

Thursday, 6 April 2006 - Strasbourg

Work of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in 2005 (debate)

Ana Gomes (PSE). - (PT) I should first like to commend Mr Cornillet for his report, and the joint chairman of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly for her hard work and commitment in the work of the Assembly.

I should also like to draw attention to the conclusions of the Women's Forum that took place at the fringe of the Assembly during the final session in Edinburgh in November. The discussion touched upon the issue of the trafficking of women and girls from developing countries and the poorest parts of Europe to the wealthiest areas of Western Europe. Some 600 000 to 800 000 women are trafficked every year across international borders, which corresponds to more than the entire population of some ACP countries, for example Cape Verde, Djibouti and the Comoros Islands.

The Women's Forum established a bridge between countries of origin and destination. The debate was lively, with strong participation from the contingent from the ACP countries. In the final conclusions, the participants called on the Joint Parliamentary Assembly to draw up a report to identify the measures needed to combat this scourge in all ACP countries, including European, African and Caribbean countries.

It should be noted that the Forum was arranged for the fringe of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly and that resources are not made available for it. I therefore call on Parliament's services and the Conference of Presidents to consider harnessing funding for such a positive, results-focused organisation. On a more general level, the Joint Parliamentary Assembly last year discussed the situation in Darfur and West Africa, but did not address the breakdown in the rule of law and the electoral process, and the serious violations of human rights in countries of key, symbolic significance such as Ethiopia, where the African Union has its headquarters.

There have, however, been important developments in the fight against impunity in Africa; for example, the dictator Charles Taylor has been arrested and brought to justice. Other dictators such as Hissène Habré, and former Ethiopian dictator Mengistu, currently being harboured by ACP countries like Zimbabwe and Senegal, must also be brought to justice. These are further cases in which the Assembly can play a key role in ending impunity in Africa.

On this issue, I must say that it would be most useful if the debates were more genuine. Sometimes, there are ACP countries acting more as the ambassadors of their governments and less as critics of the situation in their countries. I feel that as MEPs we have a duty to find ways of supporting our counterparts from ACP countries who are determined to tell the truth and to encourage them to take action to bring about change and better governance in their countries.