

FORWARD WITH THE STRUGGLE TO STOP THE EPAs

Declaration of 9 Annual Meeting of the Africa Trade Network

We, African civil society organisations gathered at the 9th Annual Review and Strategy Meeting of the Africa Trade Network in Accra, from the 11-14 of December, 2006, having reviewed the on-going negotiations on the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements as well as developments in the World Trade Organisation negotiations, declare as follows.

We affirm as primary the right of our countries to pursue autonomously determined policies which promote the development of our economies, and fulfil the social and human rights and livelihood needs of our people. We also assert the integration of African countries both regionally and continentally, on the basis of our own imperatives, as a key condition for the development of our countries and for the benefit of our people.

Over the past two decades, this right of African countries to pursue their own individual and collective developmental agenda have been attacked and subverted by the countries of the north that dominate the world economic system, as part of their never-ending attempts to further open up the economies of African and other developing countries for the benefit of their transnational corporations.

Economic Partnership Agreements

The so-called Economic Partnership Agreements being negotiated by African countries (and the Caribbean and Pacific) with the European Union, are, like other bi-lateral and multilateral free trade agreements, simply the latest instruments deployed in the attack on our countries. These agreements are set to be even more restrictive of the policy choices and opportunities available to our governments, and even more severe in their impacts than the World Bank/IMF structural adjustment policies as well as the WTO agreements.

It has been three years since members of the Africa Trade Network launched their opposition to the Economic Partnership Agreements. Since then, several hundred civil society organisations, social movements, and mass-membership organisations across Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Europe have been pursuing a campaign to STOP the EPAs as currently being negotiated between the European Union and ACP groupings of countries.

While there is wide-spread recognition among governments, inter-governmental institutions, parliamentarians, civil society actors and a diverse range of social constituencies across the ACP, Europe and the rest of the world of the dangers posed by the EPAs to the economies and peoples of the ACP countries, this has

not yet led to fundamental changes in the design of the EPAs and the process of negotiations.

Expressions of concern among some European Union member-states and institutions about the EU proposals for the agreements have not yet translated into changes in directives for the European Commission. Instead, the EC has simply adopted new rhetoric to continue to impose its parameters, agenda and momentum on African (and other ACP) groups. Furthermore, while the EC negotiators have sought to strike a public profile of reasonableness, they have continued with characteristic arrogance in the negotiations.

On their part, Africa's EPA negotiating regions still seem unable to give expression to the fundamental logic of their stated developmental concerns in the overall architecture of the EPA and its different themes. Rather, they have tended to get bogged down in disputes with the EC over narrow (even if legitimate) questions of support for adjustment costs, transition costs and supply-side constraints.

Furthermore, many countries in the African regions have still not fully carried out their own independent assessments and studies of the overall as well as sectoral implications of the EPAs. They continue to rely on support from the EC, while the latter continues to reject those studies whose outcomes it does not like. In some instances, the secretariats of the regional groupings whose role it is to represent the interests of the regions in the negotiations have been overwhelmed by the EC.

Above all, in spite of the fact that they are patently not in a position to do so, many of the African negotiating regions are rushing to engage in the more advanced and complex stages of the negotiations.

The region of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has declared itself ready to move into text-based negotiations, in spite of continued deadlock (indeed as a way of breaking out of the deadlock) over fundamental issues of principle such as the development content of the EPAs. Furthermore, in spite of their own stated opposition to the Singapore Issues in the EPA, ECOWAS has agreed under pressure from the EC to adopt its own regional policy frameworks of investment and competition in a manner that is set to prejudice its ability to continue to resist the inclusion of these issues in the EPA.

On its part, the Eastern and Southern African (ESA) region has tabled its own draft EPA agreement ahead of any meaningful progress on such fundamental principles as development in the EPAs, and in the absence of clarity on how to deal with some subjects such as services in the EPAs, or even on such practical matters as approaches to dealing with sensitive products that should not be subject to tariff liberalisation. The draft agreement's provisions on tariff liberalisation give up the right of ESA countries to use tariff to develop the capital

and raw material goods sector, thereby undermining their long-term industrialisation.

