

**STATEMENT BY THE ACTING ACP- CO PRESIDENT OF THE ACP-EU JOINT
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, HON. ODIRILE MOTLHALE (BOTSWANA) AT
THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 5TH REGIONAL MEETING OF
THE ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday, 14 July 2010

Le Meridien Barbarons Hotel, Mahe, Seychelles

- His Excellency Mr. Danny Faure, Vice-President of Seychelles,
- Hon. Dr, Patrick Herminie, Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles,
- His Excellency Ramtane Lamamra, the African Union's Commissioner for Peace and Security,
- Mr. Elie Hoarau, Acting Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
- Excellencies of Regional Integration and Cooperation bodies present
- Members of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
- Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this gathering on the occasion of the 5th Regional Meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. First of all, allow me, on behalf of the JPA as well as personally, to thank the Government and people of Seychelles for kindly offering to host this Regional Meeting for the East African Region, their hospitality and the facilities that they have put at our disposal for the success of this meeting. Our friend and colleague William Waven has been especially helpful in this regard, and I wish to thank him for his efforts.

I wish, on behalf of the JPA and indeed on my personal behalf, to express sincere condolences and sympathies to the Government and people of Uganda for the bomb attacks that led to the deaths of 76 people on Sunday, 11 July 2010. Such cowardly attacks must be condemned in the strongest terms by all peace loving people.

This is my first time to address a meeting of the JPA in this manner. As many of you are aware, Mr. Charles Milupi, who was ACP Co-President of the JPA, resigned from the Parliament of Zambia and therefore ceased to be a Member of the JPA. I was requested to take over his responsibilities in an acting capacity until the position is filled. On behalf of my country, Botswana, and indeed on my personal behalf, I wish to thank the Assembly for giving me this opportunity to serve in this capacity.

Your Excellency,

It is gratifying to note that this is the 5th Regional Meeting of the JPA, and I can say that we have a long way since the first meeting was organised in Windhoek, Namibia in April 2008. We are indeed hoping to replicate the successes of the previous Regional Meetings here as well. Regional Meetings of this kind reflect the growing recognition of the importance of fostering closer interaction among Members of the JPA at regional level. In addition, meetings of this nature give us the opportunity to discuss in greater detail how issues in the framework of ACP-EU cooperation affect ACP States and ACP Regions.

As you are aware, regional integration has also been given greater prominence in the latest revision of the Cotonou Agreement which was signed in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on 22 June 2010.

The topics for discussion in this Meeting reflect some of the pressing challenges in this Region. However, these topics, such as political stability and governance and climate change are global issues that are indeed part of the international development agenda. In the past three years, the world seems to be in constant crisis and the international development agenda is consequently in jeopardy. While governments seek solutions to plug holes in national and international financial systems, as well as grapple with the aftermath of the recession and crippling budget deficits, we must remember that the deadline for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is only 5 years away; Attainment of the MDGs must remain our prime concern.

Through this entire global crisis which has been running for the past 2 or 3 years, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty should remain the central objectives. Aid budgets may not be shrinking, but commitments and pledges are not being matched by actual disbursements.

I would like now to focus on two of the main themes that run through all the topics, namely regional integration and ACP-EU Cooperation, as well as the importance of peace and security.

ACP-EU Cooperation

Your Excellency

Ladies and Gentlemen

ACP-EU Cooperation is one of the most dynamic in the world, covering a wide range of areas such as trade, development assistance as well as support for peace, security governance and democracy in ACP States. I will also like to emphasise that under the Cotonou Agreement, regional integration and cooperation are not just about trade; they cover a wide range of other functional and thematic fields which address common problems. Addressing these issues within the framework of ACP-EU cooperation is not an easy task considering the diversity of developmental challenges and interests among member States of the ACP Group as well as those of the European Union.

In this regard, The JPA has always insisted that ACP-EU Cooperation must help to strengthen and deepen regional integration and cooperation as the basic building blocks of closer international cooperation. The challenge for policy makers, parliamentarians included is how to rationalize the multiplicity of regional integration organisations to which our countries belong. Besides the obvious drain on resources, there is the possibility of duplication of effort. Countries in this Region already belong to more than 4 regional integration bodies.

