Commissioner Poul Nielson
Opening Session at the EU-SADC (Southern Africa Development Community)
Ministerial Meeting
Maputo (Mozambique), 07 November 2002

Your Excellency, Mr Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique
Honourable Ministers
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me thank the Government of Mozambique for hosting this Conference here in Maputo. It cannot have been easy to have made all the practical arrangements in what was a relatively short period of time. So my congratulations and my thanks go to all concerned and especially to the two Co-Presidencies for this good example of working together.

I am impressed by the positive events which have taken place in the region since our last Conference in Gaberone just two years ago. First and foremost the accord last April which has brought peace to Angola and the progress in the various talks on the troubled country of the DR Congo in which many SADC members have been involved. We realize that these diplomatic efforts will need to be accompanied by continued commitments from all sides and we as the European Commission are already engaged, with others, in mobilizing significant resources for reconstruction and development.

Unfortunately these positive and welcome achievements in eliminating conflict that should open the possibility for the region as a whole to reap peace dividends are being offset by events in Zimbabwe and by the major food crisis affecting many countries of the region today. We welcome the efforts deployed by SADC, through it’s Organ, to bring about peace and stability in the countries concerned.

Food Security
A major handicap to peace and stability which are a prerequisite for harmonious development, economic growth and the reduction of poverty is the fact that it is the whole region that is seriously and widely affected by the food scarcity prevailing in at least 6 of SADC Members. The Commission recognises that the Southern Africa region is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis comprising a dramatic food security situation (compounded) by bad weather, political and economic problems and the deep impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In response to this dramatic human tragedy and to the joint appeal which you launched with the UN last July, you will be aware that the Commission and the EU at large have already mobilised considerable resources to try and cover the most urgent needs of the poor. To stick to food only, the overall EU response already amounts to some € 310 million making us by far the largest source of assistance. But
(we are not taking any pride in these figures.) It was and will remain our common duty to address the humanitarian aspects of this crisis but our joint responsibility cannot and should not stop there. We all realize that this crisis is not a mere cyclical accumulation but rather a structural crisis that may well last for some time. Governments of the countries concerned need to firmly assume their respective responsibilities and address the underlying structural issues of food security and poverty.

One of the conclusions of a seminar which the Commission recently organized in Pretoria was the need to strengthen dialogue between the donor community and the responsible governments so as to develop not only a short term response but an adequate medium and long term approach which addresses all the issues causing this current crisis. The Commission will shortly articulate a new response to the food security challenge which can only be a support for your own strategies. Both our response and your strategy must be comprehensive and encompass policy issues such as good governance, institutional support, HIV/AIDS, food price policies making markets function and sectors such as water and sanitation.

During the years to come, our cooperation will focus on those areas that you have chosen. It will remain firmly based on the essential elements and principles of the Cotonou Agreement. It must be made to work for the poor.

On 27th September in Brussels the EU and ACP started negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement. Regional Integration is the single most important factor in promoting economic growth and diversification.

SADC has come along way over the years so has our relationship. Let's build on this together and move forward.

Thank you