

Statement by the Secretary General at the 4th Meeting of ACP Ministers in charge of Fisheries, 22 July 2015, Brussels.

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[Protocols]

I am delighted to welcome you to the fourth meeting of the ACP Ministers in charge of Fisheries and Aquaculture being held here at the ACP Secretariat. I particularly welcome the Honourable Ministers who are joining us today for this segment of after your officials have done such extensive work despite it being a holiday yesterday.

Please feel at home here in Brussels, here at your House amongst the ACP family.

In recognition of the paramount importance of fisheries to the economies of ACP countries, the 87th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers which was held in Addis Ababa in 2008 adopted a resolution on Fisheries and Marine Resource Management. This Resolution called for the convening of a meeting of ACP Ministers in charge of Fisheries. One of the main objectives of the Ministerial meeting was the setting up of a mechanism for Ministerial coordination and policy cooperation on fisheries and marine resources.

Since the first meeting held in 2009 in Brussels, Belgium, the Government of Seychelles hosted the second meeting in 2010, and the third meeting took place in Nadi, Fiji in 2012.

Honourable Ministers,

It is acknowledged that over two thirds of global capture fisheries output is now originating from developing countries, and the value of globally traded fisheries products is reaching 150 billion USD, when aquaculture is included. The enormous potential of this sector for our development and particularly for the Sustainable Development Goals has been just highlighted by Director General De Melo [of the European Commission Directorate-General for Development]. That is why we too in the ACP see what took place last week [at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development] in Addis Ababa as a lead-up to the New York meetings on Sustainable development and then to the Paris Conference on Climate Change. While the potential of fisheries and aquaculture to drive many of our national economies is enormous, so are the looming dangers of environmental degradation, resource overexploitation, stock declines, stock collapses, and the negative impacts of climate change.

To ensure that the stewardship of our own national and internationally shared fisheries resources is commensurate with the challenges of ever-expanding global demands in the fisheries sector, it is of paramount importance under these circumstances to be vigilant, creative and ingenious. Actions by the ACP Group as a whole and complementary to regional and national initiatives deserve serious attention.

It would be recalled that one of the important outputs of the third meeting of Ministers in Charge of Fisheries in Fiji was a 5-year Strategic Plan of Action for Fisheries and Aquaculture. The vision set out in that Strategic Plan was for ACP countries to take control and management of their fisheries resources to benefit their people now and in the future. This vision is fully in line with the principle of sustainable management and equitable benefit sharing of ACP fisheries resources.

Honourable Ministers,

For the past two days, the Senior Officials have brainstormed on critical issues of concern to the ACP countries in this important sector, and in particular, the elements of the Strategic Plan of action and status of its implementation. Along the themes in the Strategic Plan, the crucial issues of sustainable fisheries management; optimization of fisheries sustainability; food security; aquaculture development; and protection of the marine environment were variously discussed. A roadmap for actualizing the elements of the Strategic Plan is envisioned.

The discussions also took into consideration the fact that ACP countries need to look beyond fisheries as a natural renewable resource, from the single perspective of maximizing output, market opportunities and foreign exchange earnings. Fisheries potentials can equally be harnessed and maintained under scenarios of sustainable and responsible fisheries governance.

Honourable Ministers,

At the end of your deliberations, the resolution you will adopt will guide our members states on strategies to be deployed to tackle the numerous challenge faced by the ACP Member States in the fisheries sector and particularly through the relations with our partners in the European Union.

Who better than you, Honourable Ministers, can guide, inspire and lead these comprehensive and dynamic strategies for ACP fisheries sectors and the marine economy as a whole, to ensure the realization of the sustainable development goals as we look to 2030 and beyond!

I wish you fruitful deliberations and an enjoyable stay in Brussels.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Patrick I. Gomes
ACP Secretary General

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