

SPEECH: Statement by the President-in-Office of the ACP Council of Ministers Hon.Oryem Henry Okello at the 22nd Session of the ACP-EU JPA, 23 Nov 2011

SPEECH: Statement by the President-in-Office of the ACP Council of Ministers Hon.Oryem Henry Okello at the 22nd Session of the ACP-EU JPA, 23 Nov 2011

- *Mr. Assarid Imbarcaouane, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly*
- *Mr. Louis Michel, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,*
- *Co-Secretaries General of the JPA*
- *Mr. Krzysztof Stanowski, President-in-Office of the EU Council*
- *Representatives of the European Commission and European Council*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*

First and foremost, On behalf of the ACP Group of States and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to thank the Government and National Assembly of Togo for offering to host this Session of the JPA, and all the facilities that have been put in place in a relatively short time to make your meeting a success.

Democracy, Peace and Stability

Before I go any further, let me acknowledge and pay tribute to the democratic winds of change brought about by the Arab Spring, which has breathed a new sense of optimism on the continent. This indeed is confirmation that Africa is moving forward in deepening democracy and the respect for human rights.

Of course this has come at high cost to human lives, and particularly in the case of Libya, the risk of insecurity and proliferation of arms into neighbouring countries. I therefore commend your decision to debate this later aspect at this Session of your Assembly. The challenge now is for the international community, the African Union in particular to support the nascent institutional structures being established in Libya in order to assist the country move forward into its new phase of democracy and development.

Another significant milestone in Africa was the founding, on 9 July 2011, of the independent State of South Sudan. We congratulate the Government of South Sudan and the Government of Sudan for the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that made this possible. We hope that once all the accession procedures are complete, South Sudan will join the ACP Group of States and the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement. Uganda will be informing the Secretary-General of its decision to sponsor south Sudan's bid to become a member of the ACP Group of States.

Co-Presidents,

The choice of themes for this Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly reflects the transboundary nature of some

of the most pressing development challenges in the ACP States, as they are all a feature of the international trade, financial system and political system. Further, all the themes are interrelated in pointing to lack of development opportunities for local populations as the root of the problem of poverty.

It is now evident that the world needs a more coherent and consistent way of dealing with both domestic and international debt, as the example of the Euro zone crisis attests. Equally important is ensuring that ACP States and their development priorities continue to be adequately taken into account in the new EU institutional re-alignments that have taken place in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty.

One of the priorities for ACP economies is to move up the value chain, from merely producing raw materials for export, to exporting semi and fully processed goods. This will not only create more employment opportunities, but will also stimulate technological innovation and the development of an industrial base.

Ultimately it will lead to positive balance of payments as our economies export more high-value products and cease to import finished products from developed countries made from the raw materials that we export to them.

ACP-EU Partnership

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a matter of utmost concern to the ACP Group that the ratification process of the Cotonou Agreement revised in June 2010 is proceeding at such a slow pace.

So far, on the ACP side, only the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Guyana, the Solomon Islands, the Independent State of Samoa, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Saint Vincent & The Grenadines have deposited their instruments of ratification, while on the European side, only Finland, Malta, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Estonia, the Czech Republic and Denmark have complied. During the presentation of the 2011/2012 Budget in the Parliament of Uganda, the Minister of Finance laid on the table the proposal for ratification. Uganda will therefore soon communicate to the EU council its instruments of ratification.

I take this opportunity therefore, to call upon all Parliamentarians from both the EU and the ACP sides to remind their respective countries of the importance of ratifying the 2nd Revised Cotonou Partnership Agreement within two years as prescribed by the ACP/EU Council of Ministers Decision of 21 June 2010 in Ouagadougou. This means that the deadline falls on the 30th October 2012. Both the EU Council Secretariat and ACP Secretariat will be available to provide the necessary support to member States.

Economic Partnership Agreements

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

The ACP Council of Ministers have always maintained that the principal objectives of ACP Regions in undertaking EPA

negotiations is sustainable development through the structural transformation of their economies, increase in the production and supply capacity of their countries, promotion of sustained growth and the eventual eradication of poverty.

While in principle accepting the development potential of EPAs, during the years that we have been negotiating EPAs, ACP States are not entirely convinced that EPAs will contribute in any substantial way to the realization of their development ambitions because of fundamental concerns about the development dimension of the EPAs.

It is apparent that ACP-EU relations are evolving fundamentally. A partnership between very dissimilar partners will always have its own inherent difficulties and challenges, and can only survive if it is nurtured by mutual respect, understanding, conciliation and consultation. These are values which must remain as the core guiding principles of ACP-EU cooperation.

In this regard, we are therefore profoundly concerned that on 30 September 2011 the European Commission issued a proposal to withdraw 18 ACP countries from the list of beneficiaries of preferences under Regulation 1528/2007 as of 1 January 2014. This proposal is based on a provision in the Regulation permitting withdrawal of any ACP country that does not ratify an interim or full EPA within a 'reasonable period of time' such that the entry into force of the agreement is 'unreasonably delayed'.

A number of commentators have already identified a number of issues with this measure. I will mention but a few. First, it is based on the ACP countries' 'failure to take steps towards ratification' which is not however, mentioned in the Regulation itself.

Secondly, the proposal does not give proper reasons for its conclusion; it simply lists the dates the agreements were initiated, states claims that there has been no progress in ratification to date. In addition, there are also issues of EU and international law that need to be considered. But more fundamental is that the fact that the countries in question will now pay huge amounts of customs duties for their products to enter the EU.

There are still some thorny issues, such as rules of origin regulations that have slowed down the conclusion of EPA negotiations, and without movement on these issues, there is no way that these negotiations will be concluded. These are the issues that the EU needs to address.

