

# Speech: Statement by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Rt Honourable Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu

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Statement by the Right Honourable Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, delivered at the Official Opening of the 37<sup>th</sup> ACP-EU Joint Council

**14-15 June 2012, Port Vila Vanuatu**

Honourable Speaker of Parliament of Vanuatu,  
Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu,  
Excellency, President of the ACP Council,  
Excellency, President of the European Union,  
Excellency Secretary General of the ACP Group of States,  
Excellency Commissioner of the European Union  
Heads of Delegations  
Officials of the ACP-EU States,  
Honourable Vanuatu Government Ministers and Members of Parliament,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps in Port Vila,  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a historical moment for this nation and the people of the Republic of Vanuatu to warmly welcome all delegates from the great continent of Africa, the great nations within the European Union and the nations of the Caribbean and our neighbouring Pacific Islands. You have crossed continents and vast oceans to reach our land. And for this, my nation is deeply honoured to welcome you all to our shores. To my fellow citizens, I invite you to warmly welcome all our esteemed guests.

Distinguished delegates, we're gathered here in this historical venue, the Independence Park, for the opening ceremony of the ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Council. It is right here where my fellow citizens celebrated our political freedom almost 32 years ago. It is right here where we sealed the unrestrained spirit of the ordinary citizens of this country for freedom and it is here where we forged our courage to move forward as a nation.

This special location symbolises the achievements and the challenges of freedom for Vanuatu. And many of the nations who are present here today had been supportive of our struggle for independence. And for this, again in this very place, in this very opportune occasion, I express my people's profound gratitude to many of your sovereign nations for their political and moral support in the days of our struggle for independence and our desire for a genuine and peaceful partnership.

Distinguished guests, I speak to you today, not only as the Prime Minister of this nation, but as a proud citizen of Vanuatu and a fellow citizen of the alliance of the ACP-EU. The ACP-EU is a strong and vibrant trans-regional intergovernmental partnership that began more than three decades ago.

However, the partnership through the ACP-EU cooperation framework has also given rise to new challenges which need to be collectively addressed to ensure continuity and mutual confidence in the entire process of the partnership framework.

My dear friends, this important meeting here in Port Vila brings the Oceania region the timely opportunity for the Pacific nations to fully and constructively contribute to the discussions and reflect on the future perspective of the ACP and its engagement with the EU. It is at this juncture, that I would like to stress that the Joint ACP-EU Ministerial should strongly take heed of the repeated calls by the Pacific Leaders for the Commission to ensure that immediate necessary steps is taken to allow for meaningful engagement with the Pacific ACP region, in order to conclude negotiations on a comprehensive

Economic Partnership Agreement by 2012.

In March of this year, the Vanuatu Government successfully hosted the first Pacific Regional Kava Conference here in Port Vila with the view to addressing the 2002 trade ban imposed by certain members of the European Union. Since the imposition of the ban, over \$200 million worth of kava export has been severely affected and many hardworking farmers have been ruthlessly deprived of a rare opportunity to generate their own income. We must also share the concerns of a sugar farmer who yearns for an international democratic partnership that underlines the contribution of sugar sector to food and livelihood security and fight against climate change. As global citizens we must share the burdens of a cotton farmer who desires to implement the commitment made by all WTO members to address the cotton dossier ambitiously and expeditiously.

My dear distinguished friends, these elements of a strong spirit and vision of a mutually beneficial cooperation was espoused in the early days of our partnership. And our citizens must see the ACP-EU partnership as a union of promise and prosperity. This partnership must command a dignified approach in implementing its programs. It must honour a homeless fellow citizen under the towers of metropolitan cities, it must bring people hope to a cotton or banana farmer in the African continent, it must offer hope for rewarding life to a Sugar or Coconut farmer in the Pacific region and it must promise hope to a Kava farmer who is dispossessed and maybe arbitrarily isolated by the imposition of the technical barriers to trade. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage greater understanding between EU member states and the Pacific nations to reconsider the current imposition of the ban and subsequently to restore market access for kava into EU selected markets.

