



**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF
COUNCIL**

**H.E. M. MOHAMMED DIARE
PRESIDENT OF ACP COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ECONOMY AND FINANCE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA**

**On the Occasion of the Opening Session of the 100th
Meeting of ACP Ministers Held at ACP House, Brussels,
Belgium**

Wednesday 10th December 2014

ACP House, Brussels

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL

Honourable Ministers,

Our Special Guest, H.E. Mr. Li Yong, Director-General of UNIDO,

Your Excellency, Secretary-General Muhammad Mumuni,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you fraternal greetings from H. E. President Alpha Condé and the Government and good people of the Republic of Guinea. Permit me to express how delighted I am to be here. Indeed, I consider it an honour and privilege to be presiding over the affairs of this august 100th Council here at ACP House.

From my humble experience, the month of December is not always the most auspicious period in which to hold an international meeting. The fact that you are here today, in spite of the pressing affairs of state in your home countries testifies to the importance you accord our ACP family of nations and this ministerial Council in particular.

This is the 100th in our series of meetings. One hundred is an important number in the life of individuals as it is of nations and indeed international organisations. Over the decades, we have come to know each other better and better. We have established procedures and norms that stand the test of time.

Honourable Ministers,

The ACP has come of age. We can no longer define ourselves as an organization in search of a mission. Rather, we are an increasingly

important global player in quest of new territory and an ever increasing and more clearly defined and more focused mandate.

Who we are and what we are is no longer in doubt: We are an intergovernmental body united together by a shared experience and a common sense of destiny and collective in the world scene. To sure, some of our countries are large' some are medium; and many others are relatively small. Quite a good number are landlocked while others are small island states. But there is a common thread and a shared fraternity that unites us all. As an ancient African wisdom saying goes, *“a family is like a forest, when you are outside it is dense, when you are inside you see that each tree has its place”*.

Under international law, all nations are equal -- equal under God, the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth. All of us -- whether large or small -- share the common experience of global marginality and vulnerability. We are all united by our commitment to solidarity, to the fraternity of nations - to a world governed by law and the norms of international justice and equity.

Your Excellencies,

It is my conviction that it is only through unity and solidarity that developing countries such as ours can promote their common interest and the values that they cherish. In a world that is more integrated than ever, thanks to globalisation and liberalization of world trade, capital and markets; there appears to be a discernible spirit of retreat from internationalism and global collective action. The legitimacy of the key international institutions of global governance is coming increasingly under question. And yet, we all know from history that the perils of world order have been worsened by the absence of global leadership and commitment to global collective action.

This is why success of the ACP is of such importance to the future of our common humanity. The ACP is an association of 79 countries with a population of almost a billion people. We represent a significant part of the family of nations. From the viewpoint of the poor and vulnerable nations, we are the moral majority. Not only do we count; we must continue to make our voice count in the scheme of things - in the great concert of the nations.

Honourable Ministers,

We meet in challenging times. As I speak, the scourge of Ebola is ravaging through some of our countries in West Africa, the most affected being my own beloved Guinea as well as our neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia. Indeed, all the countries of the Mano River Union have felt the impact of this dreaded epidemic in one way or the other.

Your Excellencies,

Ebola is a strange and alien disease. The great Malinke civilization that goes back to ancient times has a sense of continuity and collective memory through our *griots*, poets and historians. Our ancient and proud people have no record of a disease ever manifesting the symptoms of something as dreadful and evil as Ebola.

As everybody knows, the first reported cases were from the rural countryside of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as far back as September 1976. It was certainly unknown in our ancient ancestral savannah of West Africa. According to some experts, Ebola might have broken out in our region as late 2013, but since it was something completely strange to our people, we were slow to detect it or even recognize it as a dangerous epidemic. It was in March 2014 that it dawned on us in Guinea that we had a big problem in our hands, with reported incidences in southern prefectures such as Macenta, Guéckédou, and Kossidougou. Ever since, there have been 1,971 clinical cases and about 1,260 deaths from the disease. The hotspots include areas around our capital of Conakry and the south-west districts bordering Liberia. Some 10 of our country's 34 districts have not reported any incidences of Ebola.

Thanks to the decisive actions by the Government of Guinea and through the support of the international community, I am happy to report that, as at end of November, the weekly growth in the number of reported cases has continued to dwindle. Sadly, in border areas such as Faranah district at the frontier of Sierra Leone, some new cases have been reported. However, I am pleased to report that we have made considerable progress in our outbreak control goals. Over 70 percent of reported cases are being isolated while 80 percent of our required burial teams have been active.

Your Excellencies,

Ebola has been a devastating humanitarian tragedy for our people. The World Bank has modeled the macroeconomic impact on the affected countries, coming out with “low” as well as “high” scenarios. In the low scenario, the Ebola epidemic is forecast to cost West Africa an estimated \$2.2 billion in 2014 and \$1.6 billion in 2015 in lost GDP. In the high scenario, the figures amount to \$7.4 billion in 2014 and a whopping \$25.2 billion in 2015. Our economies are experiencing capital flight. Investors are no longer to come. Jobs are being lost. Social capital is being eroded. Families and communities have been traumatized in ways that words cannot quite convey.

Throughout these trials and tribulations, we have received encouraging support from the international community, including many of our sister ACP member nations. The EU Ebola Coordinator and Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, visited our region in early November to see things for himself. We are particularly encouraged by the announcement of €1.1 billion from our EU partners in support of the Ebola-ravaged countries.

