

**Statement by His Excellency Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti  
Secretary-General  
to the  
117<sup>th</sup> Session of the OACPS Council of Ministers**

23 July 2024

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**Madam President, Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson-Smith, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica**

**Honourable Ministers**

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good afternoon, good morning and good evening to everyone. Welcome to the 117<sup>th</sup> Session of the OACPS Council of Ministers. We are meeting at this hour to facilitate Ministers from different time zones of our membership to join this virtual meeting. I wish to thank you all, for making the time and effort to join us today and over the coming three days.

Our gratitude and special thanks are extended to the Honourable Kamina Johnson-Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, for assuming the presidency of Council. In chairing our sessions, the esteemed Minister has demonstrated proven and constant commitment to the OACPS.

Madame President, you stepped in to chair the Special Session of Council convened in April this year to deal with the budget. We are even more

appreciative of your efforts to be here in person, to preside over this meeting.

In the course of this meeting, Council will be called upon to make important decisions, and we will be guided, as usual, by your experience and leadership.

We are grateful to His Excellency Mário de Azevedo CONSTANTINO, the Ambassador of Angola in Brussels, for availing the premises of the Embassy to us. I would also like to thank Hon. Domingos Custodio VIERA LOPES, Secretary of State for International Cooperation and Angolan Communities, for his presence with us and his immense support to OACPS. Through him, we convey our thanks and best wishes to His Excellency João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and President-in-Office of the OACPS Summit for his commitment and dedication to our Organisation.

I am here with the President of Council, some Bureau Members, the Chair of Committee of Ambassadors and the Secretariat. The Secretariat is yet to identify a new Headquarters and our temporary location does not permit us to hold an in-person Council session. The Secretariat's dire financial situation of the Organisation does not permit us to hire Conference facilities. It is with this background in mind that I would like address Council on three main points.

**Honourable Ministers,  
Excellency Ambassadors  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with profound respect and a deep sense of responsibility that I address you today at this regular session of the OACPS Council of Ministers. As we convene to discuss and deliberate on matters crucial to our collective progress and prosperity, allow me to reiterate that the strength that lies in our unity, and our shared vision, is what binds us together.

The three critical areas I would like to address are

- (i) the need for regular payment of financial contributions,
- (ii) the imperative for smooth management of the transition to a new executive management, and
- (iii) strategising for a future that is fraught with social, economic, and environmental challenges.

I will thereafter, mention a few issues of concern and interest to the OACPS.

Firstly, I wish to highlight the importance of regular financial contributions from ALL member states. Our organisation thrives on the principles of solidarity and mutual support. It is through our collective financial commitment that we can sustain the work of the organisation and enable us to take new initiatives. Regular contributions are not merely a financial

obligation; they are a testament to our shared dedication to the goals of the OACPS.

Without adequate funding, our operations face significant constraints, hindering our ability to effectively support member states in various areas of our work. Therefore, I strongly urge each of our member states to honour their financial commitments, punctually and fully. This will ensure that our organisation remains robust and capable of delivering on its promises to improve the livelihoods of our peoples.

The Committee of Ambassadors is seized of this important matter, and their proposals on the way forward will be part of its report to Council.

Secondly, the seamless transition to new executive management is paramount for the continuity and stability of our organisation.

My tenure as Secretary-General and that of the Executive Management Team will terminate at the end of February 2025. Council will need to initiate the procedure for appointing the new leadership team for the Secretariat that will take office from March 2025.

As we approach a period of change in our leadership, it is crucial that we manage this transition with utmost care and precision. The incoming team must be well-versed in our strategic objectives and equipped to carry forward the initiatives that have been set in motion.

This becomes crucial in view of the restructuring exercise which is currently going on. My administration is ready to support the transition plan that will be put in place. We recognise the importance of this task.

As my team and I demit office at the end of February next year, I want to ensure that the new Executive Management Team has the requisite financial and human resources to continue the activities of our beloved organisation. By ensuring a smooth handover, we can maintain the momentum of our work and avoid disruptions that could impede progress.

Thirdly, our Organisation must always focus on the future, a future which presents us with significant social, economic, and environmental challenges. The world is changing rapidly, and the issues we face are becoming increasingly complex. Climate change, economic instability, and social inequities are just a few of the pressing concerns that demand our urgent attention and require innovative solutions.

We must adopt a proactive and strategic approach to navigate these challenges. This involves leveraging our collective expertise, fostering partnerships, and investing in sustainable development initiatives. We are called upon to engage in collaborative efforts to develop and implement strategies that address these multifaceted issues.

In this regard, the creation of the Ambassadorial Crisis Management Group dedicated to assessing future risks and opportunities for our Organisation is a welcome development. This Group was tasked, and is expected to propose strategies that not only mitigate the impacts of the challenges that Organisation is facing, but also harness potential opportunities for the success of our Organisation. Council will receive an

interim report of the Crisis Management Group, and make decisions or provide political guidance on a number of recommendations therein.

