



STATE OF THE ORGANISATION (SORG) ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. GEORGES REBELO PINTO CHIKOTI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES (OACPS) AT THE VIRTUAL TOWNHALL IN CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE OACPS

“OACPS OF THE FUTURE: TRANSITION. SOLIDARITY. UNITY”

THURSDAY 8 APRIL 2021, AT 8:00 P.M.

**His Excellency, President Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya and President-in-office of the 9th Summit of OACPS Heads of State and Government,
Dr the Honourable Amery Browne, Minister of Foreign and Caricom affairs of Trinidad and Tobago,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
H.E. Fatumanava-o-Upolu III Dr Paolelei Luteru, Ambassador of the Independent State of Samoa and Chair of the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors
Excellencies,
Representatives of Regions and Partners,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Introduction

Thank you all for joining us on this very special occasion in celebration of our first anniversary as the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States—the OACPS. This is also our first-ever public event of this nature aimed at reaching out, not only to our constituencies, but also to a wider audience, including our partners, the media, and anyone with an interest in the largest cross-continental grouping, representing 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries with a combined population of more than one billion people.

On 5 April 2020, we officially changed our name from the ACP Group of States to the OACPS. In doing so, we also became a fully-fledged international organisation with the aspiration to be an advocate for global solidarity and a staunch supporter of multilateralism. In the quest to fulfil that objective, we will work tirelessly to be a trusted, valuable, reliable, and visible partner on the international scene.

The theme for the 2021 State of the Organisation (SOrg) Address is “**OACPS of the Future: Transition. Solidarity. Unity**”. To look into the future, one needs to reflect to be better prepared to make informed decisions that will have a real impact, and which will address the many challenges---known and unknown. However, before I address some of the major achievements of our first year of existence as the OACPS, and provide some insights into the objectives of this year and beyond, let us take a look at the current global context and the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has altered reality for everyone globally.

COVID-19 and the global context

This month, many of our countries mark the first anniversary of the initial COVID-19 lockdown. It is a daunting, if not impossible, task to try and absorb all that has changed since then; to remember all those we have lost; and to contemplate the reality that it is far from being over yet. Let me pay tribute on behalf of the OACPS to all the frontline workers and helpers globally for their continued dedication, selflessness, and commitment to protect and care—***thank you to each and every one of you for that!***

In addition to the many lives lost or affected by this virus, we have also, unfortunately, said farewell to many leaders within our Organisation. My sincere condolences to the Member States, their Governments, peoples, and families that have been so affected by their great loss.

Within the COVID-19 context, 2020 was a year of uncertainty, destruction, and devastation. The outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 has spread a feeling of, and indeed the reality of, vulnerability and unpreparedness across the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable and marginalised communities around the world, particularly women and girls. COVID-19 has rapidly reshaped countries, societies and communities. The pandemic has changed political and social systems and created new social

norms. Coupled with COVID-19 are the plethora of ongoing challenges and crises such as climate change and disasters from extreme natural hazard events, inequality, technological change, migration and displacement, and violent conflict. These challenges are both complex and evolving, and demand our collective action.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching impacts on education, human rights, food security and economic development. It also affects Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States disproportionately, many of which are Members of the OACPS. For these countries, the lack of domestic financial resources, high debt levels, minimal economic diversification, and fragile health systems present an urgent challenge.

The 2021 World Economic Situation and Prospects warns that, and I quote, ***“the COVID-19 pandemic, which has delivered a heavy blow to economic activities worldwide, may exert devastating long-run socio-economic effects, unless global policy responses can ensure a robust and sustainable recovery. Those actions should comprise smart investments in economic, societal and climate resilience, revitalization of global trade, avoidance of premature austerity policies and addressing widening inequalities.”***

This provides a strong message to us all that in our multi-polar, globalised and hyper-interconnected world, we must turn around the destruction and devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, we must actively construct and re-create global solidarity and a rule-based multilateral trading system. Global partnerships and strong multilateral frameworks will be vital for addressing the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, while ensuring that all efforts consider the integrity of the environment. Systemic transformation is therefore needed to deliver social priorities and people-centred policies that are key to restoring confidence and trust in markets and governance, globally. To this end, the OACPS has been working throughout 2020, with our partners at every level, to ensure the recovery of our Members. Rest assured that, as always, you have the commitment and support of the OACPS.

