

EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES (OACPS) COUNCIL OF MINISTERS



The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) is a group of countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific that was created by the Georgetown Agreement in 1975. Formerly known as African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), the organisation's main objectives are sustainable development and poverty reduction within its member states, as well as their greater integration into the world's economy. All of the member states, except Cuba, are signatories to the Cotonou Agreement with the European Union.

The Cotonou Agreement which was signed in Cotonou, Benin in June 2000 is the successor to the Lomé Conventions which was revised in 1995 in Mauritius and gives special attention to island countries in this agreement. One of the major differences from the Lomé Convention is that the partnership is extended to new actors such as civil society, private sector, trade unions and local authorities. These will be involved in consultations and planning of national development strategies, provided with access to financial resources and involved in the implementation of programmes.

This year's extra-ordinary session of the OACPS Council of Ministers was held on the 28th July, 2020 through virtual conference, the first of its kind. The meeting brought about 185 participants from all the member countries. Prior to the session, the Bureau of the OACPS Council of Ministers met on a virtual platform to update member states on the Post –Cotonou negotiations and deliberate on strategic sectors of work of the organisation implemented against the backdrop of an unprecedented global crisis. Both meetings were chaired by His Excellency Mambury Njie, the outgoing president of the Ministerial Council.

In his opening remarks, the Honourable Minister welcomed all the members of the Bureau of the Organisation's Council of Ministers. In his first statement, he had this to say: "It is a pleasure as well as a great honour to be here with you all today albeit virtually. We are certainly living in extraordinary times. In our modern age, our lives are so inter-connected and our national prosperity depend so much on the movement of goods and services, COVID-19 will have a profound and lasting impact on life as we know it. We are however hopeful that some of the changes will be for the better".

In his statement regarding members' contributions, the president reiterated that OACPS Secretariat relies on the solidarity of its Member States by way of payment of their annual contributions for its operations. In this regard, he leveraged on the opportunity to convey the Organisation's appreciation to the 16 members who have paid their entire contributions to the Secretariat's Budget for 2020 which represents only 39.68% of the budgeted contributions.

Unfortunately, he said, some 34 members have arrears in contribution for a total amount of Euro 2,376,845 out of which 10 countries are under sanctions for having at least one full year of arrears.

As President of Council, he affirmed that it is his duty to call on those Member States which are yet to settle their assessed contributions to do so at their earliest convenience to ensure the Secretariat is able to fully carry out its mandate.

He reminded the participants that this year is a crucial one as the Organisation is in the final stages of negotiating a Post-Cotonou Agreement; one that is nowhere close to the previous rounds because the negotiation of a new OACPS-EU partnership

Agreement will not be business as usual. He noted that since the signing of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2000, major changes have taken place. These include new geopolitical realities, globalisation and regionalisation dynamics; a changed European Union with increased membership and the departure of Britain, the emergence of a universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which transcends the traditional “North-South” divide and calls for different means of implementation, and a transformed AU.

Minister Njie further adduced that the post-Cotonou negotiations also coincide with the internal EU budgetary cycle and the revision of the EU’s Development Cooperation Financing Instruments that would apply in a post-2020 set-up. All these processes combined pose challenges but also represent a unique opportunity for the OACPS.

He outlined the importance of the OACPS to determine its position in relation to other actors and new emerging economies. Through the revision of the Georgetown Agreement, the OACPS has redefined its mission while the European Union remains a major and important partner for the Organisation.

In his words, the Honourable Minister told participants that “the road we are embarking on requires vision and political will. In this ever changing world, we should sustain our faith in each other and maintain and consolidate our bonds of unity and solidarity”. He urged them never to forget the responsibility they are carrying to those generations that have come before them, whose foundation they are now striving to consolidate, and those who will come after them. “We owe it to them not only to maintain the momentum but to take it to a higher level”. He emphasised.

Honourable Njie expressed optimism that a new dawn is breaking and prayed that everyone gets inspired to face the future with renewed vigour, loyalty and dedication to this reinvigorated Organisation. Delightfully, the Chair thanked all for the trust placed in him to chair the session. To him it is a great personal honour, for The Gambia and West Africa at large.

To boost morale further, the Honourable Chair reiterated his confidence in the organisation's ability to work together and assured that with their cooperation work and discussions will progress efficiently in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. He pledged his availability and that of his delegation and assured all to serve to the best of their abilities.