The proposal on regulation 1528/2007 therefore, looks like arm-twisting ACP Governments to conclude negotiations while the fundamental disagreements are yet to be resolved. A related issue that compounds our concern about the EU proposal is that there is another similar measure with far-reaching development impact for ACP countries, namely, the elimination of sugar quotas in the context of the EU's CAP reform.

The ACP-EU Sugar Protocols

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

The ACP and LDCs are of the view that the elimination of sugar quotas as from 2015 disregards the EU market reality, the economic development objectives of the EU's commitment to their countries as well as the key CAP objective of food security.

Indeed these proposals seriously jeopardize the EC market balance and the future of the sugar industries of the ACP LDCs.

Much has changed since the 2005 Reform of the EU sugar Regime was introduced and it is only 2 years since the final and largest cut in sugar prices occurred. Market conditions have been difficult and it is only thanks to market management tools (of which quotas are the core) that it has been possible to cushion the impact of world market disturbances. The removal of quotas at this time would be premature, unnecessary and almost certainly counterproductive.

The Commission offers no valid justification for its proposals or for their timing. Its "Impact Study" which purports to illustrate the benefits that might accrue is flawed in many aspects and insufficient care has been taken to ensure policy coherence as mandated by Article 208 of the Treaty of Lisbon

The Commission's proposals also ignore the June 2011 Resolution of the European Parliament. They constitute a deterrent to ACP and LDCs to invest in increased efficiency. As it is, investment in the sector require 10 years to come to full fruition and the Commission's proposal will undermine all potential growth as a result of a lower priced and more volatile EU sugar market.

For those who have already ratified and are implementing respective EPAs, these changes are tantamount to a unilateral modification of an international treaty. For those countries still in negotiation, they will increase doubts about the benefits of EPAs since duty free quota free access is worthless without a remunerative and predictable market price which for many EPA EBA suppliers represents the only source of income. Further, the proposed lowering of price will seriously hurt the prospects of these countries to achieve their Millennium Development Goals.

The ACP and LDC sugar suppliers consider that while the drive to greater liberalization is understandable, time is needed to secure the benefits already under way in the industries. Consequently, they consider that maintenance of quotas until at least 2020 is fully justified. They therefore join the other stakeholders to urge the Commission to reconsider its proposals.

Climate Change and Sustainable Development in ACP Countries

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we prepare for the 17th UN climate change conference, the COP 17, due to take place in Durban, South Africa, perhaps I should say a few words about the ACP approach to climate change. Essentially, the ACP Group would like wealthier nations to pledge deeper emissions cuts as part of a new global climate pact and to offer billions of dollars in long-term financing to pay for clean-energy technology and steps to help farmers become more resilient against increasingly extreme weather.

Poverty eradication as an element of sustainable development is ACP's overriding priority with people's access to food and clean energy at the centre of our concerns. The sustainable use of renewable energy and indigenous resources means that our countries would be able to have more food as well as secure and clean energy supplies, which will also assist in breaking the cycle of high-carbon development that has led to the world being threatened by accelerating climate change.

COP 17 therefore represents a critical moment in the international climate change negotiations, and a defining opportunity for ACP leaders to chart the course towards outcomes that curb the rising threat of climate change, implement the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol, and advance the interests and aspirations of all ACP countries and peoples.

The Conference is coming just when the continent is coming out of what has gone down in history as one of the worst food crises of the 21st Century. While the food crises have multiple causes, it is obvious that with climate change projected to increase the frequency and severity of such extreme weather events, the challenges faced by vulnerable regions and countries will be exacerbated. The recent drought induced famine in the Horn of Africa which has resulted in a large scale humanitarian disaster is a case in point.

The vulnerability of ACP countries to the impacts of climate change coupled with their very low adaptive capacity call for urgent intervention in terms of proactive leadership, effective, coordinated, accountable and appropriate humanitarian support. A closer integrated action for risk reduction with humanitarian intervention strategies, investment in medium and long term strategies to enhance livelihood resilience and strengthen local and national capacities for agricultural development and disaster risk management is desirable.

4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to inform this Assembly that the ACP Group will be participating in the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid effectiveness taking place in Busan, South Korea at the end of this month. I am glad to learn that this Assembly will also be sending a delegation to the Forum.

The ACP Group looks forward to the evaluation to the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action and to identify the priorities and actions to be taken, as well as an agenda for aid effectiveness after Busan.

Conclusion

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

As I end, I wish to submit that the future prospects of ACP trade depend largely on the domestic and international economic policies of developed nations.

Although internal structural and economic reform may be essential to economic and social progress, an improvement in the competitive position of industries in which ACP Stats have a dynamic comparative advantage will be of little benefit to them or the world as a whole as long as their access to major world markets is restricted by rich country commercial policies.

Participating fully and effectively in international trade, investment and production requires capacity building, improving the transparency, soundness and certainty of domestic economic environment and securing access to markets. International assistance, enhanced market access opportunities, development finance, investment and technical cooperation can play a crucial role in complementing domestic efforts to create necessary conditions for economic growth and sustainable development.

Co-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you success the rest of your Session.

**HON. ORYEM HENRY OKELLO
MINISTER OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
ACTING MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF UGANDA
PRESIDENT-IN-OFFICE OF THE ACP COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

Tags: [SG speeches](#) ^[1]

Source URL: <http://acp.int/content/speech-statement-president-office-acp-council-ministers-honoryem-henry-okello-22nd-session-a>

Links:

[1] <http://acp.int/category/story-type/sg-speeches>