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**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE 147th ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE GROUP OF AFRICAN AMBASSADORS IN BRUSSELS
ACP HOUSE – 25 APRIL 2012**



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1. The Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels held its 147th ordinary session on 25 April 2012 at ACP House. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr Eltigani Saleih FIDAIL, Ambassador of Sudan.

Point 1 : Adoption of the agenda

2. The African Group adopted the agenda as submitted.
3. After the adoption of the agenda, the Chairman informed the meeting that the African Union Commission was organizing on 17 and 18 May 2012 in Arusha, Tanzania, a coordination meeting on the negotiations of EPAs. The objective of the meeting was to offer Regional Economic Communities (RECs) an opportunity to exchange information and experience on the EPA negotiations; examine the latest developments in the EPA negotiations and strategies on the way forward; and to sensitize the RECs and other stakeholders to the Decision of the 18th AU Summit held in January 2012 on “Boosting Intra-African Trade”.
4. The Chairman added that as for previous meetings, the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels has been invited to participate and make its contribution to the meeting in Arusha. He requested Embassies to communicate as soon as possible to the Permanent Mission, the names of the Coordinators who will represent the five regions at the meeting.

Point 2: Adoption of the minutes of the 146th session

4. The summary record of the 146th session of the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels was adopted without amendment. No matter was raised as arising from the minutes.

Point 3: Report on the Rio + 20 workshop (Brussels, 27 March 2012)

5. The Chairman called on the Permanent Mission to submit the report on the Rio+20 workshop organized on 27 March 2012. The Officer in charge of the Permanent Mission explained that the objective of the workshop was to understand the stakes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio from 20 to 22 June 2012 and sensitise the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels to Africa’s common position for the Summit.
6. The Officer-in-charge went through the recommendations of the workshop as follows:
 - As the African common position is close to the European Union’s, both partners should pull their efforts together to achieve positive results at the Rio+20 Conference.

- Africa and Europe must ensure that the issue of the transfer of technologies and financing for the green economy are focal issues in the discussions of Rio+20 and that a fair agreement to all involved parties is reached.
- Africa must defend vigorously and with conviction the idea of transforming the United Nations Environment Programme into a United Nations Specialized Agency with headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Africa should insist on the need to establish a new framework with a proper representation of developing countries and to facilitate the promotion of the green economy, the availability of funds, capacity building and access to technology and its transfer. This new institutional framework should also ensure that Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Action and the other sustainable development objectives are implemented.

Item 4: Report on the coordination meeting with the African members of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly (19 March 2012)

7. The Chairman of the African Group invited the Permanent Mission to introduce the report on the coordination meeting between the African Group and the African members of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly on 19 March 2012. The Officer in charge of the Permanent Mission indicated that the objective of the meeting was to facilitate an exchange of views between the African Group and the African Parliamentarians on some of the items on the agenda of the Committee meetings of the ACP and ACP-EU Parliamentary Assemblies, with a view to adopting an African common position at such meetings.
8. The Permanent Mission underlined the points raised by the Ambassador of Tanzania at the meeting, in his capacity as Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps:
 - The EPA negotiations: the Dean urged the Parliamentarians to continue appealing to their counterparts from the European Parliament for the withdrawal of the proposed amendment to Regulation EC 1528/2007 on market access, and to seek a more flexible position from the European negotiators to facilitate the conclusion of the negotiations.
 - The new approach to the EU budget support to third countries: he underlined the concerns raised by the new approach of the EU budget support to third countries.
 - The European Commission's Communication on "Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change": the Dean called upon the Parliamentarians to caution their European counterparts for prudence to avoid too rigid conditionalities and criteria which might lose the spirit of the cooperation.
 - Development financing: The MPs were urged to intensify their lobbying and advocacy efforts vis-à-vis the European Parliament and the EU Member States to have the European Commission's proposal for the 11th EDF approved and the other development instruments to be allocated enough financial resources to meet the development challenges.

- Innovative sources for development financing: he informed MPs that the introduction of the Financial Transactions Tax is being more and more discussed, particularly within the European Union. He recalled that for a long time, the possibility of allocating part of the funds generated by such a levy to development financing has been on the table. He added that to ensure that part of the FTT is channeled towards development financing, sensitization and advocacy efforts should be intensified with the partners.
 - Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development: the Dean introduced to the MPs the African Common Position for Rio+20 as adopted by the January 2012 Summit. He underlined that this African position is based, in substance, on the need to promote a new, more open and sustainable development model based on the green economy as the main mean towards achieving sustainable development.
 - Peace and Security issues: the Dean updated the MPs on the outcome of the London Conference on Somalia which took place on 23 February 2012, on the situation in Libya, the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahelo Saharan region, and on the negotiations between the Government of South Sudan and the Government of Sudan.
9. The African Group agreed to the need for such meetings with the African members of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly and urged the Permanent Mission to repeat the initiative before all meetings of the ACP and ACP-EU Parliamentary Assemblies.

