

Address to The 3rd Summit of The ACP Heads of State and Government

Nadi, Fiji, 18 July 2002

Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase,
Vice President of the Dominican Republic, Madame Ortiz Bosch,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Ministers and Ambassadors;
Secretary General of the ACP,
Mr Pascal Lamy, Member of the European Commission;
Madame Glynis Kinnock, Members of the European Parliament;
Distinguished delegates:

We are honoured to bring you the greetings and best wishes of the African Union, which held its first Assembly of Heads of State and Government only last week. We fully support the decision to hold this 3rd Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government under the theme - "ACP solidarity in a globalised world."

This theme recognises two critical elements that have to inform the important work we have met to carry out.

One of these is the reality that the world is involved in a far-reaching process of globalisation that inevitably draws all our countries into a global village from which we cannot secede. Accordingly, we have no choice but to determine our future within the context of that village.

The other is that we enter this village in a disadvantaged position, having to carry the burden of many of the negative consequences of the process of globalisation, which does not benefit all countries and peoples equally.

Some of this reality is that of the member states of the ACP, about 65 per cent have each populations that are less than 5 million, with the majority being less than 3 million. The negative impact of the small size of our markets is compounded by the fact of our underdevelopment, which underline the extent of our disadvantage relative to the developed countries of the North.

As pointed out by the theme of the Summit, for us to succeed in our quest to overcome the imbalance between these countries and ourselves, we have to act together in solidarity, using our combined strength to make our voices heard.

These are the sentiments that informed the decisions of the peoples of Africa to form the African Union and to adopt its development programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Our continent has taken this matter seriously on board, that we share a common destiny. Our peoples understand that the development and success of each of our countries depend on the success and development of the rest of our continent.

None of us need educating about the fact that our development partner, the European Union, represented here by its distinguished Commissioners, is a very powerful force in the world economy, in global politics and all other areas of human activity. The partnership we seek to build with this community of nations is one whose central goal must surely be the eradication of poverty in our countries and ending our condition of underdevelopment.

Together with others in the world, we are convinced that the resources and know how exist within human society to achieve these objectives. Indeed, the determination to attain these goals was stated and agreed specifically at the year 2000 UN Millennium Summit, which set specific time-bound targets. Surely,

the negotiations we are about to start with the European Union must be informed by the same focus and intent, to achieve specific time-bound targets with regard to the two central matters of poverty and underdevelopment.

By setting these targets, the peoples of the world also made the important statement that it would be unrealistic for us to expect that the market alone would operate in a manner that would produce the results we seek. Conscious, purposeful interventions are therefore required.

A critical commitment was also made by those more developed than ourselves, that they would draw on the resources at their disposal to direct them towards the achievement of the kind of goals agreed at the Millennium Summit, acting in a spirit of global human solidarity.

We believe that all these considerations will help to inform our forthcoming negotiations with the European Union.

As developing countries, we have our own duty to determine what we ourselves must do to address the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment that confront us. These are the things that we will bring into the partnership with the European Union and the rest of the development North, helping to define the relationship with the richer part of our common globe as one of partnership and not dependence.

It was these sentiments that drove us on the African continent as we elaborated and adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development. First and foremost, this is a partnership among the peoples of Africa. It is a partnership among countries and a partnership between governments, the private sector, the labour unions and civil society.

It represents a commitment to use our own resources to address the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. As you would expect, NEPAD focuses on the same matters that are central to the agenda of the ACP Group of countries. These include human resource development, with a specific focus on education, health and gender equality, agriculture, diversification of production, increased capital inflows, market access, debt relief, infrastructure, technology and capacity.

Further to this, it is based on a common resolve to solve the problems and remove the obstacles that have blocked our path to development.

Accordingly, we have taken the necessary decisions to act together to create a continent of peace and stability, democracy and human rights, the rule of law and accountable government, and the necessary conditions that will facilitate meaningful economic growth and development.

As a token of the seriousness of our intent and to ensure the observance of decisions that we have already taken, we also adopted a declaration covering matters relevant to good political and economic governance. We have agreed on our own African Peer Review Mechanism as an African-owned instrument to assist ourselves as we work together to build the kind of Africa for which the masses of our people throughout the continent yearn.

We have taken all these decisions not because anybody has asked us to. They are the result of our own experience, which has informed us about what we should do and what we should avoid, in our own interest.

The decisions we have taken also help us to engage the second element of the New Partnership for Africa's Development correctly. This is the partnership between Africa and the developed countries of the North. We are determined to rebuild this partnership in a manner not defined by a relationship between donor and recipient, but one driven by the achievement of agreed goals.

We are pleased that the North, including the European Union, the G8 and the Nordic countries, has accepted the priorities set by the African peoples themselves and committed itself to work with us to pursue a programme of action that is made in Africa. We are happy that all sides have also accepted the principle of mutual responsibility and accountability.

We are now faced with the task together to translate these common commitments into a practical set of actions focused on the task of ending poverty and underdevelopment on our continent.

