



Address by His Excellency Deo Saran, Ambassador of Fiji, to the ACP Committee of Ambassadors, 7 May 2015

The Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors, the Distinguished Dean, the Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very good morning to you all.

Thank you for the kind introduction and warm welcome to this august forum of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors. It is indeed an honor to have been chosen to represent Fiji here in Brussels, following the sudden passing of my dear friend and fellow colleague, the Late Ambassador Peceli Vocea. As a newcomer, I will certainly benefit from the advice and wise counsel of Your Excellencies, and the Secretariat on the numerous issues that we cover from this house.

On behalf of my government, I would like to first of all offer my congratulations to Dr. Patrick Gomes on his appointment as the Secretary General of the ACP Group and his new Management Team. I would like to commend Dr. Gomes for the work he undertook in his capacity as the former Chairman of the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives and offer my full support for the implementation of the decisions of the Council of Ministers.

We are fully committed to the deepening our ACP-EU relationships post 2020 and are encouraged by the strong support for the continuation of our relations, the modalities, I believe, are yet to be determined.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, my joining of this august body is at a momentous occasion as we celebrate our 40th anniversary. Having come thus far, in an international organization of this magnitude, will require

continuous renewal and transformation to adapt to the new landscape and challenges that lie ahead. We are indeed very encouraged to note that the new Management Team is fully committed to this course. I can assure you of my full commitment.

I fully endorse the Secretary General's remarks during my first visit to him that the success of an organization of this nature depends largely on effective participation and open dialogue by its members. In this context, Fiji has and will continue to actively participate and provide leadership to the workings of the Sugar Subcommittee and all other organs of our Group.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is imperative that our deliberations and outcomes are in sync and consistent with the perspectives of global bodies such as the G77 plus China, WTO and the United Nations.

The challenges my country faces is similar to Small Island Developing States and small economies many of which are represented here.

In Fiji's case, sugar has been the main stay of our socio-economic development underpinned by the longstanding ACP-EU relations. Whilst we note the position taken by the EU on the abolition of sugar quotas and its consequent adverse impact on the sugar prices, we strongly support the recommendations of the Sugar Group in pursuing and safeguarding the interests of the fragile, small and vulnerable ACP States.

In this regard, I wish to stress the following from a recent media release of the Sugar Group and I quote..."The ACP countries had consistently warned the EU that the abolition of EU sugar production quotas in 2017 will lead to drastic price reductions and major market instability which will seriously undermine the substantial investments in the reform and adaptation processes of their sugar industries. The ACP sugar suppliers strongly believe that they would continue to need additional support to complete the much needed reform programmes already underway to allow them to genuinely attain a level of competitiveness in order to face the market challenges."

In this context, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to submit that in my view, Fiji has been unfairly treated in the application of the Article 96 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement which apparently arose from the political transformation that Fiji was undergoing at the time of the implementation of the 2006 Sugar Reform Programme of the European Union. It is extremely unfortunate that the two events occurred during the same period.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me assure this distinguished forum that on hindsight, the seemingly extended process of our political transformation was absolutely necessary to lay the foundation for sustained political stability. This is clearly evidenced by the increased investments and strong economic growth our country is now experiencing. Whilst we have made significant investments to modernize our sugar milling processing facilities, the crop production and harvesting and transportation

operations have been left behind due to the unavailability of the full support assured under the Accompanying Measures Programmes for Sugar Protocol Countries.

In view of this and in line with the recommendations of the Sugar Group, we seek your support in the restoration of Fiji's legitimate entitlements, failing which we risk achieving our competitiveness and loss of investments already made in the industry.

We note the progress on the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreement which has been enduring. We share our Region's concern that the negotiation has now been put on hold and seek your support to expedite its re-launching.

Whilst the Financing for the Development programme is much needed and appreciated, it is imperative that the programme places due attention on capacity building and institutional strengthening of our member states to raise our absorptive capacity for effective utilization of funding that has been earmarked for poverty eradication under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Allow me to briefly touch on the issues of climate change and how our small island economies in the Pacific Region are greatly susceptible to it. The devastation caused by the recent Cyclone Pam, in my neighboring countries of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, is a glaring example of this vulnerability.

In addition to the loss of many precious lives, it will cost millions of dollars to rehabilitate and reconstruct these economies. I, therefore, urge that climate change and disaster management issues relating to small and vulnerable economies are treated with greater consideration.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Fiji is indeed honored to be given the opportunity to host the 38th Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly & the 29th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly from 10-17 of next month and we look forward to welcoming you all to our shores. Please do allow time during your stay to experience our diverse cultures and warm hospitality.

I wish to conclude once again by expressing my gratitude and deep appreciation for the gracious and warm welcome you have extended to me today.

Thank you for your attention.