INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE
ACP EMINENT PERSONS GROUP (EPG)

STATEMENT BY
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SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ACP
GROUP OF STATES

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Your Excellency the Honourable Mr. Phandu Skelemani, President of Council and Minister for International Cooperation and Development of Botswana, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Members of the Eminent Persons Group, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Secretariat, I welcome you all to ACP House – which is your house. I want to thank you all for honouring our invitation to be here today. It is for us a highly propitious occasion. The inauguration of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) coincides with the Special Session of the Council of Ministers which holds today and tomorrow here in ACP House. We are delighted that the President of Council, the Honourable Phandu Skelemani, Minister of International Cooperation and Development of the Republic of Botswana and his colleagues in the Bureau are able to be here to witness this occasion.
We are particularly grateful to all the members of the EPG who, despite their busy schedules, have accepted to take on this important assignment. They have been carefully selected from across the various regional communities of the ACP; men and women known for their high integrity, wisdom and experience.

We have no doubt that you will bring your intellectual and moral capital to bear on the crucial dilemmas facing the ACP today, so that, together, we can forge a common path towards a brave new future.

Not too long ago my good friend Kamlesh Sharma, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, launched a dialogue process to reinvent the Commonwealth of Nations to face the arduous challenges of our post-Cold War international order. He did this through the establishment of a Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. The ensuing report, “A Commonwealth of the People”, is a wise and farsighted response to the challenges facing the Commonwealth.
According to an old African saying, "When the music changes, so does the dance". We are keenly aware that the music is changing not only in Europe but also in our member states, and, indeed, globally. It was in recognition of this fact that we launched our own dialogue process through the Working Group on Future Perspectives chaired by H.E. Dr. Patrick Gomes, the distinguished Ambassador of Guyana.

At the Seventh ACP Summit in Malabo during December 2012, my proposal to set up an Eminent Persons Group to infuse new thinking into the change and reform process was endorsed by our leaders. The ensuing Sipopo Declaration underlined the importance of reinventing and reforming the ACP so that it can better serve the interests of our nations and peoples.
With its 79 member nations – and the prospect of rising to 80 when the young nation of South Sudan joins us -- the ACP today is the largest trans-regional intergovernmental organisation of developing countries in the international system. There is potential to build on this numeric strength to promote the collective cause of some of the poorest countries in the world, with opportunity to establish crucial alliances not only with Europe but with some of the emerging global players in the world economy.

Your Excellencies,

As we face the years ahead, we recognise the need to reinvent the ACP as a meaningful player on the world stage. As you are all aware, the Lisbon Treaty came into force in December 2009. The Treaty seeks a major overhaul of the European system and far-reaching restructuring of its key institutions. What has been rather troubling for the ACP is the fact that the Treaty makes no express reference to the long-standing partnership between the EU and the ACP.
It is also unclear whether the EDF will come under the Commission budget and if the ACP countries can feel entitled to a predictable source of development assistance as has been the case hitherto. Global re-alignments and major shifts in EU policy orientations have given rise to concerns of possible downgrading of the importance of the ACP-EU Partnership. The EU’s neighbourhood focus with regard to Eastern Europe and North Africa; and its rapprochement with Latin America and the general thrust of its development policy re-orientation has led to considerable anxiety among ACP members.

The rise of the emerging economies and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – the nations generally referred to as the BRICS – offers a new window of opportunity. The ACP feels that they can leverage on their numeric strength and moral authority to promote their collective interests while building new alliances with the emerging economies of Asia and Latin America. A collective strategy to tap these opportunities has been part of the overall future orientation of the ACP.
Building upon the accumulated wisdom of decades of development cooperation, I launched the 2011—2014 Strategic Plan, "Renewal and Transformation”, which aims to reposition the ACP as a knowledge institution with increasing executive authority to mobilise resources and implement development projects.

The key elements of the organisational repositioning are anchored on the following seven pillars: (i) developing a new Vision and Mission Statement; (ii) administrative restructuring and process reengineering to enhance impact and results; (iii) culture change and enhanced skills development and training; (iv) scaling up the role of Secretariat and its transformation into a knowledge institution and development agency; (v) enhancing the financial viability of the Secretariat; (vi) establishment of an ACP Investment Bank to foster trade and investments in our regional member countries; and (vii) exploring alternative alliances with the emerging economic powers.
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The collective strength of the ACP derives from decades of inter-regional solidarity, international trade negotiations, development finance cooperation political dialogue and relations with other international organisations. Indeed, the call for solidarity, greater visibility, relations with other international groups, streamlining of the core business and empowering its institutions have been a constant theme in all of the Summits of Heads of State and Government since Georgetown 1975.

More than anyone, we are keenly aware of the new imperatives that globalisation imposes on our national systems, in particular the pressures of market discipline and competition. We are also aware that the honeymoon of privileged access to EU markets is over, thanks to the emerging of the rules-based WTO international trading regime.
Equally crucial is the need to reform the workings of our principal Organs and to streamline many of our core functions. It seems evident that the ACP can be most effective when it sets out not to replicate what others are already doing but when it concentrates in those niche areas in which it enjoys a high comparative advantage. This would require focusing on our core competencies and repositioning the Secretariat as an intergovernmental organisation that does more than the role of mere convener of conferences and meetings.

Your Excellencies,

The EPG will have a very busy schedule over the coming two years. You do not need any lectures from us about the crucial choices that you will lay before our leaders. We trust that you will avail us the benefits of your collective wisdom and knowledge. According to an ancient prayer made famous by the American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: "God grant me the courage to change the things I can; the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; and the wisdom to know the difference".
In our age of upheavals, we face major choices on how to reinvent the ACP – how to make it better serve the needs and aspirations of our nearly one billion people. There are things we will have to jettison; there are time-tested assets that we would have to keep. And I trust that we shall marshal the wisdom and the courage to make a difference.

On more than one occasion, I have said that if the ACP-EU partnership did not exist, it would have been necessary to invent it. A stepchild of history, it has evolved as a part of the moral economy of the New Europe, providing the EU an unrivalled influence to nearly a billion people and their governments. It is perhaps the best model there is for the contractual approach to world development based on interdependence, dialogue and mutually shared responsibilities.

But there are aspects that have not worked very well. The EDF has been strong on the public sector but rather weak in the area of private sector development. While financing instruments such as budget support have been well received by a good number of countries, concerns have been raised about their long-term development effectiveness.
There is also the fact that old attitudes die hard. Unlike the Chinese, the European mindset continues to view the ACP as a problem rather than an opportunity. With Europe's aging population and its current fiscal and institutional challenges, the growing economies of the ACP constitute a potentially huge market and investment opportunity that could help restore the Old Continent to the path of long-term growth.

I am persuaded that Europe will not be Europe if it abandoned its moral obligations -- those ideals that have been inherent in her since the Enlightenment. At the same time, we the ACP must rise to the occasion and take full responsibility for our own future, building on our own inner resources and collective strength; and leveraging on our moral capital as the largest coalition of the world's poor.
Your Excellencies,

As destiny would have it, we are launching this inaugural meeting at a time which also coincides with my final week as Secretary-General and chief servant of this organisation. From the sand dunes and scorching heat of Darfur, I shall follow the work of this Group with great interest and hopeful expectation. I know that you, the members of our Eminent Persons Group, will come up with wise advice that will help take the ACP forward. I wish you every success.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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