2020 achievements

The year 2020 was a year of change---planned and unplanned. Looking back, the cornerstones of this change were our ability to adapt, despite the challenges, to stay the

course as we transitioned into the **OACPS we want**, and strengthen our **solidarity and unity**. Allow me to briefly highlight some of our key and notable achievements during the last year, which are the following:

- Entry into force of the revised Georgetown Agreement, which is our constituent act, and the change of name to the OACPS;
- Convening of the first-ever Inter-sessional Extraordinary Summit of the OACPS Heads of State and Government, and subsequent meeting with international partners on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Conclusion of a political agreement on the future OACPS-EU post-Cotonou dispensation;
- Use of our numeric strength, unity and solidarity to support the appointment of the new Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO);
- Ensuring the full commitment of all intra-ACP funds, including the 11th European Development Fund reserve. In this regard, €214.5 million was mobilised as part of a joint OACPS-EU response to the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Appointment of a gender-balanced management team at the OACPS Secretariat;
- Establishment of the OACPS Information Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; and
- Implementation of the OACPS reform agenda starting with the restructuring of the OACPS Secretariat, through the adoption of new Staff and Employment Regulations, and the formulation of proposals for its new organisational structure.

2021 and beyond: Objectives

In this coming year, my focus will be on building the **OACPS we want**--an international organisation that is an active, reliable and engaging partner; one that is well connected with, and provides leadership for and support to its own national, regional, and continental constituencies; and an OACPS with a **fit-for-purpose** Secretariat that is a **centre of excellence** and provides **value for membership**. For this to happen, two of the more critical aspects are the availability of adequate financial resources, and the development of an innovative internal and external communication strategy that will promote and ensure greater

organisational visibility and responsiveness. To this end, I commit myself to ensuring the financial stability of our Organisation through improved and more regular financial contributions from Member States, operationalising the OACPS Endowment and Trust Fund, and developing genuine and durable partnerships. By the end of 2021, we will begin implementing a new comprehensive communication strategy that the Secretariat will develop by the third quarter of this year.

Intra-OACPS

With regard to intra-OACPS relations and matters, I will continue to work tirelessly to improve cooperation and service delivery, as well as provide value for membership through the following actions and initiatives:

- Addressing, in a sustainable manner, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our countries and regions and their recovery, by facilitating high-level dialogues among the three main OACPS regions, and with development partners. In this regard, key priorities will be to look at building reliable health systems, and planning for disasters or pandemics;
- Collaborating with OACPS Members and Regions, as well as with international partners, to ensure the acceleration of the development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines, COVID-19 diagnostics and treatments, and a guarantee for rapid, fair and equitable access to vaccines for all our people. In this regard, we will continue to support vaccine-sharing through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility;
- Completing the restructuring of the OACPS Secretariat, implementing digital and automated work processes and systems, and finalising a review of the working methods of the various OACPS organs to ensure a more efficient and modern Organisation that delivers and provides value for membership;
- Developing and finalising the Secretariat's Strategic Management Plan (SMP) for the period 2021-2025, to take full account of the provisions of the Revised Georgetown Agreement and the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement;
- Continuing with the implementation of the Revised Georgetown Agreement, with a focus on operationalising the National Focal Points in Member States, the convening of a meeting of the Inter-Regional Organisations' Coordinating Committee (IROCC) in the first half of 2021, and the establishment of the OACPS Cultural Foundation; and

- Strengthening and defining our relationship with our principal partner, the European Union, and developing complementary partnerships with other organisations, groupings, regions, and countries.

Many of the members and regions of the OACPS are often affected by violent conflicts and acts of terrorism that have a severe impact on the lives of our peoples. I believe that we must all work to improve respect for human rights, to uphold the rule of law, and to build democratic and inclusive societies. Peace, security, and stability are indispensable for the sustainable and inclusive development of our countries and regions, and vice-versa. Given the importance of this, I will reach out to our countries and regions to determine how we can support one another to develop more peaceful, stable, and inclusive democratic societies throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

Critical for the sustainable and inclusive economic development of the members and regions of the OACPS, is South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation. Let me applaud the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as the strategic framework for delivering on Africa's goal for inclusive and sustainable development. With this framework in place, it is time to improve the links between the African, Caribbean, and Pacific regions of the OACPS. To this end, I am determined to develop a relationship with the Secretariat of the AfCFTA, for the mutual benefit of all OACPS regions. Our newly created OACPS Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Malabo will play a key role in fostering intra-OACPS cooperation, and serve as a reservoir of knowledge for South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation in the interest of OACPS members and regions.

Another concern for the OACPS members and regions is the climate crisis. Climate change poses fundamental threats to our peoples, places, and biodiversity. It brings droughts, desertification, hurricanes and cyclones, floods, agricultural losses, reduced water resources, and rising sea levels to our members and regions, which impact the lives and livelihoods of our people. Therefore, OACPS members and regions must work together and in tandem with international stakeholders, to provide the climate leadership that is required to address the impacts of climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

Our 38 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are at the forefront of this climate challenge to ensure the survival of our planet and people, for present and future generations. In this regard, I commit the OACPS to playing a leading, central, and engaging role at the upcoming 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), scheduled to take place in

Glasgow, Scotland, from 1 to 12 November 2021. Collectively, including through the OACPS SIDS Forum, we need to increase efforts to deal with the impact of climate change, as these impacts are more severe in the poorest and most vulnerable countries, many of which are among our Member States.