Hope for prosperity under this partnership framework should be the pressing burden of this cooperation. I urge the relevant Sub-Committee on Trade and Cooperation to ensure appropriate measures are taken to address the kava dossier. Failure to achieve solutions to these problems would deny us the collective confidence we have in this intergovernmental partnership to eradicate poverty and integrate the ACP states into the globalised world economy. If we fail to forge equal trade and create wealth in our countries, many of our people will be left behind in a globalised world.

We have seen the unprecedented impacts of the global financial crisis since 2007 that have swept along faster than many economies could contain them. My dear friends, many of our Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been unable to counter the ferocious wave of this international financial crisis. And we must feel the compulsion to take the decisions to ensure that the vulnerable SMEs in our regions must be propelled back to life, so they can generate jobs and ensure growth of the private sector. Here I must acknowledge the positive role played by the European Investment Bank in assisting investment projects in many of our countries. It is at this point that I join the voices of many to call on the EIB to review the existing location of its Pacific Office. There has got to be a sense of ownership in this process. And for this, it is important for this facility to be hosted by one of the members of the ACP-EU of the Pacific States, including Timor Leste. I also take this opportunity to highlight and testify to the importance of the Centre for Development Enterprises (CDE). A number of SMEs in my country had significantly benefited through this resource and we call for a strengthened mandate of this facility.

Experiences have shown that membership with numerous multilateral and plurilateral organisations is often plagued with highly bureaucratic procedures with impractical deadlines, making access to funds and implementation programmes difficult and strenuous given the limited absorption capacities of many countries. My friends, we must reach an understanding concerning the disbursement of resources allocated to tradable commodities such as Banana, Sugar, Cotton or Kava. The allocated resources should not be forfeited in the event that certain countries encounter delays in their multi-support programme. These administrative challenges have often overpowered our good intentions to ensure that projects achieve their targets in inspiring prosperity in the forgotten corners of continents and islands. Our citizens yearn for lives marked by dignity, opportunity and recognition. And the rules of the game of this partnership between the ACP-EU must not deny the disadvantaged citizens the opportunity they need to hope for a benefit. It is now high time to find a mutual solution and solidify our hope for a solution to these issues.

Distinguished delegates, there are voices deriding and denying the importance of the alliance between the ACP-EU as one which is fostering increasing dependence. We all know and strongly maintain that this alliance does not foster dependence. It is a movement which encourages increasing interdependence between big and small, the wealthy and the not so wealthy. We are collectively bearing new burdens and taking responsibility in many forgotten parts of continents and islands. This is an important North-South Cooperation. The burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together. This partnership and cooperation is not a choice, but the only way to achieve the shared objective which had guided this relationship more than three decades ago. In this century, the Europeans and the African, Caribbean and Pacific nations must be required to do more and never allow the issue to divide us.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have within our group developed, developing and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). This combination of three classes of countries in this partnership makes this alliance a unique one. My country is an LDC. However, it has now been earmarked by the UN for graduation from its LDC status. This will be a challenging step for Vanuatu, but we will confront this challenge responsibly to demonstrate that progress is a product of a combination of factors working together. These factors include inter alia the result of this partnership which has contributed to strengthen different productive sectors of our economy.

Graduation is a matter of process. However, the question of permanent vulnerabilities remains a critical factor which could not be permanently overcome. This partnership is expected to fully acknowledge these issues and provide pragmatic responses.

As I conclude I take this opportunity to once again welcome you all to Vanuatu and I hope that, apart from learning more about our land, our social environment, our people and our Melanesian traditions, you are seizing the opportunity of our friendly and peaceful environment to conduct constructive bilateral consultations which are also essential to our future partnership. We look forward to a successful outcome of your deliberations.

May God the Almighty bless you.

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