Let me now mention a few examples of the Secretariat's milestones since the previous Council and coming activities.

### **Excellencies,**

Even though the Secretariat is fighting an uphill battle with respect to funding, it continues to service the Members and to assist the organisation to achieve its mandate.

In this regard, in keeping with our strategic objectives to enhance Intra-ACP Cooperation, the Secretariat, through its Malabo Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation has undertaken to develop an **OACPS Match Opportunity for South-South Cooperation Platform**. By effectively matching supply and demand for South-South Cooperation Opportunities, the Platform will showcase **what is good and attractive** about each OACPS member and provide the international community a quick access to business opportunities for potential investors, tourism destinations, and any other country-specific attractive features.

I would like to thank the Government of Equatorial Guinea, under the leadership of President Obiang, for pledging to support the initial phase of developing such strategic initiative.

In line with the Luanda Declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State

and Government, the Secretariat has engaged Member States to establish Focal Point Offices for South-South Cooperation. The National Focal Point Offices (NFP-SSC) are expected to provide a modality for close collaboration with the OACPS Centre in Malabo, in identifying areas for collaboration, documenting intra-ACP Cooperation and partnerships among the Member States, as well as promoting and coordinating South-South Cooperation initiatives. This is possible using the ***OACPS Match Opportunity for South-South Cooperation Platform***.

I thank our Member States who have already established such structures and invite OACPS Members to utilise this platform for greater intra-OACPS exchanges.

### **Excellencies,**

In order to give the necessary attention to issues related to Environment and Climate Action, a new eponymous department was established in 2020, and has achieved a number of landmark successes.

With regard to OACPS' advocacy and engagement in multilateral processes for the environment and for climate action for the reporting period to December 2024, the Secretariat will provide support and work closely with our members, regional agencies and negotiating groups to prepare OACPS Issues Papers for the upcoming COP16 on Biological Diversity to be held in Cali, Colombia from 21 October to 1 November; and COP29 on Climate Change to be held in Baku Azerbaijan 11 to 22 November.

It is of utmost importance for the OACPS to be engaged and influence the outcomes of these global processes, as the triple planetary crises on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution continue apace and threaten any development gains that we strive to make and resilience we seek to build.

At the intra-regional level, our efforts to prepare for the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Oceans, Inland Waters and Fisheries and related meetings - is one of OACPS' identified and agreed key priorities for 2024.

The meeting which will be held in Dar-es-Salaam from 9 to 13 September 2024, provides an important occasion for inclusive, intra-regional exchange on key priority issues of shared interest and import, that we have committed to, under *The OACPS Strategic Plan of Action for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2030* and companion *Priority Agenda for Action (PAA)* for the period 2023-2025.

All of these intra-regional and international meetings will allow us to pursue our agendas on Oceans and Climate, to engage and demonstrate much needed international cooperation and collaboration with our long-standing, traditional partner the European Union as well as other key partners, and to illustrate the true value and potential of the OACPS as it pursues achieving sustainability and building resilience for its peoples and places.

Turning to geopolitical perspectives, I urge member states to extend their support to countries facing governance and conflict challenges to increase



their resilience. We particularly call on Member States to join the efforts of the international community to restore public order and security in Haiti through lasting solutions, in particular, the restoration of State authority throughout the territory and the organization of free and transparent elections.

The 2030 Development Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a huge hope for economic, social and environmental development for Members of the OACPS. With less than seven years left to implement this shared and inclusive development agenda, where no one should be left behind, the UN Secretary General stated at the MDG Summit in September 2023 that the achievement of the MDGs is not on track. There is a risk that more than 80% will not be achieved.

This delay, or even failure, will have negative consequences in many members of the OACPS, which have vulnerable economies with low resilience. The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, the situation in the Gaza Strip and the Red Sea, and the ensuing geopolitical tensions, global warming and terrorism, as well as the after-effects of covid-19 pandemic and the ever-increasing debt burden, are putting a considerable strain on the budgets of governments, which no longer have sufficient fiscal room for economic recovery.

Faced with this combination of multiple crises with dramatic consequences, the focus must be on the means of implementation, in particular increased funding to make up the financing shortfalls. In

addition to efforts to mobilise domestic resources, reform of the global financial architecture and multilateral development banks is essential to facilitate and increase development financing. The Bridgetown Initiative and the Paris Summit for a New Global Financial Pact are part of this process. The Summit of the Future to be held at the United Nations in September provides a platform for calling for this reform.

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

Our journey ahead is filled with both challenges and opportunities. By ensuring regular financial contributions, managing our leadership transitions smoothly, and strategically planning for the future, we can steer our organisation towards greater resilience and prosperity. Let us reaffirm our commitment to these principles and work together to build a stronger, more united OACPS.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to our fruitful discussions and deliberations.