In 2015, the OACPS was instrumental in the adoption of the Paris Agreement and we have, since then, supported the implementation of the Agreement and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Last year, we strengthened our capacities to provide improved support to OACPS members and regions, by creating a new department dedicated to Environment and Climate Action within the Secretariat. This department's remit is crucial to supporting our efforts to achieve sustainable, inclusive development and build resilience. Global solidarity is needed now, more than ever before, to accelerate action towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the achievement of the goals of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The private sector is a vector for growth and stability in our countries and regions. Furthermore, it can provide much needed support for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. As the OACPS, we need to implement and promote business-friendly and inclusive national and regional policies, as well as legal frameworks, and strengthen our productive capabilities and value chains. To this end, we will ramp up the operations of the OACPS Business Forum, so that it can serve as an instrument that will bring greater value, and more actively promote the creation of an enabling environment for private sector development. Linked to this crucial role of the private sector, are our cultural and creative industries. Working in tandem to promote our industries, the greater linking of these sectors can be a game changer for many of our economies. Today, we live in a knowledge-based society, and it will be important to emphasise the mastering of information, innovation, and research.

In all of the aforementioned critical areas of engagement, I will be counting on the input, contribution, and support of the members of the OACPS Parliamentary Assembly, and that of all non-State actors, including the private sector.

OACPS-EU Partnership

The European Union (EU) is, and will remain our principal partner. We have a longstanding relationship and next week we will initial the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement, which will govern our partnership for the next twenty (20) years. The new Agreement brings a greater focus on innovation to our relationship, with special emphasis on collaboration on the international scene and the regionalisation of the partnership.

The EU's future relationship with the three main regions of the OACPS is outlined in Regional Protocols to the new Partnership Agreement, which complement and are part of the main OACPS-EU Agreement. This, without any doubt, brings challenges and opportunities. As mentioned earlier, I will reach out to the OACPS regions to determine the most practical set-up and modalities, so as to ensure the full operationalisation of the Agreement, in the interest of all OACPS members and regions. Our unity and solidarity will stand the test of time, and together, we will ensure that we maximise the many benefits and opportunities of the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement.

We are ready to pursue with the EU, our common goals on the international scene, where our combined numerical strength will be a decisive factor. Together, through our global partnership and joint support for strong multilateral frameworks, we can expand the opportunities for developing countries and revitalise the multilateral trading system. Soon, we will work together to develop a mechanism for meaningful international cooperation that will go beyond simply issuing joint declarations and statements. I am confident that, together, the OACPS and the EU can be instrumental in re-imagining multilateralism.

The OACPS on the global scene

As an international organisation, we need to complement and diversify our existing relationship with the EU. To this end, mutually beneficial partnerships with other organisations, regions, and countries will be developed to support our vision of being a promoter of multilateralism and an advocate for global solidarity. We are committed to actively pursuing partnerships, and through the implementation of the aforementioned communication strategy, becoming not only a visible, but a reliable and trusted actor on the global scene. The OACPS is a global player, and we will do our utmost to ensure adequate

support to our members and regions for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

In implementing our global vision, it is incumbent on us to ensure that we develop partnerships that complement our work and drive initiatives for the sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development of our countries and regions. In 2021, I will also develop a plan to increase the OACPS' presence in the major capitals of the world.

Conclusion

One year has passed since I assumed office and all our plans were thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been shaken, but not deterred.

Much work lies ahead and our youth have a prominent role to play. Our young people are the incubators of renewal, innovation, and change. They are the present and, indeed, the future. To this end, I will develop this year, in collaboration with partners, a programme that will focus on the engagement of our young people, as innovators, in the digital economy.

As mentioned, 2021 will be a year of transition, continued change, transformation, and reform, with an emphasis on implementation, and the strengthening and building of partnerships. With the encouragement and unwavering support of OACPS members and regions, and the staff of the Secretariat, we, as an Organisation, can make meaningful contributions to the lives of our peoples. We are **stronger together**, and when we are **together in unity and solidarity**, we can **infuse change and innovation** that will have real impact.

Today, the challenges are numerous, and some of them feel insurmountable. However, let us follow the path of President Nelson Mandela. The long walk must be walked, and it is more productive and indeed, magical, if walked with others. Therefore, let us all walk **together**, with purpose, and in **unity and solidarity**.

I thank you.