We must also make the central point that the intensification and consolidation of the process of African solidarity constitutes an important part of the movement towards greater South-South solidarity, such as represented by this collective of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Both the African Union and NEPAD enhance our possibility to pursue this goal with even greater vigour.

I have mentioned all these matters because they have a direct bearing on the work we have gathered to carry out during the next two days. I am convinced that the positive developments in Africa, and the involvement of the EU in these processes, will help to enhance the quality of our interaction during the forthcoming negotiations. They certainly increase the capacity of the African continent to act in even greater solidarity with our sister countries of the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Reference has also been made to the fact that in a few weeks the people of the world will gather in Johannesburg at the UN World Summit for Sustainable Development. It is good that this matter features on the agenda and the draft decisions of this important Summit Meeting.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those ACP Heads of State and Government present here who agreed to work with us as friends of the Chair of the Johannesburg Summit. We value their inputs that will help to define the outcome of that Summit. I trust they will also find time to consult with the regions from which they are drawn to ensure that the voice of the peoples of the ACP countries is heard clearly in Johannesburg.

As the Summit is aware, we have sought to insist that the Johannesburg Summit must both build on the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and Agenda 21, and truly and practically address sustainable development properly understood. In this regard it is important that we reach a common global understanding that sustainable development is made up of a triangle of three spheres of human existence - the social, the economic and the environmental.

The Johannesburg Summit must therefore focus on issues of the sustainable social and economic development of the poor of the world, as well as the important issues of the environment that correctly serve on the agenda of this Summit.

In addition, we are firmly committed to the view that the World Summit for Sustainable Development should result in a concrete programme backed by the necessary resources, to achieve the objectives that the peoples of the world want to advance within the context of sustainable development.

Inevitably therefore, the World Summit, the WSSD, will discuss many of the important matters that are on the agenda of this ACP Summit. It is therefore important that as the ACP, we pay the closest attention possible to the WSSD, bearing in mind the disappointing results of the Bali Preparatory Committee meeting. I would urge that all our Heads of State and Government should attend the Summit to give the necessary impetus for an outcome that will address our concerns and interests in a real way.

Necessarily we must also mention the WTO and the Development Round negotiations scheduled to be concluded by the beginning of 2005. We all recognise and welcome the important and positive results we achieved in Doha, arising from the fact that we were able to act together on the basis of a clear set of agreed objectives. We will have to sustain this approach and manner of working as we engage the WTO and other international negotiations, including those with the EU.

The Johannesburg Summit will represent the culmination of a number of international conventions of major importance to us as developing countries. These include the Millennium Summit, the Monterrey Summit on Financing for Development, the World Food Summit, the Children's Summit, the Doha Ministerial Meeting and the recent G8 Summit held in Kananaskis, Canada.

Clearly, we should keep close track of all these important meetings and their outcomes to ensure that none of them results in regression in terms of advancing our objectives.

They also demand of us that we should make our inputs into these processes addressing both the framework agreements and the detailed programmes that should characterise the outcomes of these engagements.

It is also clear that where such detailed programmes emerge that seek to address our concerns, we owe it to ourselves to push for the practical implementation of these programmes as speedily as possible. After all, we are the ones that bear the burdens of poverty and underdevelopment.

All these matters draw sharp attention to the need for us, collectively, to attend to the central matter of the capacity of our governments and countries successfully to engage in the necessary regional and global dialogue and implementation processes that are an integral part of the process of the growth of the system of global governance.

I am certain that Africa would be very keen to strengthen the partnership within the ACP Group for us to share and build the resources that will help to improve the effectiveness in shaping the global human map. South Africa is also ready to work with our ACP partners to meet this challenge.

We are pleased that at the end of this month, South Africa will host the ACP Forum on Research for Sustainable Development. Let us use that opportunity to develop partnership programmes that will provide consistency and certainty on the path we have chosen, to improve the quality of the lives of our people, and to enhance the outcomes out of our interaction with our development partners.

I believe that we should also approach the forthcoming negotiations with the EU to elaborate the Economic Partnership Agreements, informed by the need to pool our resources, to lend strength to one another by acting in unity and solidarity. Without this, it will be more difficult for us to realise the objectives of poverty eradication, ending underdevelopment and achieving the global integration of our economies.

We have embarked on the journey of sustainable development with determination. The African Union and its regional groupings stand ready to strengthen bridges of co-operation with the Caribbean and Pacific States. We would also be pleased if, as requested by Mozambique and the region of Southern Africa, the next ACP Summit were to be held in Maputo, Mozambique.

On behalf of South Africa I would also like to re-affirm our commitment to share our own experiences in negotiating with the EU. As you will recall we hosted the first ACP Trade Ministers' Committee meeting in April 2001 and we continue to work closely with the ACP Secretariat in Brussels.

We look forward to receiving you in Johannesburg in August and September for the WSSD, where we should further our collective work to provide better lives for our peoples. I am certain that we will ensure that we come to Johannesburg fully prepared to articulate our views in one undivided voice.

I thank you.