



Speech by

**Honourable Peter O'Neill, CMG, MP
Prime Minister**

To the

**Committee of Ambassadors
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**Chair of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors,
Secretary General of the ACP Group,
Dean of the ACP Ambassadors,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a pleasure to address this audience.

I would like to congratulate the new Secretary General, Dr Gomes, and his team assuming office.

I would also like to thank the Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, Ambassador of Vanuatu, His Excellency, Roy Mickey Joy for his leadership over the past few months.

Excellencies,

As the ACP finds itself at the crossroads – it needs bold and decisive leadership in finding solutions to consolidate its position going forward.

I believe that the new Secretary General and his team, with the support of all of us, from Leaders to the Committee of Ambassadors will deliver on the Group's aspirations.

I pledge our Government's support to the new leadership and encourage all members to maintain the solidarity and unity of action.

This unity was certainly desired by our founding fathers in Georgetown 40 years ago in 1975.

Excellencies,

Papua New Guinea will be celebrating 40 years of statehood in September this year.

Just like the rugged terrain of the hinterlands of the country, the journey has not always been smooth.

But this time has provided its fair share of rewards as well.

Papua New Guinea is blessed with an abundance of natural resources in hydrocarbon, minerals, agriculture and fisheries.

While we are 40 years as a State in the Western concept, we have tens of thousands of years of rich culture and tradition.

Certainly, the most important resource is our people with over 800 languages and dialects.

It is this diversity in the people that is one of our great strengths.

Papua New Guinea we are an open, transparent and democratic country.

We also have a strong economy – that has positive economic growth for 14 successive years.

This year we are anticipating growth close to 15 per cent.

Our national debt is manageable, and we are running planned budget deficits until a return to surplus in three years. Other economic factors including interest rates, exchange rates and inflation are reasonable and are not prone to wild fluctuations.

The political landscape of our country is also stable. Since 2002, we have had only two Governments and we will return to the people for election in 2017.

In the National Parliament, the overwhelming number of members vote with the Government.

This has given the Government the support that we needed to implement our core national policy pillars.

This includes free education that has seen more children now going to school than at any other time in our history. When we came to office there was around 1 million children– now we have close to two million. This has seen a large increase in the number of girls going to school who might have been marginalised when families had to pay school fees.

We now have universal healthcare in our country. This is contributing to long and healthier lives, and is very big boost to community moral and unity.

We have increased spending in our security and justice sector and this is making our communities much safe. We have increased police resources, have empowered our judiciary and introduced reforms in our corrective services.

The fourth policy pillar we have implemented is a massive infrastructure development programme. We are delivering new infrastructure and rehabilitating old infrastructure from the cities to the most remote areas.

These include roads, bridges and ports that helps our rural majority to get goods to market.

We have also rebulit infrastructure in our major economic centres to stimulate business, jobs and investment.

Our country and our economy is changing.

This has allowed us to attract large multinationals, like ExxonMobil and TOTAL, to partner with us to develop our resources.

Apart from exporting agriculture, fisheries and mineral products, we are also exporting natural gas.

However, the challenge for Papua New Guinea, as I believe this is for the ACP Group, is adding more midstream and downstream value to our natural resources.

Excellencies,

Another focus of our Government that is shared with ACP countries is how we deal with cross-border issues that have a devastating impact on our people at a local level.

The effects of climate change and pandemic disease in particular – are of great concern to our nation and the ACP community.

We are all vulnerable to these challenges.

It is my hope that lessons learnt from the Ebola crisis and the Cyclone PAM disaster will further strengthen our resolve, as a Group, to respond to crisis situations in the future.

I wish to offer my deepest sympathies once again to those who lost loved ones and suffered considerable loss from these tragedies.

In the case of Cyclone PAM, Papua New Guinea knew straight away that we could provide support to both Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

The ACP Group of countries are also vulnerable to diseases like Malaria and other epidemics.

Recently, we saw a terrible outbreak of the killer disease EBOLA in West Africa.

It is indeed encouraging to see the unity of the ACP Group in providing financial, material and morale support to those countries affected West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

To add to this collective support, our Government pledges an amount of 500,000 Kina, around 160,000 Euros, to assist in any post recovery efforts by these countries.

