

Statement by the Secretary General at the 4th Meeting of ACP Ministers of Culture, 9th November 2017, Brussels

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Honourable Chair, Minister of Tourism and Culture of the Republic of the Gambia Hon. Hamat Bah

Honourable Ministers; Senior Officials

Ambassadors and Plenipotentiaries of ACP member states

Distinguished guests, and friends

A special welcome to the Minister from the Dominican Republic. When we heard the ACP anthem [which you have just heard played], I wish to recall that the anthem was composed by the versatile musician of the Dominican Republic. We hear in it also the drumming that comes from your neighbouring island of Haiti. I'm always touched when I hear the anthem and we thank you very much for being with us.

I am pleased to welcome everyone to ACP House for the 4th meeting of ACP Ministers of Culture. I appreciate the commitment and dedication of all who are here with us today, especially those who have had to cover long distances to be in Brussels. This is a demonstration of your strong support for the development of cultural industries in ACP countries.

Allow me to thank the senior officials who have worked very assiduously over the last two days to prepare for this meeting. We all look forward to their report later today.

Hon. Ministers,

It is five years since the last meeting of ACP Ministers of Culture. This meeting, therefore, gives us an opportunity to discuss the state of implementation of the 2012 Brussels Resolution, and results of the ACPCultures+ programme which ends in December 2017. The Secretariat will also present perspectives for the cultural sector in the programming of the 11th EDF, and ACP-EU relations post 2020.

I am certain your collective wisdom and strong commitment will provide fruitful and action-oriented outcomes to advance cultural industries and entrepreneurship in the ACP family.

Hon. Ministers,

I believe that this meeting is most timely and relevant. The world is experiencing unprecedented social, political, ideological and economic upheavals. Never has humanity's destiny felt so intertwined, and yet how sadly we feel each day to be so far apart.

Many countries and communities witness political polarisation, religious intolerance and civil conflict. Above it all, is an ecological crisis engulfing the welfare and livelihoods of people everywhere.

In this context, the cultural sector takes on special significance, promoting greater social awareness, open-mindedness, and providing a medium for people to express their customs, traditions and values regardless of race, creed, country of birth or factors that promote exclusion.

Although culture was not specifically included among the 17 SDGs, many of us see it as a cross-cutting issue with profound implications and direct bearing on many aspects of "planet, people and prosperity". This was the thinking behind the adoption of the theme for your meeting: *Making culture an impact investment in achieving the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*.

Culture is widely recognized as an important lever for the eradication of poverty, empowering women and young people, helping to enable sustained and inclusive economic growth, shared prosperity and a world of equal opportunity allowing for the full realization of human potential.

Culture is also critical to generating meaningful employment and decent jobs, constituting one of the most important sources of wealth of our countries. According to the 2010 UNCTAD report on the creative economy, cultural and creative industries generate €2 billion in revenue each year, and provide almost 3 million jobs and 3% of Global GDP. This explains, in part, why culture has been identified as a strategic policy domain by some of our regional organisations.

Hon. Ministers,

A number of factors are conducive for ACP cultural and creative industries. **These include** strong demographic growth; high levels of creativity and innovation and growing consumer demand for local artistic and cultural content, in a range of goods and services – in clothing, jewelry, household products, games and communications.

Indeed, digital technologies present enormous scope for local cultural industries and for wider distribution of ACP cultural works and content, with new possibilities for paperless transactions and business models.

However, ACP cultural and creative industries are also facing many challenges and these will be a subject of your meeting. Far from attempting to pre-empt your discussions, may I mention in very general terms, a few issues of concern to cultural operators.

First, is the lack of adequate protection of indigenous cultural property and copyright. In many countries, the legal framework either does not exist or is poorly enforced. This, coupled with lack of emphasis on cultural diversity, support to local languages and cultural heritage as well as implementation of UNESCO Conventions has made local cultures open to harmful or unprofitable exploitation and loss of cultural diversity.

Secondly, the cultural sector is still not seen as a viable economic proposition in many of our countries. We therefore need to enhance access to cultural industries for all of our citizens and more specifically, to young people, women, the disadvantaged and populations in rural areas. We need to encourage training and capacity building, especially in cultural management, authors' rights, the use of digital tools and implementation of cultural policies, as well as the inclusion of cultural studies in educational curricula.

Most importantly, artistes and cultural operators must be given proper protection through specific legislation and support for their mobility among ACP countries and between ACP countries and Europe.

Hon. Ministers,

The third challenge facing the sector that merits your serious attention is the reduction of international funding, inadequate budgetary allocations and access to financial resources at national and international level in order to sustainably support emerging cultural sector models, the digital transition, production and distribution of ACP cultural goods and services. In this regard, it is very regrettable that US government support for UNESCO has been withdrawn and trust this will soon be restored.

Hon. Ministers,

In the preamble to the Cotonou Agreement, and as stated in the Georgetown Agreement establishing the ACP Group of States, explicit reference is made to "the development of greater and closer economic, political, social and cultural relations among developing countries..."- to foster closer cultural relations has always been a principal objective of the ACP. This resolve has been admirably addressed by the Secretariat's programmes on culture, through the support of the EDF, beginning with the programmes on ACP Films and ACP Cultures under the 9th EDF in 2003, then merged under the current ACP Cultures+ programme.

It is encouraging, from what I have been advised, that the results of the programmes so far vividly illustrate the growth and depth of the contribution by cultural enterprises and industries to ACP economies.

I understand the officials' report also includes a draft Resolution for your consideration and approval. The Resolution presents proposals and is a demonstration of the political will to further cooperation between the ACP Group of States and the European Union in the framework of their joint support to the ACP cultural enterprises and industries.

Hon. Ministers, Distinguished invited guests,

In the words of the motto of the Cultures+ programme –No future Without culture, and as the late President Leopold Senghor, legendary icon and advocate of cultural cooperation has said – "Culture is at the beginning and end of every meaningful human action".

As we recall the memory of the late President, I wish your deliberations to be fruitful and of lasting value to today's generation and for those to come.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Patrick I. Gomes
ACP Secretary General

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