Also, a fortnight ago, we had the honour of receiving President François Hollande who came on a solidarity visit to Conakry. We were encouraged by his demonstration of commitment, having announced a pledge of €100 million to support action against Ebola, in addition to other practical measures to support our health system in the arduous battle against this evil plague.

Several agencies have committed resources and personnel to help us overcome that dreadful disease. We can only express our deepest and most heartfelt gratitude. But I must say greater collective action is required if this mountain is to be moved and if we are to secure the lives and livelihoods of millions in West Africa.

Honourable Ministers,

Viruses such as Ebola recognize no borders. In a world made small by new technologies of communication and the forces of globalisation, diseases can easily cross borders. It is therefore in our collective interest to support countries undergoing viral epidemic attacks to devise effective control mechanisms.

It is no coincidence that the countries most affected are also among the poorest countries in the world. Liberia and Sierra Leone had undergone violent war and civil strife. Guinea had its own challenges during a difficult political transition. When the guns fell silent, we all rejoiced. The return to democracy and the rule of law was the herald of a new dawn, giving renewed hope to our people. Before the outbreak of Ebola, West Africa was the fastest growing sub-region on the continent of Africa. The African Development Bank put GDP growth in ECOWAS at 6.9 percent in 2012 and 6.7 percent in 2013. Despite the Ebola outbreak, it is forecast to reach 7.2 percent in 2014. There is no doubt that the outlook would have been ever brighter if we did not have to contend with the dreaded epidemic virus.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ebola is about our common and inseparable Humanity. We continue to call on all of you to come to our help. We also call on our European partners and the international community to support us in our heroic effort to fight this scourge and to restore hope to our people. Crucially important will be the support to our health systems to enable them to become more resilient in the years ahead. Equally important is the rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructures and enhancing national budgets so as to devise effective social protection and long-term sustainable health systems.

Among the Zulu people of South Africa, it is said that “*you can never fight an evil disease with sweet medicine*”. We in Guinea, as indeed in the affected countries, are keenly aware that we must make tough choices ahead. We have to apply more stringent economies in our expenditure systems to ensure that resources go to the areas of the greatest need and sectors that will have the greatest impact in terms of improved livelihoods. All of us must make sacrifices. And we the leaders must lead by example.

Honourable Ministers,

We have a busy schedule ahead of us. Apart from issues of trade and commodities, this 100th Session will be considering the budget for the coming year 2015; we will also be appointing a new Secretary-General to lead our organization for the next five years in addition to receiving the

interim Report of the Eminent Person Group (EPG) that was established to help us forge a brave new future.

I need not remind us that the ACP is in need of leadership to steer the affairs of our organization and to prepare for our post-2020 future. We have a new European Commission under the Presidency of Jean-Claude Juncker. As the EU parliamentary elections in the summer made clear, we face a new Europe that is decidedly right of centre. We cannot continue to do business-as-usual. Aid fatigue is a fact of our emerging international economic order. It is therefore important that we reposition the ACP as a credible international organization that can leverage on its capacity to mobilize resources from diverse partnerships.

This is why the choice we make in terms of who becomes our new Secretary-General is a matter of the utmost importance. Among the Ashanti people of Ghana, it is said that *“an army of sheep led by a lion can defeat an army of lions led by a sheep”*. The ACP is in dire need of a lion or lioness to steer our organization in boldness, courage and sagacity in the coming years.

Let me use my Good Offices as President to express my concern about the budget and the financial situation of our organization. From the reports we have received, at the month of November, some 25 countries have not made any payment whatsoever towards their contribution to the 2014 budget while only 28 member states have paid their entire contribution for the current year. Arrears from 23 member countries amount to a total of €1.4 million. Ten countries are under sanctions for being in default of payment for at least one full year.

Honourable Ministers,

You will agree with me that this situation is untenable. We cannot demand so much from our Secretariat while at the same time robbing them of the wherewithal to perform their mandate. We were greatly encouraged by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea and President José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola who both made substantial donations to our organization over and above their assessed contributions. These funds went into supporting the Secretariat and the work of the Eminent Persons Group. We are profoundly grateful to both countries. I would like to use this opportunity to urge some of our

financially more buoyant members to imitate the good example laid by both Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

In concluding this address, let me express how delighted we are to welcome in our midst H. E. Mr. Li Yong, Director-General of UNIDO who will be addressing us this morning. I also understand that he will be launching the *African Industrialisation Day* tomorrow Wednesday the 10th of December during lunchtime. The organization he leads is a respected and trusted partner of the ACP. We have an ongoing MOU with UNIDO that has worked very well for both organisations. We look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration together.

Finally, let me thank the Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, my own compatriot, Ambassador Dr. Ousmane Sylla and his colleagues for all the preparatory work that has ensured a smooth and successful Council meeting. Our profound gratitude to Secretary-General Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni and the Secretariat for the warm reception we have received and for putting together all the necessary arrangements to ensuring a successful meeting. I also note that this Council meeting will be the last that Alhaji Mumuni will have with us before he departs at the end of February. During his brief stint as the head of our organization, he brought his wealth of experience as a lawyer, parliamentarian and statesman to bear positively on the work of the Secretariat. We thank him for his invaluable service and sacrifice to the cause of our ACP family of nations.

Thank you once again and let me wish us very successful deliberations.
