OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTER FOR LANDS AND PHYSICAL PLANNING AND MINING

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

OF THE 16TH SESSION OF THE ACP-EU
JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2008
PORT MORESBY, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPEECH DELIVERED BY

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DISTINGUISHED CO-PRESIDENTS OF THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

HONOURABLE PARLIAMENTARIANS
ACP AND EU DELEGATES
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It is with great pride that the people of Papua New Guinea join me in welcoming you all – Parliamentarians, Delegates and Special Guests – to Port Moresby to participate in the 16th Session of the ACP –EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

On behalf of the Government and the People of Papua New Guinea, I express our most sincere appreciation to you for choosing our country to host this important meeting. This marks the second occasion Papua New Guinea is hosting a meeting of this august Assembly. It was almost two decades ago when we first hosted the JPA and a number of developments have taken place since then.

We are profoundly touched by your gesture – a unanimous decision that is a clear testimony of the trust and confidence that you bestow on my country, Papua New Guinea. It is also an honor for the entire Pacific Region, which has placed great hopes on this important meeting of ACP and EU Parliamentarians who will be discussing critical issues and the serious challenges facing our countries and our people.

Papua New Guinea being the largest South Pacific Island Nation has been a major beneficiary of aid from development partners in the ACP and EU countries over many years. The opportunity to hold the meetings here will allow the Member States to see first hand what this aid has achieved.
Over the last two decades, Papua New Guinea has benefited from numerous developmental projects estimated at over Euro 2.69 billion or K8.07 billion. PNG has also received considerable assistance from the EU through the STABEX and SYSMIN instruments under the Lome and Cotonu Arrangements.

EU assistance under the Rural Development Program has been the result of the positive dialogue to address social and economic issues in Papua New Guinea.

I also wish to say that Papua New Guinea is currently involved in piloting the One Laptop Per Child Project with technical support from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Our trials are already demonstrating that this single, smart program is receiving a lot of enthusiasm and support. The Government is finalizing a National Policy for implementation in 2009.

This program in our humble opinion will bring enormous benefits to our children, schools and teachers and the volume of benefits if rolled out fully, will cover over 7,000 Educational Institutions from elementary to secondary schools, benefit over 1,160,000 children and 35,700 teachers. At the same time the establishment and rollout of the IT Infrastructure nationwide, particularly in the rural setting will transform this country and greatly narrow the digital divide.

On our own domestic conflict in Bougainville, I am happy to inform this Assembly that our continued efforts to maintain peace were further boosted by the success of the first democratic election three years ago for the Autonomous Region.
Many countries and organizations in the region including the ACP and EU offered assistance for the rehabilitation and restoration of services on the island province.

Today, we are witnessing the fruit of this work and an autonomous government is in place on Bougainville. Details of this success will be highlighted during the week.

Honorable delegates, your meeting is taking place at a time that is marked by global challenges – climate change, the sudden rise and Instability in food and fuel prices and the current financial crisis. All these challenges are impacting our world in an unimaginable manner as we approach the end of 2008, a time which should be the turning point, in terms of the mid-term assessment of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

For us here in Papua New Guinea we are cautiously optimistic., with Political Stability, strong partnerships with Member States and recent steady economic growth. Partnership is Key and must be scaled up. Our governments vision is to transform societal change into a framework of sustainable economic growth. This is why Papua New Guinea is calling for the shedding of policy chains of the past and create a new paradigm for the future.

I re echo what the Prime Minister has always stated and that is – First the environment could not be considered an externality and the Natural environment was not free for society. Second a broad framework for ecosystem service markets must be created and thirdly it is time to view the natural environment as an engine for wealth creation.

In this context we are of the strong view that our rural communities were subsidizing the carbon emissions of rich countries, at amounts, that, if redirected, would enable us to achieve our MDG’s by 2015 and sustain our livelihoods well into the future.
Indeed, the major international meetings held this year – the United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals held in New York in September, the Second Global Forum on Migration and Development held recently in Manila, and the forthcoming Doha Conference on Financing for Development scheduled to be held in Qatar at the end of this month – should be watersheds providing hope to hundreds of millions of people living in the developing world.

Great hopes have been placed in those international meetings that are crucial to the fight against poverty in respect of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the face of dismal global economic growth and the slowdown of the world economy, ACP and EU countries must remain committed and must resolve to honor the commitments undertaken by all countries in these meetings towards their full implementation.

Indeed one of the major challenges to attaining the MDG’s is the availability of public development aid. For not only can official development aid play a catalytic role in promoting economic growth, but also, the fight against poverty in the developing countries of the world will continue to require huge levels of public resources for a long time yet.

It is imperative therefore and now more than ever before the developed countries must keep their promises to the less developed nations on their committed allocations of their gross national income to official development assistance.

Apart from requiring huge levels of public resources, I wonder though, after all these years of the poverty reduction platform, whether it is not time to make equally huge paradigm shifts in the way both developing countries and development partners think and do business.
Poverty Reduction and the fight against poverty in my humble opinion, evokes and promotes a "scarcity mentality" while Economic growth and wealth creation on the other hand promotes "abundance mentality". Our collective systems, institutions and all stakeholders across the different member states need to engage in a new debate and action driven by economic growth and wealth creation. This is the paradigm shift and the journey that the ACP and its development partners must take if there is to be any real shift in our thinking and action.

The current financial crisis has opened the eyes of the international community to the urgent need to reform the international financial architecture and fully involve the developing countries in the proposals and initiatives to revise the international financial institutions and the concept of global governance. If we do not take collective action, the on-going crisis will inevitably bring about an economic recession. This will affect ACP countries whose export markets will be negatively impacted by contraction in demand.

I am glad to note that ACP Ministers of Finance and Economic Affairs at their recently held meeting in Brussels underscored, among other things, the need to place "development" at the heart of any decision on financing.

Distinguished Co-Presidents of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Honorable Parliamentarians
Ladies and Gentlemen

The 16th Session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly is being held at a critical time when the disparities and inequalities in the financial systems and the dynamics of multilateral trade are being examined more closely, especially in the context of WTO negotiations.
Those topics are also at the centre of the actions undertaken at the regional level by ACP countries engaged in negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union.

The progress of the negotiations in some Regions bring to the fore, among other things, that our fragile economies are not yet ready or prepared to deal with the challenges posed by the EPAs in various areas such as reform of the tax regimes, impact on the budgets due to possible fiscal loss, social dislocation as a result of job losses in some affected sectors, to name but a few.

For the Economic Partnership Agreement to attain the central objective of the ACP-EU partnership, as laid out in the Cotonou Agreement, that is, “reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, to enable the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy,” they must be real instruments for development, and not simply agreements that deal primarily with trade concessions. The peculiar situation we in the Pacific had been faced with, in late 2007 where two of the Pacific ACP members were compelled to depart from the rest of the group as a result of purely trade concerns to initial the interim agreement, is a case in point.

In this regard, the negotiating parties must address all the concerns, and interests expressed by the ACP States to ensure an inclusive and beneficial outcome from the EPA process.

Our honorable guests, may I wish you a successful meeting with highly interactive and constructive discussions over the next few days. The issues and challenges that you will address during this 16th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly will no doubt contribute to further strengthening the ACP-EU Partnership.
Please enjoy your stay in Papua New Guinea. We are at your service and will do everything possible to make you feel at home. I hope that you will have some free time to explore and discover the uniqueness and diversity of Papua New Guinea.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on this note it now gives me the greatest pleasure and honor to now declare the 16th session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Port Moresby open.

Thank you.