

**ACP/EC Joint Parliamentary Assembly
Luanda
Monday, 30 November 2009
Speech of M. Karel DE GUCHT
Commissioner for Development and
Humanitarian Aid**

Co-chairs of the Assembly,

Honourable members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first congratulate Mr Louis Michel for his appointment to this prestigious and challenging post of co-chair of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly that he was used to attend as Commissioner. Let me extend my congratulations to Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas for his appointment as new Secretary General of the ACP Group.

I would like to praise them for the excellent job done in their respective functions, and I am very confident that their experience, wisdom and engagement will help the ACP Group and our partnership to find the renewed political impetus we need to effectively tackle the global challenges we are facing today.

Even if I will soon hand over the Development portfolio to my successor and future colleague Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, it is a great pleasure for me to attend this Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly for different reasons.

First of all – on a personal basis – I truly enjoy attending as Commissioner this Assembly that I used to attend as MEP for many years. I am pleased to notice that this Assembly has grown in status, relevance and political influence.

Having been a MEP for a great part of my political life, I am deeply convinced that strong and democratically elected parliaments are the best guarantors of democratic control and remain the most effective voice of the people.

I therefore would like to praise once again the value and the prominence that the European Commission has always given to this Assembly, which is to my knowledge the largest and oldest joint North-South parliamentary body in the world.

Second, because we are **at the eve of an historical day for the European Union**. As of tomorrow, the European Union will be based on a new Treaty: the Treaty of Lisbon. With a stronger role for the European and National Parliaments in the decision making process, we hope to be able to fill the democratic deficit we still have at the EU level.

I hope that this new trend will spill over through this joint Assembly in promoting a more transparent and democratic monitoring of our partnership.

In this same vein, I strongly believe that this Joint Assembly must be the prime advocate in defending parliamentary democracy in ACP countries.

The on-going negotiations of the Revision of the Cotonou Agreement provide an opportunity for strengthening the role of the JPA; this opportunity cannot be missed. I would like to encourage the Assembly to reflect on this further.

Just to give some examples:

- The JPA should encourage its ACP members to make full use of the country and regional strategy papers in order to open and broaden the debate on the development policy. The Commission is often asked to consult national

parliament and civil society on development agenda; no other institution that is in a better position to do it than your Assembly.

- The JPA should also convey the message that Economic Partnership Agreements must be subject to parliamentary oversight.
- The JPA could also **reinforce its own role** by being more political and more ambitious, by not shying away from calling a spate a spate, and by being closer to the real concerns of the people in a globalized world, notably by **strengthening its regional dimension.**

Honourable Members of the Assembly,

At the end of the day, the pertinence of the partnership between the ACP and the EU will be judged against its **capacity to respond to the burning global challenges** we are facing today.

Either we succeed and we remain relevant on the international scene or we fail and therefore our capacity of influence will be lost for good.

To succeed, we need to adapt the Cotonou framework to changing parameters – this is what the successive revisions are meant to do. But more so, we must **give this framework a real political content.**

Just to mention some...

The **Copenhagen conference on climate change** will start just a few days from now. We all know what is at stake: nothing less than our common future and the one of our children. We have a joint responsibility to achieve the most ambitious, effective and fair deal possible.

ACP countries are hardly responsible for climate change, but they are nevertheless confronted with its severest consequences, notably through

increased frequency of natural disasters and adverse impact on agricultural production, raising sea levels, etc. This injustice does not however imply that ACP countries are powerless and cannot be supportive - if not critical – in order to reach a global deal.

The European Union has proposed drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We have set ourselves binding reduction targets. However, the EU's share in worldwide CO2 emissions is only 11%; even our best efforts won't solve the problem, we must convince others as well.

The EU has also strongly argued that developing countries must be helped in their efforts on adaptation. In the case of ACP countries, we have already considerably stepped up our support in this area. But **to do significantly more, we need a global deal.**

There are so **many points of common understanding if not common interest** between the EU and ACP in these negotiations that should make us **natural allies:**

- The need to ensure an equal status for adaptation and mitigation in the Copenhagen deal;
- The need to link the fight against climate change with development; and, associated to this, the necessity that delivery of climate financing does not jeopardize the fight against poverty;
- The significance of reducing emissions from deforestation coupled with safety nets and sustainable exploitation of natural resources;
- The need to adequately consider agriculture;
- The need for a reformed Clean Development Mechanism.

