short and medium term, the Working Group has sought to address issues relating to strengthening the Secretariat, enhancing the visibility of the ACP and development of a communication strategy as a means of enhancing visibility. Two Ad-Hoc Groups have also been constituted, one on the *Structure and Functioning of the Organs*, and the other on *Development Cooperation*.

The *Ad-Hoc Group on the Structure and the Functioning of the Organs of the ACP Group* is chaired by H.E. GILBERT-ROBERTS, the Ambassador of Jamaica, and mandated to propose reforms of the working methods of the Principal Organs as well as the various Ambassadorial sub-committees. The *Ad-Hoc Group on ACP Development Cooperation* is chaired by H.E. Ambassador Bocar BA of Mali and is mandated to explore more effective ways of enhancing preferential trade agreements among the ACP countries while examining the possibility of establishing an intra-ACP Free Trade Agreement. It is also expected to come up with actionable proposals on how to accelerate agricultural and industrial development cooperation especially of landlocked, least developed and island states while empowering the Secretariat to become a development organisation.

During spring 2011, we were invited to Maastricht, Netherlands, to participate in a symposium on the future of the ACP. It was part of a series of activities marking the Silver Jubilee of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), with whom we have had a close working relationship going back for decades. The symposium acknowledged that the EU seems to be gravitating towards greater regionalisation in its international relations, with a new generation of Europeans perhaps viewing the ACP as part of an old post-colonial heritage.

### **Mr. President,**

History will decide whether our generation has what it takes to reinvent the ACP as a credible and effective international organisation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Equally important is the need for Vigorous strategizing for post-2020, enhancing South-South cooperation, and engaging all relevant stakeholders in crafting a bold new future. We all have a stake in ensuring that the ACP not only survives but that it flourishes in the years ahead. As Parliamentarians, you have an important role in ensuring that budgetary contributions are paid on time. Equally important is the question of a new building for the Secretariat. You are all aware that our current premises, which have served us for more than thirty years, are no longer adequate to our needs. We have been in discussion with our Belgian hosts who are helping us to identify a suitable building. We count on your support when it comes mobilizing the necessary resources for the new building.

In concluding, I make bold to say that there is a future for the ACP. There is a future not merely because we live by hope. We have a future because of the enduring spirit of our peoples in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific; because of our immense potentials; and because of the solidarity that informs our highest aspirations as group.

Thank you for your kind attention and I trust that we will have very fruitful deliberations.

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**H.E Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas  
Secretary General  
ACP Secretariat**

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