Similar contradictions and tendencies have been displayed in other EPA negotiating regions in Africa and beyond.

The above narrow and superficial approach has been adopted in relation to the mid-term review into the EPA negotiations as mandated in the Cotonou Agreement. The declared principle that the review be comprehensive, transparent and inclusive of all stakeholders, has so far not been observed. In addition, none of the regions seems to have taken seriously the stated objective of the review to explore alternatives, and indeed some have stated that there is no alternative to the current approach.

As they are proceeding therefore, the EPA negotiations reinforce our declared concern that they aim to establish nothing other than free trade agreements between Europe and the regions of Africa (and the Caribbean and the Pacific), where reciprocal trade liberalisation is coupled with deregulation of investment in favour of European investors.

We therefore re-iterate our rejection of the Economic Partnership Agreements, and re-affirm our campaign objective to Stop the EPAs.

We re-state our position that as free-trade agreements between two unequal parties, the EPAs are fundamentally anti-developmental. This is especially so in the particular context of Africa's weak, fragmented economies, which have been ravaged and distorted by years of European and (other) external domination. This anti-developmental essence can not be reversed by means of the on-going attempts to inject some so-called development dimensions into these FTAs. We also assert that any alternative to the EPAs can only be defined as the right of, and support for, African and other countries of the ACP to determine their own policies and agenda for development.

We therefore re-affirm the demand of the stop EPA Campaign for an overhaul and review of the EU's neo-liberal external trade policy, particularly with respect to developing countries, and demand that EU-ACP trade cooperation should be founded on an approach that:

- is based on a principle of non-reciprocity, as instituted in the Generalised System of Preferences and special and differential treatment in the WTO;
- protects ACP producers, domestic and regional markets;
- excludes the pressure for trade and investment liberalisation; and
- is founded on the respect for and supports the space of ACP countries to formulate and pursue their own development strategies.

In furtherance of the above, we demand that:

- the Singapore Issues of Investment, Competition Policy and Government Procurement should be unconditionally excluded from trade agreements with the European Union;
- rules and disciplines on services liberalisation and intellectual property must not form part of such agreements, since the related disciplines in the WTO are sufficient for any interaction with the European Union; the imbalances of those disciplines in the WTO will not be removed but rather worsened in the EPAs.
- there should be no reciprocal removal of tariff, in whatever form, whether asymmetrical or otherwise, with the European Union; any market access relationship should be based on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).

WTO

We reiterate our views that the negotiations under the Doha Work programme have continued to marginalise the developmental concerns of African and other developing countries, in favour of the developed countries. This is affirmed by the very circumstances of the suspension of the negotiations in July 2006, which was occasioned by deadlock among an exclusive group of countries, consultations among whom had taken centre stage of the negotiations, at the expense of the democratic participation of other member countries.

We reject any resumption of the Doha talks that is based on the exclusion of the concerns and interests of African countries.

We reject the continued drive by the developed countries to further open our markets to their agricultural and industrial products, and to their services suppliers. Instead, we insist on the right of our countries for a continued use of tariff instruments to protect our agricultural producers and industry, to support our industrialisation; and maintain our flexibility to determine whether and how to further open our economies to foreign entities.

Responsibility of African governments

We call on all African governments to rise up to their primary responsibility to the African peoples and states in the context of all the trade negotiations.

In relation to the EPA negotiations, we urge our governments to resist attempts to rail-road them to stick to tight and unrealistic negotiating time-lines. They must use the space that is gained for a more meaningful engagement with their stakeholders around our own autonomous regional integration agenda as basis for a beneficial relationship with the European Union. We further call on our governments to rise beyond narrow regional fragments in dealing with the European Union that has been imposed by the region-based negotiations of the EPAs, to assert the collective vision for Africa which the people yearn for and

which the imperatives of our economies demand. They must also work more closely with the Caribbean and Pacific regions.

Civil society

As civil society organisations, we commit ourselves to strengthen our continent-wide solidarity and action, and to further strengthen our interactions with our allies from the African, Pacific, the Caribbean and Europe and all over the world to take forward the struggle to Stop the EPAs.