

**STATEMENT BY THE ACP- CO PRESIDENT OF THE ACP-EU
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, HON. WILKIE
RASMUSSEN (COOK ISLANDS) AT THE OFFICIAL OPENNING
CEREMONY OF THE 15TH SESSION OF THE ACP-EU JOINT
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

Monday, 17 March 2008

Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Center, Slovenia

- Mrs. Glenys KINNOCK, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
- Honourable Janez Janša, Prime Minister of Slovenia,
- Andrej Šter, State Secretary for Development, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- Members of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the opportunity, honour and privilege to make a statement to this distinguished Assembly. On behalf of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly and indeed on my own behalf, allow me to express our profound gratitude to our Slovenian hosts for their hospitality and excellent facilities put at our disposal in this beautiful city of Ljubljana. In many ways, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to have a Joint Parliamentary Assembly Session in Slovenia, one of the latest entrants to the European Union. As a country with a diverse and rich history, Slovenia shares a lot of historical attributes with many ACP States. This occasion also gives us an opportunity to profile the importance of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement in the new Member States of the EU. I am also particularly privileged to participate in this Session of the JPA, being my first as Co-President. It is an honour for me personally and for my country, the Cook Islands. I will do my best to be a loyal servant to this august Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Wealth Imbalance

In the coming few days, we shall be focusing our attention on some of the most pressing development issues facing the African Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States. It is important that as we debate, we remain focused to strive to achieve our goals. Collectively, the ACP Group represents about 20 percent of the world's population, and yet the Group only generates a fraction of the world's wealth. African States for instance, are some of the world's biggest suppliers of minerals, and yet they earn just a small percentage of the final market value of the minerals they produce. Some ACP States are the largest exporters of primary commodities, and yet they are not known as manufacturers of finished products made from their exports.

Loss of Skilled Manpower

Whilst thousands of young professionals and scientists flow through universities and colleges in developed countries, the relatively few that ACP States manage to educate and train at great cost to them cannot find gainful employment and are snapped up by more competitive employers in developed countries. In effect, developing countries are subsidizing the professional needs of developed countries in certain crucial areas such as medicine. This is just the tip of the iceberg of the complex and multidimensional issue of migration.

Climate Change

However, in addition to these challenges, there are common issues that confront us all in the same way. For example, climate change. We still do not understand very clearly how this is going to affect the world, but already it is very apparent that ACP States, among the least contributors to the causes of climate change will suffer disproportionately from its consequences, partly because there are

simply not enough resources for mitigation and control of the effects of climate change. Some Island Pacific and Caribbean States are threatened with rising sea levels to the extent that some of them could be submerged under water in some years to come. Even in this case, events at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change held in Bali, Indonesia in December 2007, which saw protracted negotiations on the basic issue of agreeing on targets to reduce carbon emissions, demonstrated that as developing countries, ACP States have very little hope of influencing the global development agenda when commercial and vested interests are at stake.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cooperation to tackle Problems

I nevertheless wish to submit that we have come a long way in terms of cooperation between developed and developing countries. The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement is unique in the sense of giving an opportunity to beneficiaries and donors of development aid to discuss priorities and programmes of intervention together as partners. Coupled to this fact is this important exercise that we as Parliamentarians undertake twice a year, to discuss issues of mutual interest in a Parliamentary Assembly bringing together representatives from some of the richest as well poorest nations on earth. We now have a much better idea of what kind of policies work and what kind do not. We have better evidence of best practices in development cooperation policy. We therefore have very little reason not to be able to tackle development challenges in a much better way.

Poverty

We know that the biggest threat to world development is global poverty. Unless the international trade and financial regime is structured in a way that tackles the root cause of the marginalization of developing countries in the international economy, developing countries will continue to be mired in poverty, which leads in turn to political instability and underdevelopment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poorly Managed Resources

As ACP States, we acknowledge that we have problems to resolve in our own backyards. It is important to dwell on the issue of governance and institutions because as the evidence shows, most ACP States are poor not because of lack of resources, but because of the way those resources have been managed in the past. Indeed, the ACP Group collectively is the most resource-endowed region on earth. Some ACP States have enjoyed very large volumes of capital infusions in the form of export earnings from exports of minerals and agricultural produce, but this has failed to bring about development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Agriculture

Agriculture plays a central part in the well-being of developing countries' economies and their people. In the developing world, an average of 50 percent of people make their living from farming and agriculture, and in some countries, this figure rises to over 80 per cent. Moreover, agriculture particularly affects women, accounting for the vast majority of women's employment in developing countries. Agriculture also plays a central part in reducing poverty. Three quarters of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor people live and work in rural areas.

