

Statement by the Secretary General at the Opening of the Central African Regional Consultations of the Eminent Persons Group, 2 June 2014, Malabo - Equatorial Guinea

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Your Excellency, Teodoro Obiang Nguema MBASOGO, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea
Your Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria and Chairman of the ACP Eminent Persons' Group (EPG)

Your Excellency, Bharrat JAGDEO, former President of Guyana and other ACP Eminent Persons Group members present, Honourable Ministers,
Highly distinguished personalities, delegates and resource persons,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Your Excellency, Mr President,

It is an honour and privilege for me and with great pleasure that I address this august assembly of very highly distinguished personalities from the Central Africa region.

I would like to thank Your Excellency, Mr President, the Government and the Peoples of Republic of Equatorial Guinea for the warm welcome and generous hospitality that has been accorded to me and my colleagues from the Secretariat, since our arrival in this beautiful city of Malabo and at this conference venue in Sipopo.

But I should thank you even more for not only offering to host the Fourth Meeting of the ACP Eminent Persons Group and the Central Africa regional Consultations but also for taking time off your extremely busy schedule to come here this morning to deliver an opening statement.

We remember with fond memories that your country hosted the 7th ACP Summit of Heads of State and Government in December 2012. Since then, the leadership you have provided in your capacity as President of the ACP Summit of Heads of State and Government has raised the profile and improved the visibility of the ACP Group of States. Your Excellency's personal commitment and that of your country Equatorial Guinea to the ACP cause is highly appreciated.

Your Excellency has also favoured the ACP Group with a visit to the ACP House in Brussels this year on 4 April 2014, on which occasion you addressed the ACP Committee of Ambassadors. Your generous financial donation in support of the work of the ACP Secretariat and the beautiful gift to the Committee are memories still fresh in our minds.

Today, you are here with us and I should deeply thank you once again for your genuine dedication and support to the ACP Group.

Allow me to also recognize the presence of His Excellency, Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, Chairman of the ACP Eminent Persons Group on the future of the ACP beyond 2020 as well as his Vice Chairman, President Jagdeo of Guyana. Their presence today is a clear testimony of their commitment and dedication to the work of the EPG.

Finally, I should thank the organizers of this meeting who have worked with the ACP Secretariat. I should mention, the Coordinator of the ACP Central African Ambassadors in Brussels, particularly their coordinator, Ambassador Ousmane MATAR BREME of Tchad and Ambassador Carmelo NVONO NCA of Equatorial Guinea, both respectively played a key role in making this consultation process and Fourth EPG meeting a reality.

Your Excellencies,

As I have had the occasion to say in other regions that have concluded their consultations, it is worth recalling that the ACP Group embraces 79 member countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Islands of the Pacific. The ACP Group dates back to the Rome Treaty 1957 when the former French African colonial dependencies were brought into Association status with the European Economic Community. The membership was later expanded in 1973 when Britain acceded to the Community, bringing with it her erstwhile colonial dependencies that were now members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

With the further expansion of the European Economic Community that brought Spain and Portugal into the European system,

the former Portuguese and Spanish colonies in Africa and the Caribbean also became members of the ACP Group.

The ACP Group emerged largely as an association of countries that share particular ties with the former European colonial powers and that are bound to Europe through history, economics and trade arrangements.

But the ACP does not define itself solely in its relationship with Europe. The Georgetown Agreement of 1975 sought to establish the ACP as an intergovernmental body bound together by a shared sense of South-South solidarity and commitment to the pursuit of equity in world economic system and international trade and in the use of dialogue as the primary instrument of international cooperation.

The ACP is the largest trans-regional intergovernmental organisation of developing countries in the international system. The collective strength of the ACP Group derives from decades of inter-regional solidarity, international trade negotiations, development finance cooperation political dialogue and relations with other international organisations.

There is potential to build on this numeric strength to promote the collective cause of the Members, with opportunity to establish crucial alliances not only with Europe but with some of the emerging global players in the world economy.

At the various levels these relations need to be nourished to allow for greater intra-ACP cooperation and coordination, and a more cohesive, proactive and vibrant Group.

Indeed, the call for solidarity, greater visibility, relations with other international groups, streamlining of the core business of the ACP and empowering its Secretariat has been a constant theme of all of the Summits of ACP Heads of State and Government since the last two decades.

The ACP Group has existed for more than 30 years without having lost a single member. Since 1975, its membership has nearly doubled to its current 79 developing countries, soon to be 80 with the accession of South Sudan which currently has an observer status. We are optimistic that the political and security situation in South Sudan will be resolved soon.

The call for action to justify the ACP's relevance today is also an urgent reminder that the global context in which we have operated hitherto has been radically transformed. At the same time, it is a call to reaffirm our solidarity and the inherent dynamism and durability of the ACP 'family of nations'.

It is for this reason that the Eminent Persons Group on the future of the ACP beyond 2020 was formed and launched on March 25, 2013. It is comprised of 12 distinguished personalities and statesmen from the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The Chairman of the Group is a Great Son of Africa, Chief Olusegun OBASANJO. I personally and on behalf of the ACP Group would like to thank him most immensely for agreeing to take up this great responsibility.

President Obasanjo has continued to exhibit exceptional commitment to the Group's work. We are all indebted to him particularly because we are aware of his other challenging responsibilities and commitments in service to his country - Nigeria, the African continent and indeed the ACP Group. President Obasanjo, please accept our deep gratitude. We are confident that Your Excellency will ably steer the Eminent Persons Group to deliver on its mandate.

The members of the EPG include former heads of state or government, executives at international organisations, accomplished academics, and former high level government officials. The eminent persons were selected for their distinctive leadership skills, far-reaching experience in international affairs and development, and sound technical knowledge in their various fields. Each possesses the demonstrated ability to 'think out of the box' to find solutions for complex problems.

But most importantly, the EPG members represent the African, Caribbean and Pacific people who would be the main beneficiaries of a sturdier, more dynamic ACP Group.

The significant task assigned to the Group is that of independently reviewing the 79-member ACP Group as an international organisation and to offer the future perspectives that the Group should pursue post 2020 when the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, commonly known as the Cotonou Agreement comes to an end.

The creation of the EPG was an initiative of my predecessor, His Excellency Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, immediate former Secretary General of the ACP Group of States. As the organisation goes through a process of self-evaluation and renewal, with the aim of becoming more active, visible and effective in helping its populations, his idea to create a Group that would engage stakeholders on the ground in ACP countries in the debate on the future perspectives for the ACP Group is commendable and remains valid today.

So far the EPG has held four consultations - in the Pacific, the Caribbean, West Africa and East Africa regions. This is the fifth such consultation. The remaining region, Southern Africa will meet in Brussels next week from 10 - 11 June 2014.

The ultimate objective is to gather key contributions from the stakeholders that can inform and guide the EPG members when compiling their final report. At the same time, inputs from ACP peoples from all walks of life are strongly encouraged, through online discussions on a webpage that the ACP Secretariat has opened on its website.

The final report of the EPG will be presented to the 8th Summit of Heads of State and Government due to take place in Paramaribo, Suriname during the period 3 - 7 November 2014.

That is why we are here today. We would like to hear your views in your various capacities as government officials, parliamentarians as well as non-state actors drawn from the private sector and civil society. And for that reason, I encourage and urge you to be frank and candid because it is only by being open that we will comprehend what you want your organization

to be and to do for you in the future.

The regional delegates and resource persons gathered here today have among them a lot of knowledge and great experience in various fields. We believe that their collective wisdom will help to make this consultation process a great success.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

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