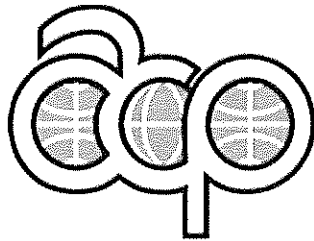


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**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. PATRICK I GOMES  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ACP GROUP OF STATES  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 8<sup>TH</sup> SUMMIT OF ACP  
HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

**Tuesday, 31 May 2016**

**National Convention Centre**

**PORT MORESBY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

- **The Right Honourable Peter O'NEILL, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea,**
- **Your Excellency Prime Minister Vincente TOMÉ, Special Representative of His Excellency Teodoro Obiang Nguema MBASOGO, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and Chair of the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government,**
- **Your Excellency, Honourable Prime Minister of Senegal...**
- **Your Excellencies, Vice-Presidents, Prime Ministers, Heads and Representatives of international and regional organisations,**
- **Distinguished invited guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to address this assembly at this time in the history of the ACP Group. May I begin by thanking the Right Honourable Prime Minister, the Government and People of Papua New Guinea for the tremendous welcome and hospitality extended to us. Your hosting of this Summit is a celebration of the commitment of the people of Papua New Guinea to the ACP's unity and solidarity.

Let me also congratulate You and the People of Papua New Guinea on the attainment of 40 years of independence and wish you many decades of peace, security and prosperity. The economic and social achievements over the years testify to the determination and dedication of this enchanting archipelago. Papua New Guinea is not only a key player in the ACP family; it is also making great strides in regional leadership. You were the sixth-fastest growing economy worldwide in 2011. You successfully hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> Pacific Games in July 2015; and the 46<sup>th</sup> Pacific Leaders Forum in September 2015. I wish you all success in preparations to host the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Summit in 2018.

## **Excellencies**

**The ACP Group also expresses its gratitude to the out-going Chair of the Summit, President Obiang Nguema MBASOGO of Equatorial Guinea, who unfortunately cannot be with us, due to constitutional requirements following his recent re-election. We are happy that Prime Minister Vicente E Hate Tome is with us as the President's representative. In appreciation of President OBIANG's generosity to the ACP Group, to other member states and the ACP's Secretariat, a suitable occasion is being considered for President Obiang's sterling contribution to be recognised in his home country.**

## **Excellencies**

History is more than a path left by the past; it influences the present and can shape the future. Today we meet in Papua New Guinea to once again shape our future as the ACP Group. Our history continues to be written, and we must craft a narrative – contemporary and unrelenting – in our purpose to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all.

As we seek to achieve the SDGs, the ACP Group is called upon to reassess its "*modus operandi*" and embrace opportunities to address the challenges that affect our countries. Poverty remains an abiding challenge for the vast majority of our people. Several of our small states in the Caribbean and the Pacific continue to grapple with the realities of increased vulnerability, loss of bio-diversity and rising sea levels. Desertification in the Sahel and the accompanying food security challenges in that region continue to cast a shadow over the life-chances of millions. Sub Saharan Africa is increasingly threatened not only by terrorism, but also drought, floods and famine, most recently manifested in Southern and Eastern parts of Africa.

## **Excellencies**

In 1975, the ACP Group placed its destiny with all progressive forces in the struggle against poverty, inequality and injustice, the core purpose for which it was established.

40 years later, this journey is now signified with decades of trade and economic cooperation, vigorous and contentious political engagements and a range of development finance programmes.

As we write the next chapter of the ACP story, we seek to enhance the ACP's role in the post 2015 era by leveraging our numerical strength and capacity to rally developing countries behind issues of common interest.

Looking ahead, we reaffirm our unflinching commitment towards taking the necessary steps to strengthen and deepen the cooperation and interaction among ACP Member States and the regional economic communities; expand our partnerships to embrace the Global South, and intensify our efforts to ensure a more balanced partnership with the European Union. The recent challenges of terrorism and migration encountered by our Member States also compel us to give even greater attention to opportunities for meaningful employment among women and youth.

## **Excellencies**

The milestone agreements witnessed last year, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provide appropriate frameworks to further pursue the ACP Group's mission of improving the livelihoods of our citizenry.

The 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change is another unique opportunity for the ACP Group to consolidate its position as a global player and partner in its implementation, especially in support of the priorities of our Member States. The ACP Group welcomes the outcome of COP 21, in which our partnership with the EU has been recognised in many quarters as pivotal in securing a legally binding Agreement.

### **Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

As we gather for this Summit to more effectively serve the interests of our Member States, we regard the occasion as a continuation of the self-interrogation and introspection that attained a major milestone at the 7<sup>th</sup> ACP Summit in the Sipopo Declaration. There we expressed the unequivocal determination not only to stay united, but to build on our solidarity and strength in order to face the challenges of a rapidly changing external environment.

The theme “Repositioning the ACP Group to meet the Challenges of Sustainable Development,” and the sub-themes of this Summit, namely, equitable and sustainable development, global governance, and peace and security, will provide an opportunity for our Heads to pronounce on “what and how” this ‘repositioning’ of the Group is to be undertaken.

I submit that in many respects, the ACP Group enjoys a comparative institutional advantage, at least in trade advocacy for developing countries, development finance and cultural cooperation. These have earned success by converging disparate geographical, cultural, linguistic and historical differences into a united Group. This should give us the conviction to speak with one voice in the global community of nations and to demonstrate the

maturing self-confidence and self-determination that we possess. Enhancing the role of the ACP Group in global governance for development is therefore not just an option; it is an imperative.

## **Excellencies**

Our deliberations today will also benefit from the work of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) that was established at the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit. The work of the EPG complements that of the ACP Council of Ministers, which on the recommendation of the Committee of Ambassadors had launched a process of reflections on future perspectives in 2011. More recently, the Committee of Ambassadors in retreat addressed priorities, principles and pillars for a reinvented ACP Group. This trilogy of reflections provides a composite body of rich experience and bold thoughts on the 21<sup>st</sup> century ACP Group that is being re-invented. This process will inform the dialogue and negotiating position of the Group with respect to the successor to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the EU.

In an increasingly interdependent world there is need to strengthen, rather than diminish, the modes of structured cooperation that have served us well, and the ACP-EU partnership has proved its worth over the past 40 years.

As Cotonou draws to a close, it will need to be replaced with an accord that responds to the challenges of the times and needs of our peoples in keeping with the objectives of Agenda 2030. A post-Cotonou Agreement offers the parties an opportunity for reflection on the way forward in terms of enhancing, improving and indeed making ACP-EU cooperation adaptable to new ideas, challenges and the impetus that is needed to speed up the realisation of our common ambitions for the attainment of sustainable

development for all the peoples who are the ultimate constituents of the ACP-EU partnership.

(pause)

In conclusion, I believe this Summit should mark a giant step forward in the historic journey that will shape the new, transformed and dynamic ACP Group. As I look at what lies ahead I am inspired by words of our beloved Nelson Madiba Mandela, *“as long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist, in our world, none of us can truly rest”*.

The ACP Group cannot rest, we can only move forward by aligning ourselves with the new global dynamics and continue to passionately pursue the ideals of our existence grounded in unity and solidarity. With your guidance, we shall courageously craft the path to that great future.

I look forward therefore with keen anticipation to the deliberations and decisions of this 8<sup>th</sup> Summit.

Thank you for your kind attention.

(Port Moresby, 31 May 2016.)