Excellencies,

I am optimistic for the future of the ACP Group post 2020.

The dedication of the Ambassadorial Working Group on the Future Perspectives of ACP, that culminated into a report to the Council of Ministers last December, is applauded.

I note that our Secretary General chaired this Working Group in his previous capacity as Ambassador of Guyana – so we can be rest assured that he is now better placed to take the recommendations of the Report to the next level.

I think we all agree that we need to further improve social and economic conditions within the ACP Group.

We must also think of the political dimension of the EU relationship, post-Lisbon Treaty, our overall partnership with the EU must be re-examined to ensure that the partnership remains relevant to the needs of the ACP Group.

The Landscape is not the same as 1975 when Cotonou was negotiated and sealed.

The EU membership has grown – and some new members have development challenges which require more EU budget.

This reduces the overall resources available to the ACP states.

It is therefore important that we reposition the ACP Group to mobilize resources from diverse partnerships.

This includes groups like BRICS, as well as within ourselves, to facilitate south-south and north-south triangular cooperation.

Allow me to highlight an important aspect of our group come 2020.

This financial viability and independence.

The recommendation by the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives, for the establishment of an ACP Long Term Endowment Fund, is important in this regard.

Papua New Guinea believes that given the strength of natural resources that the ACP have as a group, we can develop a long term fund using this strength.

This will allow us to have some financial independence in funding our development aspirations, especially in the areas of economic and social infrastructure.

In this regard, and by way of Papua New Guinea's contribution to the future perspective agenda, Papua New Guinea has pledged 500,000 Euros.

This is for a feasibility study to determine an appropriate structure to set up the Long Term Endowment Fund.

Excellencies,

This year is also an important year in terms of the global agenda for international development.

As you are aware, three important meetings will be conducted:

- They are the Conference on Financing Development in Addis Ababa in July;
- Followed by the UN Summit on the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda in New York in September; and
- The COP21 in Paris in December.

These inerrelated events provide the ACP Group with a unique opportunity to be heard and seen as one unified body and voice.

Papua New Guinea would therefore support any initiatives to make the ACP Group visible on these issues.

Whilst it is important that we focus on these events, I encourage member states not to lose sight of other equally important undertakings such as the '*Samoa Pathway*' for Small Island Developing States.

I look to us all taking necessary collective actions to implement the recommendations contained therein.

Small islands Developing States, of which about 50% are members of the ACP Group, give rise for us to be concerned about impacts of climate change.

We must take united positions on initiatives that would protect our peoples and economies from uncontrolled carbon emissions.

In this respect, Papua New Guinea would support initiatives for ACP SIDS, and other members of the Group, to call on developed countries to control and reduce their carbon emissions to acceptable levels.

We want to see that more developed countries take responsibility, working with SIDS, to devise practical sustainalbe development strategies.

This can be based on the practical use of our sea and land resources, through the Blue and Green sustainable development initiatives, to better engage with the global economy.

In this respect, Papua New Guinea is a founding member of the Coalition of Rain Forest Nations in Africa and South America.

This group has decided to protect and preserve their abundant rainforest resources to trade in the global carbon trade market.

The Group has worked over the years towards COP21, under the REDD-PLUS initiative.

It is hoped that COP21 in Paris will formerly approve a carbon trading framework that SIDS and other rainforest nations in the ACP Group could use in their green economic development strategies.

Finally, I have been briefed that the ACP Group is seeking support to host the 9th Session of the Leaders' Summit that had been intended to be held in the Caribbean region.

The venue is now open for other regions to host.

I wish to advise that Papua New Guinea is willing to host the Leaders' Summit in May 2016.

As part of our commitment to the ACP Group, our Government will be working closely with the ACP Secretary General and the Committee of Ambassadors to undertake this event.

Papua New Guinea is the host of a number of high level regional and global leaders' events in the coming years. This includes the Pacific Islands' Forum Leaders meeting this year, and the APEC Leaders' Summit in 2018.

Our Government has the logistical and substantive capacity to welcome Leaders and deliver a successful Summit.

It would be our honour to host this important global meeting.

Chairman, Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention and wish you all the best in your work and deliberations.

I look forward to welcoming you all in Port Moresby next year.

Thank you.