

**SPEECH OF THE ACP SECRETARY-GENERAL,
H.E. MR. GEORGES REBELO PINTO CHIKOTI**

Interparliamentary Conference on the Role of Parliaments
in Deepening the EU-Africa Relationship

21 June 2021: The EU-ACP cooperation and the role of Parliaments

Hon. Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal,
Co-President of the OACPS–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Hon. Carlos Zorrinho,
Hon. Catarina Rocha Ferreira, Member of the Portuguese Assembly and our Moderator,

My fellow speakers,

Honorable Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege and honor to address this august Assembly. I am delighted to note the presence of Hon. Carlos Zorrinho, the Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. He is a great friend and indeed supporter of the OACPS.

Of all the Cotonou Partnership Agreement’s joint institutions, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly best exemplifies the spirit of equal partnership, and global solidarity in the fight against poverty and injustice, as well as the quest for human dignity, decent lives, and sustainable, inclusive development for all. It has remained one of the most unique international parliamentary institutions with a combined membership of representatives of 106 countries, representing the global South and North.



As you may be aware, we have now initialed the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement on 15 April 2021, which marks the formal conclusion of the negotiations for a fit-for-purpose Agreement for the next 20 years. I wish to thank Portugal for its support and congratulate its officials to achieve this initialing of the Agreement under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union Council. I was reminded that it was also under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union Council that the Cotonou Agreement negotiations were concluded in 2000. This testifies to the importance Portugal attaches to the OACPS-EU Partnership.

I count on you to extend the same support in the ratification process, as well as the implementation of the Agreement to ensure there is a strong Parliamentary cooperation through political dialogue within the Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the three Regional Parliamentary Assemblies that will be established under the provisions of the new Agreement.

Let me highlight what I see as the role of Parliaments in OACPS-EU cooperation, and by extension, also the strengthening of EU-Africa relations:

Tool for promoting democratic processes and good governance

Like national Parliaments, the Joint Parliamentary Assembly provides a forum for frank discussions among its members on issues of concern and any other subject of interest to their people. Through these elected officials, the voice of the people is expressed at all levels of national, regional, continental and global governance. In this regard, Parliaments and Parliamentary Assemblies provide the space for dialogue in which all actors in social life, including civil society, can express themselves to promote the interests of their citizens, particularly vis-à-vis the executive power.

In the context of the OACPS-EU Parliamentary Assembly, the two-way flow of information, parliamentary persuasion and debates help to anchor a strong culture of solidarity, and respect for democratic principles and human rights among Parliamentarians and in the countries that they represent. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has shown us the importance of solidarity in dealing with global challenges and Parliamentary cooperation could prove effective in this regard.



Monitoring and implementation of the Agreement

Parliament has the key role of supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Partnership Agreement through accountability. It ensures that the commitments in the Agreement are fulfilled. Furthermore, Members of Parliament are uniquely positioned to act as the interface between the people and the various institutions by promoting and adopting people centered resolutions and policies to guarantee that no one is left behind.

Fostering cooperation amongst Parliaments

The Parliaments facilitates greater understanding between the people of the EU and those of the OACPS through structured and continued dialogue where members share on their economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental experiences. Rotational sittings of the JPA across the four continents from which its members are drawn enable members to directly experience the culture, successes, challenges, and circumstances unique to those countries and regions.

Monitoring global commitments and promoting parliamentary diplomacy

Parliamentary cooperation aims to ensure that parliamentarians are aware of their role in monitoring the implementation of international agreements. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16, which stresses that strong, transparent, accountable, and inclusive institutions are essential to the achievement of all the goals, Parliaments must therefore remain at the heart of the drive to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, this Assembly must aspire to be an agent of change in support of multilateralism and an advocate for global solidarity.

Oversight Role and Checks and Balances

Through the resolutions the JPA adopt, it exercises the oversight role and checks and balances vis-à-vis the implementation of the Partnership Agreement. To this end,



Parliamentarians have an important role to ensure that the Parties to the Agreement act within the spirit and provisions of the Agreement.

Honorable Members

Distinguished guests

The OACPS attaches great importance to the work of Parliamentary Assemblies. Assemblies are the main link between the work we do and the people we serve, and they are also the indispensable link between the global, continental, regional, and local dimensions, as well as a powerful vehicle for peace, stability and prosperity in our Member States. And as you play a key role in formulating resolutions that extend far beyond your borders, your responsibilities will only increase given the opportunities offered by the new OACPS-EU Partnership Agreement.

As I conclude, I wish to reiterate the OACPS support to work with all Assemblies to address the challenges of our people, including in political processes such as promotion of the rule of law and human rights, the building of resilient institutions, as well as inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Assemblies are uniquely placed to foster and support relations. The African Region of the OACPS consists of 48 Member States, and the OACPS will continue to play its role to support and encourage a closer relationship between Africa and the EU. When we are together, we are stronger. A strong OACPS-EU Partnership will account for a solid Africa-EU relationship, and such a solid Africa-EU relationship will result in an engaging and valuable OACPS-EU Partnership.

I wish you fruitful deliberations at this interparliamentary conference.

I thank you for your kind attention.

