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**STATEMENT BY MR. WILKIE RASMUSSEN, CO-PRESIDENT  
OF THE ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 18TH SESSION OF THE  
ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
LUANDA, ANGOLA**

**MONDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2009**

- Hon. Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Angola,
- Mr Louis Michel, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

First and foremost, let me welcome colleagues and Parliamentarians to Luanda, Angola, for the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. On behalf of the JPA and indeed on my own behalf, I would like to thank the Government and National Assembly of Angola for offering to host this Session of the JPA, and indeed for all the facilities that have been put in place to make our meeting a success.

I wish to state that we are privileged to be in this beautiful country of which some of us have heard a lot, but have never had the opportunity to experience first hand. For many years, many of us knew about Angola due to its unfortunate distinction - then of having one of the longest civil wars in the world. I wish to congratulate the Government and people of Angola for the peace that this country has enjoyed in the last decade, and the institutional and development transformation that is taking place.

Mr. Speaker,  
Co-President,

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome to the JPA our newly elected members of the European Parliament. Congratulations on your election and re-election, and we look forward to build a strong relationship that will foster effective cooperation and collaboration. Let me also welcome, Mr. Louis MICHEL, the new EU Co-President of the JPA, who is familiar to all of us from his time as European Union Commissioner for Development Assistance and

Humanitarian Action. I have no doubt that the JPA will benefit from his experience and knowledge of development issues that are at the core of the ACP-EU Partnership.

This Session marks the last time that I will be presiding over this Session as Co-President of the JPA. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to look back on the last two years that I have been Co-President and my reflections on some of the challenges that we still face as Parliamentarians, and in particular, as Members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker,

As you know, the JPA is a product of the evolution of the ACP-EU Partnership, and was created to provide parliamentary legitimacy and an institutional framework for parliamentary cooperation between the ACP Group and the EU, its principle development partner. The primary function of the JPA should be to promote and facilitate greater understanding between the peoples of the EU and those of the ACP States, and in furtherance of this primary objective, to compliment the efforts of other institutions and organisations in realising the objectives of the ACP-EU Partnership.

This Assembly has registered some notable achievements in the last two years, and two of those immediately come to mind. The first one is that during the 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the JPA that was held in Rwanda in 2007, it was decided that the JPA should start receiving Country and Regional Strategy Papers that are agreed upon between respective ACP States and Regions with the EC for the implementation of development cooperation in the framework of the European Development Fund. This was in large part due to the efforts of our counterparts in the European Parliament, who wished to see that these documents that were already being sent by the EC to the European Parliament were shared with their

ACP colleagues in the JPA. I feel that this one more step in bridging the democratic deficit in bilateral and regional agreements, an area in which most ACP Parliaments have no influence at all.

The second notable achievement was that beginning in April 2008, the JPA started organising Regional Meetings, as provided for in Article 17 of the Cotonou Agreement and Article 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the JPA. I have the privilege of attending all the 4 Regional Meetings that have been organised so far, and I can testify to the tremendous value of the information, knowledge and experiences shared among ACP and EU Parliamentarians of the development challenges that confront ACP States and Regions. The frank and open manner that characterise these meetings, which represent the broad spectrum of political thinking and ideology can only enhance the value and visibility of this Assembly in ACP Regions and States, as well as the ethos of partnership in ACP-EU relations.

Mr. Speaker,

As you know, the ACP Group and European Commission are in the process of the second five year Revision of the Cotonou Agreement. Some of the envisaged changes will impact on the work of this Assembly. The Revision process needs to take into account the new institutions that will be created as a result of EPAs, and of particular relevance to this Assembly are the proposals for Regional Parliamentary Committees to monitor the implementation of EPAs. However, I feel that the negotiators and Regions ought to provide this Assembly the autonomy to reform its working procedures to take into account new developments.

Mr. Speaker,

I feel that the key word in ACP-EU relations is 'partnership'. This extends to the way global issues are addressed and managed beyond the ACP-EU circle, as we are all part of the larger international community. In terms of development assistance, the issue of partnership has gained prominence, as seen in the language of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. The social, political, financial and ecological events in the last two years have validated the need for the international community to address the challenges that the world faces from the premise of Partnership and shared interests in which there are no real winners or losers. The antithesis to this approach is an unbridled belief in the primacy of one's own interests, which might not be sustainable in the long-term.

