



WELCOMING REMARKS BY

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MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EAST AFRICAN
COOPERATION**

AND

**PRESIDENT-IN-OFFICE OF THE OACPS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
AT THE
111TH SESSION OF THE OACPS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HELD
VIRTUALLY ON MONDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2020**

Mr. Escipion Oliveira Gomez, Assistant Secretary General and Officer-in-Charge OACPS Secretariat

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Habari za asubuhi, mchana na jioni.

Good evening from the United Republic of Tanzania to Colleagues in Africa;

Good afternoon to colleagues in the Caribbean;

Good morning to colleagues in the Pacific.

Honourable Ministers;

It is a great pleasure as the President-in-Office of the OACPS Council of Ministers, to welcome you for the first time at this 111th Session of Council of Ministers. It is an honour and privilege for me and my country to be of service to the Organisation of the African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in the capacity of President-in-Office of the OACPS Council of Ministers, particularly during this transitional phase of the OACPS-EU relations with a new Partnership Agreement.

We are meeting virtually today, simultaneously across the different time zones of the OACPS regions, in light of the challenging conditions imposed by COVID-19. It is a time of considerable challenges and opportunities as many of our OACPS countries are making bold efforts in building robust economies that ensures growth and prosperity now and in the years ahead. 247 300 31 606

However, 2020 has been a year like no other in our lifetime. As Covid-19 sweeps through continents, countries and communities in every corner of the world, it is fair to say that our generation has never faced anything like this before. So, before I go any further, I would like to send my thoughts and prayers to all those on the Pacific, in the Caribbean and in Africa have been affected by this terrible virus, and express my gratitude to all of those working in key sectors to look after those who are sick, especially the frontline healthcare workers who are risking their lives every day for the rest of us.

Honourable Ministers;

The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing global economic crisis are on course to reverse years of gains in the reduction and alleviation of poverty, thus drastically undermining global efforts to meet the SDGs deadline of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. The World Bank now predicts that between 71 million to 100 million people will be pushed

into extreme poverty this year, erasing almost many progresses made in the last five years. As the pandemic is spreading across our constituencies, the eradication of extreme poverty will be difficulty to achieve under these new circumstances.

During this challenging time, it is vital to promote increased coordination among all countries and regions of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific with respect to the prevention and treatment of, and eventual cure for Covid-19. Let us coordinate our efforts and pool our resources together to address the challenges posed by this deadly pandemic.

Honourable Ministers;

The United Republic of Tanzania took over the Presidency of the Council from 1st August 2020. One of the main goals of the Tanzania's Presidency has been on leading the efforts to ease the consequences of the COVID 19 crisis to the OACPS Member States; Overseeing the Conclusion of the ongoing Negotiations of the new partnership agreement between the OACPS and the European Union; Focusing on the Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment within the member states of the OACPS and with other international partners. Other focuses have been on taking forward the agenda of change and renewal; Securing of Financial stability of the OACPS and Maintaining OACPS unity and solidarity.

I wish to inform you that major steps have been taken in all those areas and even beyond. The OACPS has engaged our partners including the EU in a number of initiatives aiming to ease the consequences of the Covid-19 to our member states including a call for debt rescheduling,

cancellation and moratorium in order to give space to our members to deal with this pandemic. We have also made a call for greater coherence in adding value to our agricultural produces (value chains) and more robust and credible mechanisms to avoid trade distortions and unfair competition and market access including the introduction of new regulations of autonomous tariff quotas on certain fish products and on the organic agricultural products. Our organisation is still pushing for other equal important agendas such as more connectivity within the OACPS, the reforms within the Secretaries, securing of financial stability of the OACPS and other common challenges.

Honourable Ministers;

I understand that much work remains to be done. Most of our states continue to be threatened by Climate Change even as poverty and youth unemployment continue to exert a negative impact on the development prospects of many of our member countries. Some of our countries remain saddled with high levels of unsustainable debt and other fiscal challenges. Terrorism and insurgency also constitute a menace to human livelihoods as well as long-term growth and ethno-communal harmony in some of our member states

Honourable Ministers;

On the Post-Cotonou negotiations, I am happy to note that we have eventually reached a political deal on the text for a new Partnership Agreement that will succeed the Cotonou Agreement. H.E Professor Robert Dussey, Togo's Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and Togolese Abroad, the OACPS' Chief Negotiator and Chair of the Ministerial Central Negotiating Group will present his detailed

report in this meeting. Personally and on behalf of all members of the Council I want to commend Prof. Dussey, Our Ministerial CNG, Ambassadors in Brussels and the secretariat of the OACPS for the job well done, full of hard work and commitment towards these negotiations.

I urge our team to remain vigilant in the remaining processes before the signing of the draft agreement.

Honourable Ministers;

As you all know ACP and EU have agreed to that transition measures be extended until 31st November, 2021. The extension is necessary to provide the needed time for both parties to finalise the procedural processes required before the final signature.