The situation has further been compounded by negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements, which are being conducted in varying configurations in the East and Southern African regions. This is why ACP Parliamentarians have expressed concerns at the potential of Economic Partnership Agreements to undermine regional integration processes in ACP regions.

Political instability and Conflicts

Your Excellency

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to state that there is still one fundamental obstacle to attainment of the ideals of development as enunciated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This is the issue of political instability and conflicts. The proliferation of conflicts during the last three decades in African States has been recognised as one of the main reasons for their poor development performance. Violent conflict remains one of the most important obstacles to reducing poverty, upholding human rights and achieving sustainable development in ACP States. Conflicts have caused large scale human displacement, environmental degradation and destruction of social and physical infrastructure.

The East African Region of the ACP Group has, regrettably been characterised by some of the longest running and brutal conflicts and political crises in the world. There have been several Coups d'états and counter Coups d'états, rebel movements, electoral violence, border wars and now in the last few years, the menace of piracy emanating off the Somali coast and now spreading deeper into the Indian ocean.

I have just come from Madagascar on a JPA Mission, and I am sad to say that although the political crisis in this country does not involve an armed insurrection, Madagascar is experiencing a crisis of governance and constitutional order that has seen it being marginalised and in some cases, sanctioned from taking its rightful place in the Regional bodies and the African Union. It is a situation which we must all continue to be engaged with in order to assist in finding a sustainable solution to end the cycle of crisis in the country.

Your Excellency,

Thankfully, some of the long running conflicts in Africa have been resolved as a result of Comprehensive Peace Agreements (CPA). In the East African Region, the most significant one is the CPA that brought to an end the long running civil war in Southern Sudan. We are also witnessing a commitment to organising free and credible elections with the participation of international observers and monitors.

However, as has been pointed out on several occasions by my predecessors, elections alone are not a guarantee of democracy let alone peace. Very often, what happens in-between regular elections, especially in the period just before elections in terms of the preparations for the elections and the conduct of the main protagonists, is a good indicator of the state of democracy.

Your Excellency,

I believe that some post-conflict states and their surrounding regions will possibly remain vulnerable to renewed conflicts if the root causes are not addressed. This is why we must all be concerned about the situation in Somalia. As the tragic events that occurred in Uganda on Sunday, 11 July 2010 demonstrated, the violence is spilling over into neighbouring states. There is therefore need to address the indigenous causes of conflict, which inter alia, include political, economic and social exclusion, poor governance and corruption, manipulation of ethnic differences and abuse of human rights. In addition, it is important to address the effectiveness of regional and international security structures and conflict prevention mechanisms.

Restoration of effective statehood in Somalia for instance, and the provision of suitable conditions for political, economic and social reconstruction at national and regional levels are the main areas in which ACP-EU development cooperation can play a complementary role.

The Role of Parliamentarians

Your Excellency,

One of the recent criticisms of multilateralism is the so called democratic deficit. It has been acknowledged that most of the major decisions at multilateral level, which affect the livelihoods of all the world's citizens daily, are made by unelected officials, who it is argued, are not answerable to anyone.

It must be noted that even the EU, which has a directly elected Parliament, has not been immune to this criticism, but I think that now the situation has changed with the increased powers given to the European Parliament under the Lisbon Treaty. The JPA helps to play an important role in fostering the democratic nature of ACP-EU cooperation.

There are still no equivalent international organisations that bring together legislators representing peoples of diverse economic, cultural and political backgrounds from developing and developed countries dedicated to fostering and enhancing development.

The recent revision of the Cotonou Agreement has highlighted the importance of the parliamentary dimension to ACP-EU Cooperation. It has given new opportunities for parliamentarians at national as well as at JPA level to have an input in the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement.

To this end, I believe that Regional meetings such as this one are an important part of this process.

Your Excellency,

Mr. Speaker,

Ladies and gentlemen

As I end, I would like to once again reiterate my thanks to the Government and people of Seychelles for hosting this meeting and for welcoming us so warmly to their beautiful country. I am sure that many of us who are here for the first time will want to come back on official business or leisure.

I thank you for your kind attention.
