



**STATEMENT BY HON. JOSEPH OWONA KONO
CO-PRESIDENT OF THE ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
ASSEMBLY**

At the Opening Ceremony

Of the

**17TH REGIONAL MEETING (CARIBBEAN REGION) OF THE
ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

PARAMARIBO, SURINAME

Wednesday, 28 FEBRUARY 2019

- Hon. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname,
- Hon. Mr. Vice President of the Republic of Suriname,
- Members of Government,
- Hon. Javier Nart Acting Co-President of the JPA,
- HE Amb. Leonard Emile Ognimba, Assistant Secretary-General of the ACP Group of States
- Hon. Members of JPA
- Distinguished Invited Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- All protocol observed

First and foremost, allow me, on behalf of the JPA and indeed on my own behalf to thank our hosts, the Government, House of Representatives and people of Suriname for have accorded to us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Paramaribo. We thank you for all the facilities that you have put at our disposal for our comfort and convenience, which should indeed allow us to devote our full attention to the work ahead of us for the next two days.

Madam. Speaker,

Hon. Members,

This meeting marks the 17th time that we have met in this format since the first regional meeting was organised in Namibia in April 2008. Since then, the value of such meetings has been vindicated, and those

Members that have attended previous meetings testify to the rich breadth and depth of exchanges that we have had.

Meanwhile, a number of important global dynamics have transformed the manner in which our cooperation has existed. Also allow me before moving into the core matter that brought us together today to pay a vibrant tribute to one of our past ACP Chair and JPA co-chairs, Fitz Jackson whose leadership has been determinant in the existence of our Assembly. We are now at a critical time of the cooperation, at the 108th session of the ACP Council of Ministers, ministers took a decision to include regional protocols to address the regional specificities that were highlighted in the ACP Negotiating Mandate.

It is therefore my strong belief that Regional Meetings will therefore become increasingly an important medium through which we sensitise our national parliaments as well as the European Parliament on the development challenges of ACP States and Regions, and the important role of ACP-EU cooperation can play to meet the needs of those that put us in office.

While it is not yet exactly the ideal, we aspire for, Parliamentary involvement in the work of the Cotonou Agreement is part of the democratic attribute of the Agreement and has moved in tandem with the evolution in the nature and scope of ACP-EU institutions.

The JPA embodies the democratic ideals of the parties to the Cotonou Agreement in that it brings together equal numbers of Parliamentarians from national legislatures in ACP States and from the European Parliament of the EU, to dialogue, exchange views and propose

solutions to the challenges of development that the ACP-EU Partnership is engaged in resolving. It is the only institution of its kind; there is no other multilateral development body that includes within its treaty obligations the need to ensure the involvement of parliamentarians in such activities.

As such I am pleased to inform that the Council of Ministers at their 108th Session passed a resolution on a strong parliamentary dimension of the JPA, which called for the need for an interaction between the ACP Parliamentary monitoring group with the Central negotiating Group, efforts are underway to facilitate that interaction in the ongoing negotiations of a successor agreement. I therefore call for more involvement from you dear colleagues in the ongoing negotiations for the maintaining of the ACP PA. Failing to do that, all the major achievements earned during the last 40 years will be lost. I know your commitment, your hardworking spirit, will help us attain this ambition.

Madam. Speaker,

Hon. Members,

we deliberate on the several agenda items on the Agenda of the 17th Regional I would like to echo once again what the ultimate objective of our collective efforts must be, namely:

- To lift ourselves from the margins and poverty unto the mainstream of international development;
- To create wealth and opportunities for its sustainable generation; and
- To establish and maintain political and economic institutions that will secure peace, security and stability as well as environmental protection for present and future generations in our States.

Central to all these issues is the role of parliaments. In all the great debates that have accompanied these global issues in developed and developing countries alike, there is an underlying current of moral, ethical, economic and political questions about the proper role of government and its responsibility to protect the public interest. This is the area in which Parliamentarians can bring to bear their legislative authority and political legitimacy. I am of the view that where Governments and Parliaments are weak or ineffective, any policy devised or implemented is likely to be the same. If this premise is true for national level decision making, I believe that it equally holds for international institutions as well.

This leads me to say a few words on the importance of regional integration, an area that is unfortunately, often outside the purview of national Parliaments.

Regional integration is the key to unlocking the developmental potential of our member States. For instance, there is still less trade between African countries compared with trade between Africa and the rest of the world. I think the same is true of Pacific and Caribbean Regions. However, I believe that regional integration must be the platform to foster the smooth and gradual integration of our regions into the rest of the global economy. However, regional integration is not just economic integration, regional integration is a multi-dimensional process that is all-inclusive to promote sustainable development and indeed the alleviation of extreme poverty. This is why dear colleagues our role as parliamentarians in the regional integrations processes should become a priority.

Madam. Speaker,

Hon. Members,

The ACP Group supports many initiatives of peace and conflict resolution that are being undertaken at the level of continental and regional integration organisations, such as the CARIFORUM I wish to place on record our appreciation for the efforts by CARIFORUM to bring a lasting solution to the crisis in Haiti.

Co- President, Madam Speaker

Distinguished invited guests,

As I end, let me reiterate once again our gratitude for all the arrangements that the host country has made available for our convenience and work. We can only reward your efforts by ensuring that we have constructive deliberations on the various issues that are the subject of our meeting.

May we long continue to be united, and faithful advocates of the people we represent.

I thank you for your kind attention.