Subsidies

However, the agricultural sector is the most protected and heavily subsidised sector in the developed countries. This distorts prices and makes African agricultural produce less competitive in world markets. The European Union (EU) support to milk production per cow is 16 times more than the average per capita spending on education by all developing countries, 25 times more than the average per capita spending on education by countries in sub-Saharan Africa and over 90 times more than per capita spending on education in the world's Least Developed Countries. In 2004, the US is said to have spent over \$3billion in export subsidies. Dairy products take up the biggest category of EU export subsidies, worth 1.5 billion Euros in 2004. Sugar exports cost European taxpayers €988m, processed foods €380m, beef €251m and wine €13m each year.

Tariff Inequalities

Tariff reductions in Africa, on the other hand, are producing unfair competition, since many imported products enjoy heavy subsidies that distort prices and undermine local small-scale production. This amounts to dumping overproduced and subsidised produce onto the markets of developing countries. If this situation does not change, developed countries could in this way be preventing ACP States' development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Structural Adjustment Programmes

Many of these issues that I have spoken about will be the subject of debate during our meetings at this Session of the ACP-EU JPA, in particular, as reflected in the Motions for Resolutions submitted by the three Standing Committees and the two Urgent Motions for Resolutions. The Report on “*European Experiences of Integration Relevant to ACP States*” will give us an opportunity to examine whether, and in what ways and to what extent the European integration model can be replicated in the ACP States. I know that there are differences of opinion on the subject of Structural Adjustment Programmes in ACP States, but it cannot be denied that the transformation of Structural Adjustment Programmes into Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) is an implied acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the earlier approach that focused solely on macro-economic stability and fiscal discipline at the expense of poverty reduction and social investment. We shall be debating these issues in the Report on “*The Social and Environmental Consequences of Structural Adjustment.*”

Food Security

Food security, the theme of the Report on “*Food Security Issues,*” remains a constant pre-occupation of governments in ACP States. The factors I have touched on such as climate change and the international trade regime, impact on food security, and it is quite clear that the EU has an important role to play in addressing these issues.

Political Issues

As usual we shall also devote attention to issues of a political nature. The situations in Kenya and Chad are alarming and distressing although ACP States were pleased to receive a positive report last week of developments in Kenya. Internal problems such as the ones being experienced in these two countries have implications far beyond their national borders. Apart from undermining confidence in State institutions, the ultimate victims of political instability and armed conflict are women, children and the elderly.

Conflicts and Refugees

Some 20% of Africa's people are affected by conflict, and most of the victims are innocent civilians. The World Bank estimates that conflict is knocking 2% a year off Africa's economic growth. Large numbers of refugees place a burden on neighbouring countries; Tanzania, for instance, has taken in 1.5 million refugees in the last decade, Kenya, which is currently faced with internally displaced persons of its own, has long been seen as one of the havens of refuge in an otherwise conflict prone region.

Regional instability also cripples efforts to control the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS. Conflicts, however, have a far more debilitating effect on development. Political instability and armed conflict can push back years of gainful investment and social progress and cripple a government's ability to provide social services to its citizens.

Madame Co-President,

Hon Prime Minister,

Members of the JPA,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As parliamentarians, let us remain committed to addressing policies that expand social, political and economic opportunities and uphold the dignity of all our citizens. As ACP States, we need to take responsibility and ownership for our own development agenda, notwithstanding the cooperation and assistance we need and frequently receive from our development partners. We acknowledge of course valued assistance that ACP States have received from the EU over the three decades of our development cooperation, but we know that much more still needs to be done.

I thank you for your kind attention.