Finally, before the start of proceedings of the subsequent session, the Chair invited all to observe a minute of silence in memory of OACPS dignitaries who passed away recently in Niue, United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire as well as all those who succumbed to the deadly corona virus. He prayed that their souls rest in peace.

To proceed with the next session, Honourable Mambury Njie proposed to the participants to move on to the day's order of business and then outlined the five-item agenda to be adopted. It was then adopted without any amendment.

Following are the agenda items decided and adopted by the extra-ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the OAPS:

Appointment of the Rapporteur

In his deliberation as the president of the OACPS Council of Ministers and the Chair for this Session, Honourable Mambury Njie presided over the adoption of the agenda of the Extra-ordinary session of the Council of Ministers. The first item of the agenda considered the appointment of the Rapporteur. For this selection, the principle of rotation when meetings are held at the Headquarters is adopted hence there didn't exist for the designation of a Rapporteur when Council meetings are virtual. As a result, the Rapporteur fell to the Central African Region while the remaining five regions were expected to nominate one friend each.

As the meeting proceeded, the Chair was informed that the Caribbean and the Southern African regions have designated their friends of the Rapporteur as Guyana and Mozambique respective. Honourable Njie used this opportunity to plead with the other three Regional Coordinators (Pacific, East Africa and West Africa) to notify the Secretariat of their nominees at their earliest convenience.

Appointment of the in-coming ministerial bureau

This item of the agenda dealt with the appointment of the new members of the ministerial bureau. As already known, the next Presidency of the Council is due to be held by the East Africa region. The Honourable Chair informed participants that the region has designated the United Republic of Tanzania to hold the office of President of the Council as from 01 August 2020 whilst the other members of the Bureau include: Central Africa-Republic of Congo, East Africa-Djibouti, West Africa-Liberia, Southern Africa-Zambia, Pacific-Papua New Guinea and finally, Caribbean-Suriname. The Chair congratulated the East Africa Region and the United Republic of Tanzania as the incoming President of Council. He assured the new president of his strong support during his Presidency

On the post-Cotonou negotiation

The Honourable Minister informed the participants that since the last Council session held in Nairobi (Kenya) the organisation's Ambassadors have been working hard in Brussels to advance the Post-Cotonou negotiations. However, he indicated that a few sticking points, of critical importance to the organisation's constituencies, are still pending.

At this juncture, he invited the OACPS Chief Negotiator, H.E. Professor Robert DUSSEY, Minister of Foreign Affairs and African Integration of Togo, to present his report on the state of play of the post-Cotonou negotiations.

Having read his statement, the Council welcomes the progress made in the conduct of negotiations and calls on the negotiators to pursue their efforts in line with the ACP negotiating mandate.

Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee of Ambassadors to Council

On this item, the Honourable Chair gave the floor to the Chair of the Committee of Ambassadors, Her Excellency Mrs Teneng Mba Jaiteh of The Gambia, to make a presentation of the report. For the sake of time, Honourable Njie proposed to the participants to take note of the information presented and deal more substantively with the items for decision which are indicated in paragraphs 13 and 21 to be – on the management and extension of the mandate of the Board Members of the CTA;

and the EU anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing blacklist respectively. Having identified these two issues, the floor was opened for interventions with a view to adopting the recommendations of the committee of Ambassadors. The report was finally adopted and a word of appreciation extended to the said committee for the accomplished tasks since last December.

Consideration and adoption of the Secretary-General's Report to Council

On his part, the Secretary-General was given the floor to present his report. After the presentation, the report was adopted and observations noted. The Honourable Chair proceeded to thank the Secretary-General for his report and congratulated him on his achievements.

Adoption of Decisions and Resolutions of the Extra-ordinary session of the OACPS Council of Ministers

Considering the extraordinary nature of their work, the Chair told the OACPS Council of Ministers that they will not be able to adopt decisions at this session in the normal way. In accordance with their deliberations, he expressed the need to adopt the following Decisions and Resolutions:

1. Financial Situation of the OACPS Secretariat
2. Post-Cotonou Negotiations
3. Management of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in the framework of the post-Cotonou Transitional Measures
4. List of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions and that of third countries regarding money-laundering and terrorism financing.

In assumption that all members were in agreement with decisions and resolutions made, the Honourable Chair requested the Secretariat to circulate the written Decisions and Resolutions within 48 hours for comment, then the finalized versions would be signed by him, Honourable Mambury Njie, the outgoing president of the OACPS Bureau of Ministerial Council by Friday, 31 July 2020.