

# **Statement by the ACP Secretary General at the Pacific ACP (PACP) Leaders Meeting of the 46th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 8 September 2015**

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### *[Protocols]*

May I begin by expressing my deep appreciation for being invited to address the Pacific ACP Leaders on the occasion of the 46th session of the Pacific Island Forum. The ACP Secretariat is indeed honoured for this opportunity to update Your Excellencies, on the priorities and policies of the ACP Group of States, which your representatives – Ministers as well as Ambassadors – task us to implement.

But before I do so, please allow me to place on record our gratitude to the Right Honourable Prime Minister O'Neill, for hosting us today, and to express our admiration of the considerable social and economic strides being undertaken by the Government and People of Papua New Guinea, which the ACP's delegation has been privileged to witness firsthand.

Honourable Leaders

This being her first Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting as Secretary General, please allow me to congratulate Dame Meg Taylor on her assumption of the mantle of leadership, and to assure her of our full cooperation and readiness to work with the Forum Secretariat towards the realisation of our shared objectives.

The theme on which I have been invited to address Your Excellencies today is entitled "Perspectives for strengthening the ACP-EU relationship beyond Cotonou 2020 and implications for the Pacific". I also intend to briefly address aspects of the 11th European Development Fund, trade matters including the economic partnership agreements, Pacific's ACP presence in Brussels, and development issues of importance to the Pacific ACP States.

To assist in designing a proactive strategy for negotiations in 2017 with the EU on the relationship beyond 2020, the ACP Group has already commissioned a study to look into our future relations. The study will be completed in November, and will enable a broad engagement within member states and among civil society and private sector partners. We invite the Pacific to make full use of the study.

Both the ACP Secretariat and the European Commission share the view that any negotiations on the future of the relationship post-2020 should build on the successes of the Cotonou Agreement, while improving on its shortfalls.

On trade matters, we intend to vigorously pursue the cause of adding value to our agricultural, natural and mineral resources, as well as more favourable conditions and terms of trade for our member states in the international arena. Of great importance will be the investment on fisheries and other marine resources.

More immediately however, perhaps the most urgent task before us is ensuring a successful outcome for our member states at the 10th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation, MC10, which will take place in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi in December; - the first occasion on which an ACP country will host such an event. To better prepare our member states for a decisive role in the final outcome of MC10 – as we did at MC9 in Bali two years ago, (the trade facilitation agreement) – the ACP Ministerial Trade Committee will convene in Brussels in October. I received confirmation last night that Commissioner maelstrom will attend that meeting, to consolidate its common position. We are also facilitating a preparatory meeting for the Pacific region, to take place in Vanuatu in September.

Dear Ministers please participate fully in both meetings to ensure that the Pacific's positions and priorities are fully reflected in the ACP position.

Any discussion on ACP trade matters would be incomplete without making reference to the economic partnership agreements, EPAs. The year 2014 witnessed the conclusion of negotiations on EPAs between the EU on the one hand, and the ACP configurations of West Africa, the East African Community, and Eastern and Southern Africa on the other. CARIFORUM concluded a full EPA in 2008 and is now implementing, though facing many hurdles. This leaves the Pacific, Economic Community of Central African States and the Southern Africa Development Community to conclude negotiations in their best interests.

At the same time, ACP Member States have reported numerous challenges and constraints, both in concluding the negotiations, as well as the implementation of interim and/or full EPAs. We therefore call on the EU to show full understanding of regional priorities such as the Continental Free Trade Area in Africa, the "capacity to implement", as well as development

issues and the supply side constraints that our member states are facing. This demand echoes the Cotonou Agreement, which states that “Negotiations on EPAs will be pursued with ACP countries which consider themselves in a position to do so, at the level they consider appropriate and in accordance with the rules agreed by the ACP Group and with a view to supporting regional integration processes within the ACP”.

Mr. Chairman

The ACP is also concerned about preference erosion, as the EU negotiates trade relations with third parties, particularly with the United States of America on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). We therefore urge the EU to observe Article 12 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement to the fullest... which requires prior consultations with the ACP on any measures that may be harmful to the interests of ACP States.