Last May, the ACP-EU Council of Ministers adopted a Joint Declaration on Climate Change with the aim to cooperate and to enhance our consultations in the run up to Copenhagen. The intentions are good, but are we translating them into reality? **This Assembly should send a clear message to Copenhagen that the ACP and the EU are united in calling for ambitious and binding results.**

We are also facing other challenges of the same global nature: many people around the world are still suffering the consequences of the present **global economic crisis** and the recent **food crisis**. The origin of the economic crisis lies in the rich world, but those who suffer the most are the poor in the developing world. While the effects may differ a lot from one country to another, they are drastic in many ACP countries and we might not yet have reached the bottom.

The EU has shown a strong commitment in assisting developing countries – notably the ACP countries – to overcome the consequences of the various crises:

- Last year, the EU mobilised within very short time € 1 billion to respond to the food crisis;
- this year, we have created a € 500 million Vulnerability Flex Instrument for rapid response to the economic crisis – half of it will already be disbursed before the end of the year;
- this is complemented by beefing up to € 500 million the EDF infrastructure fund.
- The mid-term review of the EDF has been anticipated and will allow for targeted adaptation in response to the crisis.

The EU played moreover a catalytic role in fulfilling the G-20 London commitments for increasing the IMF's lending capacity by USD 750 billion. And, last but not least, the EU has been an ally in advocating a reform of the international financial architecture inter alia by giving a stronger voice and

ensuring adequate participation and representation of developing countries in multilateral institutions.

Our commitment to stand by our partners should not be doubted but this is not only about mobilising funds: our partnership should work to **ensure that these resources reach those who need them and that they are used effectively.**

It is vital that Europe and other developed countries fulfil their commitment to gradually increase their Official Development Aid. But this will not work – notably at times of severe budgetary constraints – without showing our taxpayers that firstly, we are able to **produce results** and secondly, that our partners **mobilise their own resources** and **use them within a framework of good governance and sound policies.** The same principles will apply to any resources that may come out of Copenhagen.

I believe this is very much the core of a functioning partnership: all of us must make genuine efforts and work in synergy to change the world for the better. It is not about donor and recipient, it is about shared responsibility.

Honourable members of the Assembly,

Within the relatively short period I have been Commissioner for development, I have learned that the partnership between ACP countries and the EU cannot be taken for granted but needs to be updated, nurtured and developed.

I am convinced that the potential of Cotonou is not being adequately exploited because we don't seem to succeed in filling it with sufficient political life.

At the same time, we are moving much faster at regional level than in our global ACP-EU relations, which seem to stagnate. Regional integration - including Economic Partnership Agreements - should not be seen as rivalling the ACP-EU

partnership; it should be seen as strengthening it. In the EU, we call it the "subsidiarity" principle; it is a basic principle of the European integration; it does not challenge integration but it has fostered it and it still does.

As you may know, subject to European Parliament approval, I will be the next European Commissioner in charge of Trade.

Let me tell you that it is my deep conviction that EPAs are useful – I would even say necessary. I understand they are a difficult and sensitive issue for the ACP. So far we have been working actively to address the ACP concerns and – thanks to Cathy Ashton and Louis Michel – we have looked for a tailored-made solution for each region.

In my future function, I will continue to listen carefully to your worries and concerns in order to finalise the most satisfactory and development-oriented EPAs in the next future. I strongly believe that so far the potential of EPAs in term of regional integration and economic development has been largely underestimated and in some cases misunderstood.

My conviction is that services and trade-related issues customized to the needs, capacity and development context of each region deserve the interest of the ACP group. This will of course require a sincere in-depth discussion, as well as innovative and flexible solutions. We will work together to achieve this, without putting unnecessary pressure on your countries.

Nevertheless, beyond technicalities, I would like to highlight the potential positive impact that EPAs could unleash bringing each single integrated region under the ACP umbrella to the forefront of the international trade arena.

If each region can evolve from its present situation to areas of free trade with an effective system of Common External Tariff, this could be a major step forward.

A relatively more important weight on negotiations, not only in the North-South relations but also in the South-South relations or with emerging economies, will avoid these regions and their Member States to be unfairly sidelined. They will fully benefit of having stronger voice, stronger representation and better comparative advantages.

In this regard, The Commission has already doubled the envelopes of each regional programme within the fixed ceiling of the 10th EDF global envelope. I will do my best to secure additional funds – such as an incentive tranche - to those regions that will register the best results according to their own integration programme. I will also actively urge EU member States to deliver on their promises on aid for trade.

Thank you for you attention