

ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

29 April 2008

1ST REGIONAL MEETING OF THE ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY: SOUTHERN AFRICA

28 – 30 APRIL 2008

**SAFARI CONFERENCE CENTRE
WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA**

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

**Website of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp>**

Introduction

The fifteen members of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (ACP-EU JPA) from the SADC member states and their fifteen European Parliamentary counterparts, met in Windhoek, Namibia on 28 and 29 April 2008, under the Co-Presidency of Co-Presidents Glenys Kinnock and Wilkie Rasmussen.

This was the first ever regional Meeting of the ACP-EU JPA to be organised under Article 17.3 of the Cotonou Agreement and Article 6 of the ACP-EU JPA Rules of Procedure.

The formal opening session of the Meeting heard statements from the Co-Presidents, Hon. Nora Schimming-Chase, Vice-Chairperson of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament, Hon. Dr Theo-Ben Gurirab, who officially opened the Meeting.

Regional Integration and the SADC roadmap

Members discussed the regional integration process in the SADC Region and the involvement of parliamentarians. To this end, the need for regional institutions, in addition to national, for follow-up and implementation of SADC Protocols was seen as an integral process of regional integration. Regional integration was considered as one of the means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), through the formulation of regional policies to address infrastructural and human development. At the political level, regional integration contributes to setting standards for democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

Members agreed that, in general, parliamentary involvement in international agreements was one of the least undertaken mandates in their countries. It was appreciated that the SADC Treaty had recently established the SADC Tribunal, which had jurisdiction to hear legal disputes on issues in the SADC Treaty and to serve as last instance for individuals after local remedies against measures of national authorities are exhausted. This was seen as one of the mechanisms of upholding good governance and the rule of law at regional level. It was noted that although the SADC Region has an organised regional Forum of Parliamentarians, this was not recognised formally within the SADC Treaty. SADC Parliamentarians were urged to continue lobbying their respective governments to take the necessary steps to provide for an official parliamentary dimension in the SADC regional integration process, wherein the lack of parliamentary involvement was seen as a democratic deficit at the SADC level.

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA)

It was acknowledged that the EPA negotiations had presented the SADC Region with complex challenges. The SADC EPA should contribute to strengthening regional integration, reinforcing the gains that have so far been made in advancing objectives and programmes of regional integration. Members were informed that it was difficult, from an economic perspective, to establish customs unions in a region with overlapping memberships such as the SADC Region, as such configurations would have the effect of undermining and complicating intra-regional trade.

Members expressed concern that the adjustment costs of EPAs should be financed, as well as the need for support to address supply-side, infrastructural and general capacity constraints to ensure the effective participation of ACP States in world trade.

In particular, Members called for more effective parliamentary involvement in the EPA process. Whilst acknowledging that parliamentarians would not be able to participate in the actual negotiation process, it was thought that there was scope for parliamentarians to call for information and regular updates through parliamentary mechanisms. Members emphasised that the development dimension should be the cornerstone of the EPAs.

Human rights

Members took note of the situation regarding the respect for human rights and the rule of law in the SADC Region. Whilst there had been substantial progress in the region in the observance of human rights partly as a consequence of the reduction in internal armed conflicts, the recent past has also seen some significant deterioration of the human rights situation. Members emphasised that human rights do include social and economic rights, on which there had been little emphasis so far, but which were acknowledged to be just as important as civil and political rights. Further, ACP States were urged to comply with various international human rights conventions that they were party to, and ratify those they had not. The host country, Namibia, was commended for the efforts that it had undertaken, in part through the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman, to establish mechanisms for the protection and defence of human rights.

Peace, security and stability

The impact on social stability of the situation in Zimbabwe was of deep concern. There were calls for a democratic outcome in Zimbabwe and widespread support was expressed for the SADC initiatives and the role of the SADC PF in this regard. Concerns were also raised over the situation in the DRC, in particular in Kivu with the involvement of external forces making the conflict even harder to resolve. There could be no military solution, and there are clear needs for support for post-conflict reconstruction from the European Union.

Food security and rising food prices

Members agreed that the SADC region had great potential for food self-sufficiency, but the recent rise in fuel and food prices were extremely harmful for the regional economy as well as for the health and lives of the population. Extreme weather conditions have affected harvests and higher oil prices restrict or hamper transport and market access for food products. The rise in biofuel production has also hit food supplies, and there were calls for the introduction of second-generation biomass consumption as soon as possible. There also needs to be investment in greater agricultural yields through development of infrastructure for improved market access, research, technology and support to smallholders to promote their ownership of food security policies. Furthermore, the SADC initiatives in the area of political stability and security would favour food security in the region.

Water and energy resources

Members discussed water and energy in the region and concluded that there was potential for improvements in the management of resources at the regional level. Water is not only important for consumption at local level but also crucial for agriculture and energy production. There needs to more investment in the construction of dams for water conservation and hydro-electricity as well as the promotion of energy from biomass products. Solar and other renewables should be promoted also in rural communities with, i.a., local production and maintenance. There is also a need for forward planning and capacity building in regional cooperation to develop regional energy contracts, in which SADC should become more involved.

Elections and election observation

Members heard about the activities of the SADC Parliamentary Forum in election observation missions and called for further development in their capacity to conduct such operations. Discussion covered elections in general, considering such issues as the design of electoral systems (with more countries considering changing from 'first past the post' to proportional representation or a combination of the two), the need for a continuous voter registration process, balanced access to media, misuse of government resources in the campaign and possible state funding of political parties.

There was a particular focus on the March 29 elections in Zimbabwe. SADC PF had not observed this election as it had not been invited in its own right. The European Union had, however, financed training of eleven thousand electoral monitors for the election there. Members expressed concerns over the delay in the announcement of the Presidential results in Zimbabwe. In that respect, they called for the expeditious release of the results by the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC).

Fisheries

Members heard a report on the recent JPA fact-finding mission to the Seychelles to examine the tuna industry. Fish stocks there, and elsewhere, were threatened by overfishing and climate change and it was crucial to find a way of reconciling sustainable fisheries policy and profitability. The projected erosion of preferential tariffs threatened the future of this industry.

It was vital that ACP countries like Seychelles receive additional funding to meet the cost of implementation of the new Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing regulation and SPS. Other SADC countries face similar problems as do ACP countries elsewhere, in the Pacific for example, and perhaps a regional fisheries agreement would be a good idea. This should be followed up by the JPA in its forthcoming plenary and regional meetings in that region.

Conclusions

Members expressed gratitude to the Government and Parliament of Namibia, SADC Parliamentary Forum and the European Parliament for facilitating the 1st Regional Meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Southern Africa. They agreed that this Regional Meeting had been an extremely useful and successful event

Finally, members called on the ACP-EU JPA Bureau to draw up specific recommendations for convening of future Regional Meetings based on the experience drawn from this first meeting, and called on the Co-Presidents to present the conclusions of this Regional Meeting both at the next meeting of the Bureau and the 16th Session of the ACP-EU JPA in Port Moresby and to forward them to the European Commission, SADC Secretariat, SADC-PF, the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament, the SADC Governments and the National Parliaments of SADC and EU Member States.