Please allow me, Excellencies to proudly acknowledge the visits paid to the ACP Secretariat by Pacific Heads of Government, most recently by Right Honourable Prime Minister Sopoaga of Tuvalu, and Prime Minister O’Neill, both in June this year. Prior to that, we were privileged to receive the Right Honourable Sato Kilman of Vanuatu, then in his capacity as President of the ACP Council of Ministers.

At the level of permanent representation, we laud Palau’s decision to establish an Embassy in Brussels, and to assure them of our full and unstinting cooperation. While it may be proving difficult for every member state to have a full-fledged Mission in Brussels, the possibility of replicating the practice of the Eastern Caribbean States, with one Ambassador representing 4 countries could be explored. Moreover, an enhanced presence for the Pacific Islands Forum in Brussels, as is the case with several regional organisations, could prove fruitful in the long run and we hope this can be pursued.

A discourse on the Pacific’s development aspirations would not be complete without reference to climate change and disaster management and recovery. In March Cyclone Pam wreaked unprecedented havoc on Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Solomons and other neighbouring island states, causing loss of lives and untold destruction to property. For the first time, the ACP was able to dispatch a mission immediately, led by Ambassador Mose of the Solomon Islands, to ascertain the situation on the ground firsthand, and to register the ACP Group’s solidarity with the people affected, including delivering a modest sum as ACP’s immediate contribution to the government of Vanuatu. This was made possible thanks to the generosity of the President-in-office of the ACP Summit, His Excellency President OBIANG of Equatorial Guinea.

Longer term however, the ACP Council of Ministers, approved in May the recommendation of the Committee of Ambassadors to establish an ACP Forum on Small Island Developing States. Work is currently underway to implement this landmark decision. Furthermore, provisions have been made in the intra-ACP envelop of the 11th EDF to address the challenges posed by climate change and disaster management and recovery.

All ACP countries and regions will be eligible to access the intra-ACP envelop, expected to be available from early 2016. We look forward to the issues and ideas faced by the Pacific.

I turn now to Paris and the 21st UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, CoP21. To this end, the ACP Group will organise a preparatory meeting in Brussels, which will provide the opportunity for member states to work towards a common position. The ACP Group fully supports the view that any final outcome from Paris should be legally binding and ensure common but differentiated responsibilities taking into consideration existing capacities of member states. We fully share the concerns of the Pacific peoples regarding the existential threats posed by climate change and support your common position.

Finally Mr. Chairman, allow me to register our deep appreciation to your esteemed self, as the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, for generously offering to host the 8th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government next year at the end of May. The Pacific region of course, has a sterling track record of hosting major ACP events, including the 3rd Summit in Fiji in 2002.

To ensure a successful 8th Summit, the ACP Group will work closely with the authorities in Papua New Guinea, as well as the Summit President-in-office President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea. Efforts will include closer engagement with the Eminent Persons Group, whose final report will be tabled at the said Summit, as well as the Chairs of the ACP regional configurations.

May I therefore ask for the full support, guidance and cooperation of Pacific ACP Leaders to ensure a successful Summit next year here in Port Moresby.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In conclusions, our priorities for the period 2015 to 2020, and beyond, will therefore focus on:

- rebalancing the ACP-EU relationship towards an equitable and mutually respectful partnership,
- widening and strengthening our partnerships beyond the EU,
- establishing a greater presence and visibility in international fora, such as enhancing the ACP’s observer status at the United Nations,
- improving the financial sustainability of the Group, including the establishment of an Endowment and Long Term Investment and Development Fund – for which I must once again thank Papua New Guinea for already supporting a feasibility study for the fund;
- enhancing cooperation among ACP member states through south south and triangular cooperation,
- special attention on strengthening health systems in the ACP states; the examples of Cuba will be drawn upon
- finally, restructuring the setup of the ACP Secretariat to better deal with the aforementioned priorities.

I therefore strongly urge Pacific ACP Leaders to continue your support of and active participation in the ACP Group, so that together we can better represent the Pacific’s interests in Brussels and beyond, in such areas as poverty eradication, climate change mitigation and adaptation, international trade negotiations, fisheries management and sustainable development goals for all humanity.

I thank you for your kind attention.

**Dr. Patrick I Gomes**  
**Secretary General**

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