

President Charles Michel speaks at the extraordinary summit of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States



OACPS extraordinary summit

I'd like to thank President Kenyatta and the Secretary General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, Mr Chikoti, for this initiative. It brings us together at a pivotal time in our history.

We all know the damage COVID-19 is inflicting on our populations and our economies. We see it in those who have lost loved ones. And those who wonder how to put bread on the table for their families. For them, this is a moment of pain, fear, and uncertainty.

But we must never be dragged down by pessimism or fatalism. This global outbreak reminds us how connected we are. That it can be a time to reinvest in what connects us – multilateralism, international cooperation, and collective action. It reminds us of our shared destinies.

The African, Caribbean and Pacific States are invested in this cooperation; today's meeting is proof of that. There's no clearer option for the European Union than to be by their side – to be by your side. Europe has a historic partnership with the ACP countries. We share a rich and diverse landscape of political, commercial and cultural exchanges. And a shared resolve to make sustainable development a reality for all.

The Cotonou Agreement, which connects us, is the only legally binding agreement that the EU and its Member States have ever concluded with so many countries. The bonds we share give us a special responsibility.

The EU is taking bold action to overcome coronavirus at home. But we will not turn our backs on our global responsibilities. Towards Africa, in particular. The partnership between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific States is a prime example of the vibrant multilateralism we want to promote. Our countries represent over half of the seats in the United Nations. When we band together, we can be the catalyst for change, in so many ways.

Take climate change. In 2015, we joined forces for the Paris Agreement. And we made a difference.

Today, we are facing another global threat in COVID-19. And once again, multilateralism will be our best line of defence. Solidarity must underpin this joint response. Not a solidarity based on a misplaced clear conscience. Not a solidarity of words. But a solidarity of action. Tangible and real. Both during the crisis, and tomorrow, as we forge a more caring

society.

Dear friends,

First, we need to defeat the virus. So long as the virus is somewhere, we must act as if it's everywhere. From Brussels to Vanuatu, from Addis Ababa to Port-au-Prince.

We the European Union, with our Member States, and financial institutions are redirecting 25 billion euros of funding to support our partners. But we need to go further – I have a personal commitment to debt relief.

We welcome the first steps taken in the G20. These will give the most vulnerable countries breathing space and margin for manoeuvre. And we can do more, by involving major creditors in debt relief efforts. Global ambitions come with global responsibilities. I will continue to advocate tirelessly for such action in the G7, G20 and with other international partners.

Next we need to find ways to put the pandemic behind us. Vaccines, treatments and diagnostics are the only way to relegate the virus to the history books.

On this sensitive issue, we stand with you. The EU recently wrapped up a successful pledging conference, together with our international partners. 9.5 billion euros were raised to develop and distribute health solutions on a large scale, at an affordable price. Our vision is a vaccine that is accessible everywhere, for everyone. I join the call for 'The People's Vaccine'. Any future vaccine should be treated as a "global common good".

Finally, after COVID-19, we must rebuild. Recreating the post-COVID world will be an immense task. I feel a special responsibility to the young generation – the millions of young people who will live the results of our actions today. Let's make sure they will benefit from our successes. As Nobel Laureate and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said: "Future generations will judge us not by what we say, but what we do".

The world after COVID-19 must not be a carbon copy of the one before. That's neither possible nor desirable. We must show greater solidarity and more respect for the planet. And use digital technologies responsibly, for the good of humankind. It's now up to us – the international community. Let's make sure the scope of our action matches the scope of this pandemic.

Asante sana (*Thank you.*)