You will agree with me that the failure of a consensual approach has led to the current deadlock in WTO Negotiations, and has slowed down the EPA negotiations process. Most of us in the ACP States are already apprehensive that if past attitudes do not change, the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change that will take place in two weeks time, will conclude with a mere political statement if there are no binding targets and commitments.

Mr. Speaker,

This Assembly has always been a strong advocate of partnerships that are aimed at eradicating poverty and promoting development, and we shall be focusing on this theme again in this Session when we discuss the *Report on Global Governance and the Reform of International Institutions*.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2005, we welcomed the enthusiasm of the 2005 Gleneagles Summit of the G8 nations that committed itself to raising the level development assistance, mainly in the form of debt cancellation amounting to almost US\$40 billion, which would translate into almost US\$1 billion in debt service payments for highly indebted poor countries. On the other hand, some estimates suggest that between US\$40 – US\$60 billion is needed for world to meet the Millennium Development Goals. As we had pointed out in several Sessions of our Assembly, there is no shortage of commitments and grand plans aimed at addressing our development challenges. What is often lacking is political will to bridge the gap between commitments and delivery. While disbursements for aid programmes are irregular and do not often match commitments, many development aid advocates were impressed, to say the least, with the speed with which European countries and the USA reacted to the financial crisis and the tremendous amounts, running into trillions of dollars, mobilised in a relatively short space of time to deal with the financial and economic crisis. Unfortunately, sometimes our partners forget that we too have been affected by this global crisis. In some countries, this has pushed even further backwards the little progress recorded towards the attainment of the MDGs. Might I suggest that perhaps, ACP States too need a pragmatic stimulus package free of the neo-liberal economic thinking that had weighed down previous development policies in the mould of the “Washington Consensus”.

Mr. Speaker,

In acknowledging the importance of development aid, we must also admit that it is just but one of the ingredients of development. Aid should never replace ACP States’ own development initiatives and establishment as well as maintenance of appropriate institutional support that should be the foundation of sustainable

economic development. Perhaps one of the most important factors that have affected development in our States are armed conflicts and lack political stability. Many people in ACP States continue to be victims of armed conflicts that perpetuate poverty and underdevelopment. Armed conflicts lead to the destruction of physical infrastructure, and the social capital that is dissipated in times of instability, often takes much longer to recapture than the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure. As Parliamentarians, our role is to ensure that these and many other issues remain the focus of national, regional, and international development policies.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude let me just say a few words about the EPA negotiations. We have debated this issue several times in this Assembly, so I will re-iterated what ACP States have stated before:

- i. Without a comprehensive package to address the nascent and sensitive nature of many ACP economic sectors, EPAs will not deliver on the promise of sustainable development;
- ii. The exposure to competition with EU imports will require significant funds for investments in ACP production and supply capacities, and for social and other accompanying or compensatory measures. There is need for additional funds to address these concerns; and
- iii. Before the advent of EPA negotiations, there had been several regional integration initiatives in ACP States, which had gone quite far in addressing regional development needs. Some of the regional integration organs have made a lot of progress towards becoming customs unions. It is hoped that EPAs will support and enhance existing regional integration processes in ACP Regions. However, it is to be noted that EPA negotiating configurations have already caused fissures among some ACP regional integration

organs and could weaken existing processes of regional co-operation and integration;

Mr. Speaker,

I am glad to note that the JPA has repeatedly raised many of these concerns in all its Sessions. I challenge you not to relent and to continue exercising your mandate with the courage, conviction and persistence that you have always demonstrated. I wish you success in your endeavors at this 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the JPA.

Lastly, allow me also to thank Sir John Kaputin, Secretary-General of the ACP Group and Co-Secretary-General of the ACP-EU JPA, for his dedication and commitment over the last 5 years to the ACP Group and our ACP-EU Partnership.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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