

STANDING FIRM AND ACTING TOGETHER AGAINST EPAs !

Declaration of 11 Annual Review and Strategy Meeting of Africa Trade Network, Accra Ghana, 25- 28, August 2008

The Africa Trade Network, the broadest, longest -standing network of African social, labour, women's, faith-based, developmental, environmental, farmers, human rights and other organisations, dealing with the role and effects of international trade and trade agreements in relation to Africa's needs and aspirations at local, national regional and continental levels, had its 11 Annual Review and Strategy meeting in Accra, Ghana, from 25 to 28 August.

We have, for many years, worked actively with civil society forces to engage with African and other developing country governments resisting the trade and investment liberalisation agenda of the more powerful governments. Such cooperation and coordination has contributed to the ability of African and other developing country governments to create effective alliances in the WTO to promote their development needs and demands, to expose the self-serving strategies and hypocrisies of the US and the EU, and to block their aggressive agendas. In this regard, we welcome the continued rejection by these governments of the anti-developmental content and orientation of the WTO's Doha round.

Members of ATN have also been actively engaged with African governments and civil society forces on the proposed EU's misleadingly entitled "Economic Partnership Agreements" with African (and Caribbean and Pacific) countries. We see clearly that these EPAs are not fundamentally concerned about African development but are designed to further the geo-economic aims of the 'Global Europe' strategy being pushed from Brussels in the interest of European corporations and capital.

We are therefore determined to Stop EPAs altogether. But, despite our active engagement with African governments, and the criticism and active opposition against these EPAs by many African governments -- both publicly and in private -- the EU has managed to pressurize eighteen African governments into initialing IEPAs and committing to further negotiations on 'Interim EPAs'. Most of these IEPAs are one-to-one engagements between the EU and individual African governments, while five countries are negotiating within one of the established African regions, namely the East African Community. Other African regions have, in the EPA negotiating processes, been divided and their coherence and very future imperiled.

At the same time, a larger number of African governments have not entered into these IEPAs. We commend all such resistant governments and urge them to remain steadfast. We commit ourselves to work with them and to actively engage

with all the other African governments on the following terms and understandings:

1. The IEPAs were merely an emergency defensive measure taken at the end of 2007 under the undue pressure of the EU's threat to disrupt exports from African (and other and Pacific) countries into the European market (with many LDC, who did not need to, even pressured to join).
2. These 'interim EPAs', initiated only as statements of intent under conditions of extreme pressures, cannot be accepted as being legally binding and can be challenged and blocked altogether on the basis of a number of legal instruments, such as the Vienna Convention on International Treaties.
3. The IEPA terms cannot be regarded as being set in stone. However, the mere removal of some of the most contentious issues – above all, the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause and the “standstill clause” prohibiting the flexible use by African governments of export duties and other support measures to their producers - will not alter the fundamentally anti-developmental import of the highly imbalanced nature of the tariff reduction ‘reciprocities’ demanded by the EU.
4. The so-called more “development friendly” insertions into IEPAs proposed by some African governments and NGOs, and others in Europe – such as modified rules of origin, and the removal of technical barriers to trade (TBTs) in the EU – may to some degree facilitate trade, but will also serve, more fundamentally, to reinforce the heavy trade orientation and dependence of Africa exporters on the EU market, and the traditional “supply role” of (primary commodities and raw materials by) African economies to the EU.
5. Similarly, the proposed provision of increased aid by the EU is supposedly to improve Africa's “supply capacities” to be able to take advantage of the anticipated increased market access into the EU. However, in reality, the development and diversification of African productive capacities require a wide range of programs and policies, such as the strategic application of tariff and other instruments, that will be severely constrained within the proposed EPA terms.
6. In parallel, the exclusion of some “sensitive products” and the proposals by some African governments and NGOs for slightly “longer time-frames” for the phasing- in of tariff liberalisation are also fundamentally misconceived because the changing needs of current and future products and production sectors within their countries cannot be definitively determined in advance, and policies in these regards must not be fixed in advance and as *a priori* commitments in an international treaty .
7. In addition to the above, the most serious threat of all arises from the drive by the EU, and the seeming accommodations by some African governments, to

extend the IEPAs into “full and comprehensive” EPAs, incorporating the EUs “new generation” demands for the opening up of African services and public tenders (so-called government procurement) to EU companies, and fixing the terms and rights of European investors and financial operators, together with other terms serving EU interests in Africa.

We urge African governments

- to re-unite in their respective regional communities, and to use broader African unity within and through the African Union to create a much stronger and determined resistance to the EU;
- to act decisively on their own declarations that no agreements with the EU can take precedence over, or counter, their commitments to their own regional cooperation and integration aims and programs;
- to firmly resist EU maneuvers in their current or future negotiations to draw them into full EPAs.

We also note and stress that it is most unwise and inappropriate for African governments to be entering into a far-reaching, long-term, fixed and highly questionable and contentions agreements with the EU, or any of the other powers and international forces, especially in the context of the current unstable and changing global conjuncture. This includes

- international energy and food crises affecting African most seriously;
- declining legitimacy of the IMF and WB and the WTO;
- erosion and discrediting of the neoliberal paradigm
- shifts in the global balance of power and the range of forces, especially in the South with which Africa can ally itself.

We commit ourselves to work with African governments in the quest to achieve more equitable relations with Europe that protect our sovereignty and autonomous development options.

We pledge to work with and support the movement of citizen’s groups in Africa against Europe’s self-serving EPA agenda, and to strengthen the demand on our governments to stand firmly together in the interests of our peoples and our countries, regions and the whole continent.

We call on civil society organizations and other citizens groups in Europe and other parts of the world who are also resisting European free trade agreements to strengthen their active solidarity with our campaign to stop the EPAs.