

## Press Release

5 October 2006



### **Ministers and NGOs call for urgent action on proposed EU trade deals**

Ministers from African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) governments and Representatives of civil society organisations are calling on Europe to thoroughly review their current proposals for new regional free trade deals because they threaten to undermine development.

At a conference in Brussels on October 12th government and NGO participants will demand that Europe considers genuine alternatives to the current proposals on the highly controversial Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP.

The EPA negotiations are currently being formally reviewed. Michael Gidney, Policy Director of Traidcraft, the UK's leading fair trade organisation, said: "The review offers the last chance to make EPAs work for the poor. If European Member States don't act now on these inherently unfair and divisive trade deals, it will be too late".

Since negotiations began in 2002, EPAs have attracted widespread criticism from non-governmental organisations, local farmers and industries, and – increasingly – from ACP Governments themselves.

Dame Miller, Barbados's Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Minister and Chair of the ACP Ministerial Trade Committee will address the conference, together with Trade Ministers from Fiji and Senegal and across the ACP. Senegalese Minister Mr Diop has already suggested that African Governments must opt for a "Plan B" if negotiations continue to go against their interests. Kenya's Trade Minister, Dr Kituyi has said in June 2005 that, "to make poverty history we must make EPAs history."

Many believe EPAs, which are Free Trade deals that go beyond even the ambitions of the World Trade Organisation, will have a devastating effect on some of the world's poorest countries, damaging fledgling industries and destroying hopes that trading companies and farmers can bring wealth to poor communities.

The conference - 'EU-ACP Trade Relations: the Development Challenge of EPAs' - is hosted by the South Centre, a Geneva-based intergovernmental organisation of 49 developing countries, in partnership with European, African and Caribbean NGOs. It comes at a crucial time, just ahead of a key meeting of EU Trade and Development Ministers on 16-17 October, with the ACP countries calling for EPAs to be high on the meeting's agenda.

Yash Tandon, Executive Director of the South Centre, said: "EPAs as they stand will be a disaster for the economic prospects of some of the world's poorest people. EPAs need radical reform. EU member states have a responsibility to ensure that a comprehensive review of EPAs takes place and that - as requested by ACP governments - alternatives are fully considered."

**Ends**

**Notes to editors:**

1. The Conference on Economic Partnership Agreements: 'EU-ACP Trade Relations: the Development Challenge of EPAs', takes place on Thursday 12 October, 9am-5pm, at International Trade Union House, Blvd du Roi Albert II, 5.1210, Brussels

2. A Press Conference will take place between 1-1.30pm, with lunch provided.

3. The South Centre co-hosts the conference in collaboration with the Africa Trade Network, Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), Traidcraft, Christian Aid, Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), 11.11.11, Oxfam International and SOMO.

4. Speakers:

Dame Billie Miller, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade for Barbados and Chair of the ACP Ministerial Trade Committee

Mr Kaliopate Tavola, Minister of Trade for Fiji

Mr Mamadou Diop, Minister of Trade for Senegal

Professor Yash Tandon, Executive Director, South Centre, an intergovernmental organisation based in Geneva, representing 49 developing countries

Stephen Karingi, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, UN Economic Commission for Africa

Mamadou Cissokho, Honorary President, ROPPA (Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest):

Shantal Munro-Knight, Senior Programme Officer Trade, Caribbean Policy Development Centre

Tetteh Hormeku, Head of Programmes, Third World Network, which coordinates the Africa Trade Network

Michael Gidney, Director of Policy, Traidcraft Exchange, the UK's leading Fair Trade organisation

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