Honourable Ministers;

We are all acutely aware that the Organisation has reached an important juncture in its existence. The relationship we have shared with the EU for 45 years based on the three pillars of trade and economic cooperation, development finance assistance and political dialogue must face new paradigms. With the new Agreement, which paves the way for a more modern and committed partnership, we hope to be better equipped to address the emerging needs and global challenges, such as poverty, the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, ocean governance, migration, peace and security issues and others.

While the new agreement provides us with a new opportunity to raise the partnership to a new level, we acknowledge that we stand on the brink of a new era fraught with new challenges. The European Union

is and will remain a major and important partner for our Organisation. The EU and the OACPS constitute an International force representing 1.5 billion people and more than half of the seats of the United Nations. However, we also need to diversify our partnership, as acknowledged by our Heads of State and Government in the Nairobi Nguvu Ya Pamoja Declaration. The Revised Georgetown Agreement provides us with the latitude to do so.

Honourable Ministers;

On the political front, we have cause to rejoice. This year has seen successful democratic elections in some of our Member States, notwithstanding restrictions imposed by the Corona Virus. I would like to commend and extend my warmest congratulations to these OACPS Member States for being able to conduct elections that were widely peaceful, free, fair and credible, in line with democratic values and principles.

In my own country, peaceful elections were held under the supervision of domestic and international observers on 28 October 2020. The incumbent President, H.E. Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli, pulled a landslide victory of 84.4% for his second term and was inaugurated on 5 November in front of scores of International dignitaries and Tanzanian citizens. In his inauguration speech, he pledged to continue driving country's development agenda including fighting corruption, pursuing economic growth and more job opportunities, protection of natural resources and increasing accessibility to social services in his second term. I therefore, take this opportunity, on behalf of the OACPS Council of Ministers and indeed, on my own behalf to express our heartfelt

congratulations to all OCPS countries for being able to conduct elections despite the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic.

Honourable Ministers;

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that our Organisation is still concerned about the escalation of conflicts in some OACPS regions. We cannot walk the road of social and economic development and poverty alleviation if we stand in a military quagmire and insecure environments. We need to take our destiny in our hands, seize the nettle of development and carry our people into the 21st century.

Honourable Ministers,

Colleagues, as President of Council, it was my duty to enquire about the finances of the Organisation. I was alarmed to learn that to date, 31 out of the 79 countries still owe 100% of their year 2020 contributions. The failure to pay up weakens the prospect of greater autonomy for the Organisation. Even while we are showing increasing ambition for our Organisation through the Revised Georgetown Agreement and the just concluded post-Cotonou Agreement, our ability to pay is decreasing. While the Secretariat is undergoing restructuring with the aim of making it a more streamlined, effective, responsive, transparent and accountable organ, limited financial resources will hamper its ability to deliver expected outputs and to appropriately respond to the Member States expectations. Let us not see our contributions as an expense, but as an investment.

Honourable Ministers;

As everybody knows, I have to acknowledge that the tide of history is going in the other direction with our European partners. It seems evident to us that the emerging New Europe may not necessarily wish to accord us the status of a privileged partner that we once took for granted. And as the recent European elections have shown, the political pendulum is swinging decidedly to the Right. Aid fatigue is creeping in. The Eurozone countries are facing an unprecedented fiscal crisis of their own caused by the COVID 19. Growth has remained painfully slow.

In those circumstances, Europe's generosity has been remarkable. But it is a generosity that we can no longer take for granted. At a time of this growing uncertainty we are to move from rhetoric to reality. We are to rebalance our fiscal bases while cooperating more among ourselves, with BRICS and other emerging economies in boosting the institutions of global governance and ensuring an open international trading regime that works in the interest of rich and poor countries alike.

Honourable Ministers,

Indeed, it is high time to transcend current inefficient discourse and implement measures aimed at tackling the growing global environment crisis and simultaneously strive for more equitable international economic relations that would be the basis for promoting sustainable development. This is a time when urgent solutions must be found to the problems faced by some of our Member States such as poverty; tragic economic and social consequences of natural disasters

resulting from climate change, insecurity where each and every day that brings us closer to the SDGs deadline takes us further from these goals.

Honourable Ministers;

This is our future, a future whose foundation will be cast in 45 years of holding on together as an Organisation, deriving strength in our solidarity and unity as well as our diversity. The task before us is not an easy one. It will require vision and so much political will, such as we have never before witnessed in the history of our Organisation. It is for us to decide. We can foster hope or we can destroy it.

Honourable Ministers,

Let me end my welcome remarks by thanking everyone who worked hard to make this ordinary session possible under these difficult circumstances. In so doing, I would specifically want to recognise the work done by the Secretary-General and his able team as well as that of our Ambassadors in Brussels.

Honourable Ministers,

These astute diplomats and technical team from the Secretariat provided the much needed guidance and leadership and I profited from their advises. Equally I acknowledge the great work that was accomplished under various chairpersons of Sub-Committees and Working Groups. Without their hard work and sacrifice we could not have achieved the level of success that was accomplished.

Honourable Ministers,

Let me reiterate my words of welcome and profound gratitude for your presence. I declare our 111th Session of the OACPS Council of Ministers open and I wish you a fulfilling and productive Session.

I thank you for your kind attention.