



Press Release

Chairperson Receives Vice President of Colombia



Chairperson Ping (R) welcomes H.E. Mr. Angelino Garzon, the Vice President of the Republic of Colombia

Addis Ababa, 25 April 2012 – The Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Dr. Jean Ping, accompanied by the Deputy Chairperson, Mr. Erastus Mwencha, received at the Commission's Headquarters on Wednesday, 25 April 2012, the Vice President of the Republic of Colombia, H.E. Mr. Angelino Garzon, who was accompanied by Colombia's Ambassador to Kenya, with concurrent accreditation to Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania, H.E. Madam Maria Victoria Diaz de Suarez.

Welcoming the Vice President, the Chairperson recalled his visits to Colombia during which he attended various international meetings and described Colombia as a beautiful country where he felt very well received. The Chairperson congratulated the Colombian Government and People on successfully dealing with several contemporary challenges, including the narcotics-funded armed insurgency.

On his part, the Vice President thanked the Chairperson for his warm welcome and conveyed greetings from Colombia's President, H.E. Mr. Juan Manuel Santos and the Minister for External Relations, H.E. Madam Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar.

Vice President Garzon further stated that the purpose of his visit was to explore ways and means for Colombia to contribute to the work of the African Union and strengthen its relations with Africa, notably in the areas of trade and investment, culture, youth employment, education,

the fight against organized crime and collaboration within various forums in the international system.

The Vice President described Colombia as a country with very strong historical roots in Africa and cited, as an example, Colombia's huge population of people of African descent. He indicated that there are 10 million persons of African descent in Colombia, out of a total population of 46 million, making Colombia the country with the second highest population of people of African descent in South America, after Brazil. He also informed the Chairperson that the Colombian city of Cali is the second largest Black city in South America, after Bahia in Brazil.

"It is important, therefore, for Colombia to strengthen its relations with Africa, on the basis of friendship, brotherhood and mutual interests, not ideology. To that effect, it is my pleasure to inform you that the Colombian Government has decided to open more embassies on the African Continent. A decision on the locations of our new embassies in Africa will be finalized before the end of this year," the Vice President stated.

Both personalities discussed preparations for the next Africa South America Summit, scheduled to take place in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in mid-May 2012, and agreed to work towards a common strategy on the election of the next Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which will take place in Geneva on 28 May 2012. The Vice President informed the Chairperson that Colombia will attend the Summit.

With regard to the complete reintegration of Cuba into the international political and economic system, the Chairperson and the Vice President agreed on the need to move beyond the rigidity of the ideologically-driven bipolar mindset of the Cold War and fully embrace Cuba, cognizant of the dynamics and imperatives of the global and more interconnected world of the 21st Century, as well as the evolving domestic situation in Cuba.

The Vice President invited the Chairperson to attend a High-Level international meeting of Local and Regional Government Leaders, scheduled to take place in Colombia in 2013, and pointed out that out of 1131 elected Mayors in Colombia 156 are of African descent, including the Mayor of Cartagena. He also invited African entrepreneurs to invest in Colombia and urged Colombian entrepreneurs to do same in Africa.

The Chairperson thanked the Vice President for his kind invitation and pledged the full cooperation of the AU Commission, to ensure Africa's effective participation at next year's Local Government High-level international meeting in Colombia.

Both personalities also reviewed ways of strengthening cooperation between Colombia and Africa in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime. In that regard, the Chairperson and the Vice President agreed that Africa could learn from Colombia's experience in fighting international criminal cartels, in light of the fact that terrorists and criminal traffickers, who know neither ideology nor national frontiers, have transformed the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region into major transit points, with disastrous consequences for the local populations.

Also present at the meeting, which lasted over an hour, were: the Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff in the Bureau of the Chairperson, as well as the Chairperson's Advisors on Economic and Defense/Security Affairs.

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