



ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

24 February 2012

**7th REGIONAL MEETING OF THE ACP-EU JOINT
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

SOUTHERN AFRICA

22-24 FEBRUARY 2012

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

Website of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp>

Introduction

The Members of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) from the Southern Africa region of the ACP Group and their European Parliament counterparts held a regional meeting in Lusaka (Zambia) from 22 to 24 February 2012, as foreseen by Article 17 of the Cotonou Agreement, for which organisation they thanked the National Assembly and the Government.

Their discussions focused on the following subjects:

Regional integration and cooperation in Southern Africa

In Southern Africa, regional integration is overseen by three organisations - SADC, COMESA and EAC. The Parliamentarians expressed concern on the overlapping of competencies and its challenge for integration, and called for the processes to be streamlined. In this regard, they commended the tripartite arrangements, pursued to reduce the cases of duplication in the regional integration programmes and to facilitate the eventual convergence of Free Trade Areas (FTA) into an African common market, also politically integrated.

It was noted that the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) must also aim to enhance regional integration, development and economic growth, by facilitating the access of ACP countries to international trade markets. It was also emphasised that ACP countries must put in place measures for effective internal revenue collection to compensate for loss of customs revenues henceforth.

Members pointed out that regional integration in Africa is driven mainly by the Executives and does not involve Parliaments sufficiently. Elected representatives need to monitor the process of regional integration and enhance clarity on the regional cooperation agenda and on the EPA process.

Mineral resources and their contribution to development

The trend has started to change from a malediction to a benefit for mineral-rich countries in the region which often had strong macroeconomic indicators but improvable redistribution and human development indicators in terms of health, education, etc.

There are tremendous opportunities on all socio-economic fields for mineral driven transformation in the region by using mineral resources revenues. Some Members proposed the establishment of an African investment fund based on revenues from natural resources as a complement to foreign investment, which should be enabled locally and provided with legal security.

Members commended measures taken to increase accountability in the framework of the extractive industries transparency initiative, the draft legislation which would oblige transnational companies to disclose their earnings and taxes paid in countries they operate, and emphasised the importance of the international level-playing field, with similar transparency rules and accounting standards.

Strengthening democracy

Fight against corruption

While African governments commit significant resources to fight against a plethora of problems, corruption remains a major obstacle to development. Members were of the view that fighting corruption requires strong political will, adequate anti-corruption legislation, institutional means, independent media, protection of whistleblowers, as well as vigilant citizens. Anti-corruption measures should address the entire corruption cycle – from drivers of corruption to “beneficiaries” - and be effectively implemented.

Members underlined the need to strengthen parliaments’ capacities to oversee corruption, especially via the parliamentary budgetary scrutiny.

Role of the media

Members recognised that the media are shaping public opinion, mediating the debate between the state and civil society, but also acting as a watchdog over public processes, against private gain. Free media are a prerequisite to development in the promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance.

Elections and electoral processes

Though recognising them as essential, Parliamentarians emphasised that democracy goes beyond the organisation of free, transparent and credible elections. SADC Member States are called upon to improve the institutional and legal mechanisms to ensure gender equality in decision-making and political offices; to preserve the independence of the judiciary; to allow political pluralism and freedom for the opposition; to ensure fair and balanced coverage of all political parties by the public media; to encourage a lively civil society; and to enhance follow-up of the recommendations of international election observation missions.

Election observation enhances public confidence in the consolidation, and maintaining of democracy, peace and stability, and the protection of human rights. The role of SADC Parliamentary Forum, the EU and the JPA in election observation has been recognised.

Members also commended the Zambian authorities on the recent general elections that took place in Zambia in September 2011 and which were regionally and internationally (including the EU) recognised as transparent, credible and a model of peaceful transition of power, which should serve as an example to the rest of Africa.

Millennium Development Goals

HIV/AIDS

Southern Africa is one of the most affected regions in terms of HIV/AIDS. Infection rates have started to decline but not as fast as would be desired.

Members emphasised the importance of taking into account the human rights dimension in HIV/AIDS policies. They expressed concern at laws that criminalise HIV transmission or exposure and commercial sex and deplored the absence of laws – including gender sensitive ones as women are more exposed – that protect people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Members agreed that sex education and prevention need to be integrated in primary and secondary school. Better coordination is, hence, required between government and non-governmental institutions dealing with health and education.

Education

Members recalled that MDG2 is aimed at the attainment of universal primary education for all. They deplored the very high drop-out rates from primary school in the region and urged governments to invest in training of teachers, increase of their remuneration and good school management.

Members recognised the effectiveness of school feeding programmes for enrolment and retention rates in school, especially for girls. They affirmed the important role that governments play in the education sector but they called for involvement of other actors and decentralisation.

Members also urged governments to ensure equal access to secondary education, as only at this level do pupils acquire knowledge to make a useful contribution to society.

Gender mainstreaming

Members agreed that gender inequality is not only an African, but a global problem. True equality is achieved only when work conditions are the same for both genders and all benefits in society are equally shared. Development would not be sustainable without the full participation of women.

Gender equality requires institutional change along with changes in traditions and social practices. In addition, the will and initiative for empowerment of women is crucial to achieve equality.

While there is a good legislative base at international level on gender equality, there is inadequate ownership at national level. Parliamentarians are expected to play a key role to bridge this gap, by advocating for affirmative action.

Food security

The success story of the transformation of Southern Africa from a food deficit region to a region with surplus production of cereals, emphasizes the key role of agricultural policies in the improvement of food security. The implementation of subsidised support programmes for agricultural inputs have led to production's steady increase. Members commended the fact that some Southern African countries have allocated at least 10 percent of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development.

Members called on the Co-Presidents to present the conclusions of the regional meeting to the next Bureau meeting in March and to the 23rd session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly to be held in Horsens (Denmark) in May, and to forward them to the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the SADC and COMESA Secretariats, the Pan-African Parliament, the ACP Group of States, the African Union Commission, the Governments and National Parliaments of Southern Africa and to the EU Member States.