

ADDRESS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

FOR THE OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE FIFTH
ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
CONFERENCE FOR
THE EAST AFRICAN REGION

14th July 2010

Mr Speaker of the National Assembly
Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly
Honourable Ministers
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with pleasure that I welcome you all to Seychelles for this 5th Regional Meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Please feel at home and do enjoy our hospitality.

We are honoured and privileged to have been chosen to host this ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Meeting, whose timing couldn't have been better, as we are currently hosting several important meetings.

Allow me, therefore, to extend our profound gratitude and deepest appreciation to the organizers, the ACP and the EU, for having decided to bring you all to our country.

The Joint Assembly has already established a strong position as a forum for dialogue and the exchange of ideas while at the same time fully recognizing the specificities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as Seychelles, as well as those of LDCs, land-locked and coastal states.

In the coming two days, you will be focusing your attention on some of the most crucial development issues such as climate change, the fight against piracy, fisheries and development, the EPAs to name but a few.

Over the past few years, Seychelles has, like many ACP states, benefited significantly from ACP-EU co-operation. We hope to strengthen further this cooperation in a number of vital areas, not least, in the fight against piracy.

Seychelles has become severely affected by the activities of Somali pirates. Maritime piracy poses a real threat, not only to Seychelles but to other countries in the region whereby our fishing industry and maritime-based tourism are being greatly affected. Piracy is equally a serious threat to the international community, as it is adversely affecting the security of international shipping and the freedom of movement in international waters. An important amount of global maritime trade between Europe, Africa and Asia passes through the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, and we, the countries in this region, are all directly or indirectly victims of the scourge of piracy which threatens our peace, security and economic development. Combating the scourge of piracy in the Indian Ocean continues to be one of our main priorities.

Early provision has been made through a Comprehensive Plan to deter the threat of piracy, and the Seychelles Symposium on Piracy is aimed at just that. The Government will continue to pursue the negotiations of agreements with our bilateral and multilateral partners to try and contain this scourge. The Regional workshop on Piracy to be hosted by Seychelles next week is expected to draw up a region counter piracy plan of action.

Another priority is our economic reform programme. Introduced in November 2008; the reform programme has allowed us in a relatively short period of time to:

- Reduce our total public debt stock to 82% of GDP. It stood at 170% before the programme. This figure is expected to go down further as agreements are reached with outstanding creditors.
- Slashed inflation to zero from 62% in November 2008.
- Eliminate perennial problem of lack of foreign exchange
- Encourage entrepreneurs and new businesses...
- Build up the country's reserve foreign exchange to close to 200 million dollars or two months of import coverage.
- Stable exchange rates
- Lower interest rates.
- Have a projected growth of around 4 % of GDP in 2010 compared to 0.7 last year.

It has not been easy but we were determined to see it through. It is an ongoing process which has the support of our people, major international institutions and the international community at large. The EU, for instance, tripled its aid to Seychelles between 2008 and 2009. It also changed its aid strategy from project approach to budget support approach in conformity with the Paris declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Once more, we reiterate our deepest appreciation to our people and to our friends and partners in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is one of the most serious ecological and food security threats facing our planet today. The environmental, social and economic security of many countries including Seychelles is at stake.

In less than six months from now, the global community will convene in Cancun, Mexico, to try and achieve a possible agreement that will hopefully provide effective solutions to the challenges of climate change and development.

It has increasingly become clear that the involvement of leaders, in particular Heads of States and Governments, is indispensable not only for injecting momentum into the negotiation process, but also and most importantly to ensure a desirable outcome from the global deal on climate change. Let us be reminded that time is running out and we need to back up our words with action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Much has been done in terms of cooperation between developed and developing nations, but nevertheless, there is still more to be accomplished. The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement is unique in the sense that it is an opportunity for the beneficiaries and donors of development aid to discuss priorities and programmes of intervention together as partners. You, as ACP/EU parliamentarians, representing some of the world's richest and poorest nations, meet twice a year to discuss issues of mutual interest. You know best what kind of policies work and what does not. You also have better understanding of best practices in development cooperation policy, thus- being better able to tackle development challenges in ways that will be more beneficial to your countries.

One of those challenges is sustainable fishery. Fisheries is one of the pillars of the Seychelles economy. I am pleased that this topic is on the agenda and you will be able to visit some of our installations.

Fisheries is absolutely vital for many coastal countries and especially small island states like ours. Our marine resources are not only important as a source of nourishment for our population but are also complementary in many ways to our tourism industry.

This is why our efforts with the assistance of the EU in the fight against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing should be continued and increased. Seychelles has a policy of zero tolerance for IUU activities. It is criminal and irresponsible to allow the plunder of our resources with impunity.

As you may know, more than 90% of our exports consist of canned tuna. They depend very much on the healthy state of the tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean, on a secure maritime environment and on trade considerations. On this last, we should be extremely careful about the erosion of tariff preferences by EU.

That the tuna canning factory in Seychelles is a success story would not have been possible without these tariff preferences. I am sure that this is the case in other ACP countries. For this reason we would ask the EU to consider carrying out serious impact assessment studies on the consequences of erosion of such tariff preferences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are part of a region. That region has come together to strive for the common good of all. COMESA, SADC, IOC, EAC and IGAD are the building blocks of a stronger Africa and a stronger ACP. A stronger ACP means better opportunities for both the EU and Africa.

We, as ACP countries, must stay committed to our goals and decisions, but at the same time must be flexible in our approach. Indeed, we remain committed to regional integration and development. It is the only way forward. But we must be able to diversify and be flexible and dynamic enough to create our own model for development.

Within the region, as a member of COMESA and SADC, we have promoted the agenda of island states. Like many other Small Island Developing States, our vulnerability is inherently due to our small size, our distance from other markets, our lack of natural resources and our import dependency. Consequently, at the heart of our reforms, is the recognition that Seychelles is a highly vulnerable economy.

We are now part of the COMESA Free Trade Area which is in the process of WTO accession and we have also signed and ratified the Interim EPA with the EU. Seychelles is also in the process of joining the WTO. This has offered many opportunities for our people. We should never shy away from engaging the region. All the successful regional blocks generate the majority of their income through intra - regional trade. It is only by integrating with the region and becoming an active partner in the international community, that we can mitigate and even turn challenges into opportunities.

In collaboration with the European Union and the ACP, the Government of Seychelles will work relentlessly towards a successful outcome of the negotiations for a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. The successful conclusion of such negotiations will promote policies designed to enhance competitiveness and economic well-being, greater social cohesion, peace and security, and ensure greater market access of our goods and commodities. The Government of Seychelles is committed to that.

With this in mind, I thank you once again for attending this meeting and wish you all successful deliberations.

Honourable Ministers, parliamentarians, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; it is now my great pleasure and honour to declare open the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly conference for the East African region.

Thank you.