Item 5: Exchange of views on the next sessions of the ACP and ACP-EU Parliamentary Assemblies (Denmark, 23 – 30 May 2012)

10. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Permanent Mission is busy organizing a coordination meeting to take place in Horsens (Denmark), between the Group of African Ambassadors and the African members of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly. He called on the Permanent Mission to keep the Group informed about the arrangements made for the meeting.
11. The Permanent Mission informed the meeting of its intention to hold the coordination meeting in Horsens on 23 May 2012 to give the African Group an opportunity to exchange views with the African MPs before the 28th session on the ACP Parliamentary Assembly and 23rd session of the ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly. It announced that a draft agenda for the meeting would be submitted shortly to the African Group. As regards the logistical arrangements for the meeting, it informed the Group that they were being discussed with the General Secretariat of the ACP Group.

Item 6: Finalization of the preparations for the celebration of Africa Day 2012: date and venue of the reception

12. The Chairman referred to the discussions of the 146th session of the Group regarding the need to find a more suitable venue than the Palais des Colonies to organize the reception for the Celebration of Africa Day 2012. He stressed that the Permanent Mission had identified the Banqueting Hall of the Brussels City Hall and Espace Flagey Events. He talked about the pros and cons of each of the

identified venues, in terms of hiring cost, available space, parking facilities and availability on 6 June 2012.

13. Basing itself on the pros and cons of the tentative venues identified, the Organizing Committee mandated to supervise the preparations for the celebration of the Day recommended to the Group that the reception be organized this year at the Palais des Colonies. The Group approved the recommendation of the Organizing Committee and requested the Permanent Mission to start looking for a new venue for the Celebration of Africa Day 2013.

Item 7 : Exchange of views on the outcome of some ACP meetings (Dialogue on Migration, 13/04/2012 ; Meeting of the ACP-EU Trade Sub-committee, 13/04/2012 etc.)

14. The Group exchanged views on progress in the EPA negotiations. It underlined the slow progress in the negotiations due to the contentious issues and the European Commission's insistence on introducing new issues on which the WTO has not yet adopted a position. The Group emphasized that the European Commission's proposal to withdraw, from January 2014, from the list of beneficiaries of Regulation EC 1528/2007 on market access, countries which have not yet made the necessary provisions for the signature or ratification of the EPAs raises pressure and adds to the concerns. It expressed its regret about the lack of flexibility of the European negotiators in these negotiations.
15. The Group recalled that the African countries and regions are prepared to conclude the EPA negotiations provided that the agreements are mutually beneficial and meet the expected objectives by being development friendly and accelerating Africa's regional integration. It also underlined that the European Commission entering into negotiations with countries or sub-regions weakens the integration process in Africa.
16. The Group was informed about the discussions within the European Parliament's International Trade Committee on the European Commission's proposal to amend Regulation 1528/2007. The Committee's draft report dated 14 April 2012, proposed an extension of the deadline for the entry into force of the amendment to the market access regime to 1st January 2016, instead of 1st January 2014 as proposed by the European Commission. The Group commended the European Parliament for its spirit of understanding and request to allow more time for the negotiations. However, the participants in the meeting agreed that it would be difficult to meet the 2016 deadline particularly because of the still outstanding contentious issues and of the time needed for the ratification of the agreements.
17. On the migration issues, the Group exchanged views on the conclusions of the 4th meeting of the ACP-EU Dialogue on Migration held on 13 April 2012. The Group emphasized the current contexts in some countries of the European Union which are mainly focused on immigration related problems.

Item 8: Information on the Workshop on “Boosting Intra-African Trade” and on the EPAs (negotiations, amendment to Regulation EC 1528)

18. The Chairman requested the Permanent Mission to introduce this item. The Officer in charge informed the meeting of the Permanent Mission’s intention to organize in the framework of its activities for the benefit of the African Group, a workshop on trade issues. The workshop will focus on the EPA negotiations (update on the negotiations, proposal for the amendment to Regulation EC 1528/2007, way forward) and the AU January 2012 Summit’s Decision on ways and means of boosting intra-African trade.
19. The Officer in charge added that as announced by the Chairman at the beginning of the meeting, the Permanent Mission received from the AU Commission, an invitation for regional coordinators of the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels to participate in the coordination meeting on the EPA negotiations scheduled to take place in Arusha (Tanzania) on 17 and 18 May 2012. Following this development, the Permanent Mission will inform Embassies shortly about the selected date for the workshop in Brussels.

Item 9: Any other business

20. No point was raised under this item.
21. Having exhausted all the items on the agenda, the Chairman thanked the members of the Group for their attendance and the AU Permanent Mission for its support before adjourning the meeting at 17h15.

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