



Address to Special Committee of Ambassadors

**ACP House, Brussels
28 February 2020
1:00 Hours**

By

**H.E. Dr Patrick I. GOMES
Secretary-General of the
African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States**

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

**Excellencies, SG- designate Ambassdor Georges Chikoti
Representatives of ACP Misisons,
Regional Economic Communities and Regional Integration
Organizations,
Colleague ASGs and Senior Management,
All Staff,
Interpreters –apologies for my fast diction,
Friends of the ACP Family,**

The gracious gesture of the Committee of Ambassadors to invite me to say farewell at a special Session is in itself an honour for which I am truly grateful !

The occasion need not be one to hear only pleasantries of the last five years of service by the outgoing management. Perhaps it can also be an opportunity to look back and forward to ponder together some of what we have learnt from each other (ensemble). We might also ask how the rich and challenging experiences might provide insights for a better & brighter future...of this organisation we so all dearly love.

In expressing my gratitude to the Committee of Ambassadors and in particular to you Madame Chairperson, I wish to emphasise how great a learning opportunity the ACP has afforded me... as your SG and the ASGs.

In fact, I am leaving with a heavily unpaid debt. ... a debt of deep gratitude to many.. to the Cariforum Group for their confidence and moral support; to staff, whom at times I may have pushed and made extra heavy demands or may have offended unintentionally; to all levels of staff who show their competence and commitment, especially under pressure – to each one a special thank you; to Ambassadors, who, by and large, showed openness and understanding, more than personal interest.

A legitimate question to be asked is what have I learnt from our learning organisation? Let me confine a few remarks to three lessons or principles I regard as indispensable for the modest successes that have been achieved.

But before the lessons, we may do well to recall some major milestones of the last few years.

One is the growth of a core of committed leadership among those Heads and Leaders of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific who I like to call – our champions! They are a solid core - 10 or 12 who when called upon have defended the vision and meaning of this unique tri-continental organisation.

Among those from the African continent, we recall with pride the 10 or 12 who said, unequivocally in Addis Ababa on 14 September, 2018, that post-Cotonou negotiations shall proceed within an all ACP framework. That was an historic moment for solidarity –in practice. I continue to salute such leadership.

A second major milestone is the Amended Georgetown Agreement of 2019 – declaring us an International Organisation. We must work

and act to let that proclamation be truly earned with the appropriate status. In the Amended Agreement the voice of the people in the Parliamentary Assembly is embedded as an Organ and IROCC, as a subsidiary and consultative organ, is an institutional vehicle to embrace the RECs & Regional Integration Organisations, academia and civil society to better serve the entire process. A revised structure could have Multilateralism, Regional Organisations and Parliamentary affairs as a dedicated unit.

Thirdly, is the great advance and recognition of the ACP Group as a strong and vibrant catalyst, an armour-bearer in the defense, protection and promotion of multilateralism. This can be effectively pursued through South-South & Triangular cooperation. The ACP has grown by leaps and bounds as a welcome hub and facilitator for South-South and Triangular Cooperation... witness Tuesday's symposium! I thank all who attended and participated.

Let me now turn to a few lessons or principles that may have value long after my departure.

First is what I call the primacy of purpose. This is little more than keeping in mind the big picture of what the ACP is all about - a vehicle to serve the global South in practical terms, this is inclusive, equitable and sustainable development of the people of 79 member States of the ACP.

Every meeting, any single event, cannot be treated as an end in itself – it serves a purpose. So we must always be conscious of the

larger purpose, which is now captured as becoming “an effective global player”.

My second lesson I have learnt is appreciation of the amazing breadth and scope of diversity, possessed by our 79 member-Countries – the people and their representatives.

A diversity of views, perceptions, interests, attitude and ambition that come from and shape the different experiences across three continents. These are forged to provide the all-pervasive character of the ACP – on its pillars of unity and solidarity....ya pamoja! Stronger together!

But this must be painstakingly nurtured and held fast. This unity and solidarity has been tested and proved victorious, but we may do well to anticipate more and difficult tests ahead.

Unity and solidarity so readily referred to, ought not be taken for granted.

The victories built on unity and solidarity must be attributed in large part to the champions – the leaders, Member States, Ambassadors strongly committed to the larger vision and to the ordinary people, who carry deep convictions and care to see that the purpose to which our founding fathers and mothers were prepared to make exceptional sacrifices.

These were done to defend and hold fast in their conviction that, experiences and cultures across three continents constitute a

comparative advantage, once put at the disposal of our societies, will engender truly sustainable development.

This is a continuous task for a cumulative impact of the talent and ability in the Secretariat.

The third gift bestowed on me is a combination of patience and perservance. I use these terms to capture the importance of tolerance.

Anxious to intervene in a debate, to convey my view or question what has been said – with much energy and forcefulness – but I clearly hear a misunderstanding, misinterpretation or lack of accurate information.

Waiting to speak, there is suddenly a voice, elegant and lucid that provides the intervention with precision and scope to lay to rest doubt and futile time-wasting. I have learnt to be patient and to listen more than to speak – the benefit of perseverance and timing better than repetition, will add more to the quality of our decision-making.

Madam Chairperson, let me not abuse this gracious calm with which you have allowed me to give only those fragments of the gratitude I owe you, the Committee of Ambassadors, the staff and the organisation as a whole.

I have drawn from the Committee of Ambassadors – a reservoir of learning, enormous experience and diversity of thought, from which

I have learnt the primacy, and clarity of purpose, the appreciation of diversity and the wisdom of patience and perseverance.

These gifts, I will cherish, and the debt I owe you is unrepayable. I leave this generation of leadership with thoughts of the great Caribbean historian, C.L.R. James: *To each generation there falls the duty to stand on the shoulders of the preceding generation – to see further and to move to greater heights.*

To greater heights –thank you.

May the Committee of Ambassadors and the ACP as a whole achieve the greater heights and noble purpose, to which its untapped potential can carry it.

Thank you ! merci beaucoup, obrigada, muchas gracias!