

## **What's going on in EPAs? /The low down on EPAs**

### **Issue 1: 2005**

#### **1. The African Union speaks out**

Ministers of Trade from across the African Union meeting in Cairo from 5-9<sup>th</sup> June, took the unusual step of issuing a special Declaration on the EPA negotiations. The short document reaffirms that African negotiators want to see EPAs as tools for development and want to make sure that their negotiation does not undermine on-going regional integration in Africa. The declaration also resists the fragmentation of the ACP under the regional EPA negotiations, stating that “the different EPA groupings should harmonise their positions on issues of common interest before final decisions are taken.”

Looking towards the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial, and again repeating the ACP position taken again and again, the declaration called for Article XXIV of the GATT to be amended to allow for special and differential treatment. Significantly – as regional negotiations move ahead, the Ministers cautioned that “conclusions of the market access aspects of the EPAs should take place upon completion of this amendment.” Finally the statement reaffirms that the so-called ‘new’ or ‘Singapore’ issues of investment, competition policy and public procurement “should remain outside the ambit of the WTO Doha Work Programme/EPA negotiations”

#### **Why is this important?**

This is a clear and strong statement from African Governments showing the extent of their concern about EPAs and how they want negotiations to proceed. The divisions between how the EU sees EPAs and how the Africa Union sees EPA are clear. On the ‘so-called’ new issues, this statement now makes it impossible for European Governments or for the European Commission to say – in the case of Africa at least - that they are included in the talks ‘because the ACP want them’. The statement also issues a strong challenge to the EU ahead of December’s WTO Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong that they want the rules which govern trade agreements such as EPAs to be amended to allow for fairer deals to be agreed.

*To read the AU statement visit [www.epawatch.net](http://www.epawatch.net)*

#### **2. So does civil society**

Extract from civil society statement to African Union Trade Ministers meeting in Cairo. June 2005

“The threats to the economic development of African countries in the WTO are replicated, in some instances more severely, in the context of the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union.

Notwithstanding the attempts by officials of the European Commission to paint the EPA in a more positive light, the EPAs are essentially free-trade agreements between unequal partners, which will tie up Africa's regions to Europe in an imbalanced framework and undermine Africa's producers, economies, and autonomous efforts at regional integration.

At a time when even Member States of the European Union are raising serious concerns about the EC negotiating mandate for EPAs, we call on Africa governments to heed the call from their citizens for a stop to the EPAs in their current form. We call on the governments to work for an alternative framework with the EU which:

- is based on the principle of non-reciprocity;
- allows for national and regional support and protection for African producers, and to this end, protection for Africa's domestic and regional markets;

- reverses the pressure for trade and investment liberalisation;
- recognises the necessary policy space for African countries to pursue their own development strategies.”

### **Why is this important?**

This statement shows clearly the solidarity between ACP and European campaigners on EPAs. It also shows that campaigning in Europe can help to strengthen the position both of ACP campaigners, and also African Governments in the talks.

For the full statement on both WTO and EPAs see: <http://www.twnafrica.org>

### **3. Leaked letter scandal**

The extent of the European Commission’s concern with the UK Government’s position paper on EPAs was exposed when a letter from senior DG Trade Official, Peter Carl was leaked to The Guardian newspaper. The letter which was sent to Commission representatives in all the ACP countries said “The UK statement represents a major and unwelcome shift in the UK position.....Some recommendations move well away from agreed EU positions.” It went on to acknowledge that the talks have become tense and that there is disagreement, but noting that the statement “could well make progress with EPA negotiations more difficult by reinforcing the views of the more sceptical ACP states.”

In a shocking admission of the behind-the-scenes pressure the Commission is willing to bring to bear on individual members states, the letter went on to say “Peter Mandelson is taking up our concerns and will press for a revised UK line.” Trade Commissioner Mandelson responded by saying development NGOs campaign on EPAs should “Be careful your campaigning zeal does not lead you to oppose innovation, frustrate change and undermine the case for reform in developing countries because, in this case, you will not be helping these countries and the progressive ministers in their governments.”,

This prompted a direct response from African trade campaigners, including fair trader, Moctar Fall from Interface Trading in Senegal who responded in a letter published in The Guardian newspaper:

“I am a trader from Senegal. The reality is that poorer countries' and producers' concerns are largely ignored in trade talks. And EPAs are no exception. Europe knows well the dangers of opening markets to world competition - Mandelson himself has been fighting the flood of Chinese products into the EU. But still, with his friends in the G8, he champions liberalisation.

We, in the poorest countries, have paid the price of forced liberalisation every day for the past 30 years. Without doubt EPAs will make life even more precarious for us, and that's why we reject them. Yes, poor countries need trade, reform and innovation. But we need these on our terms. There will be little scope for progress if our fledgling industries have been wiped out by European imports. “

### **What does this mean?**

The UK position paper challenged the way the European Commission is negotiating EPAs. It also questioned some of the concrete proposals in the negotiating mandate and sought to open up debate amongst the different EU member states about the direction EPAs were taking. The leaked letter sheds some light on how this kind of challenge is dealt with by the European Commission and the difficulties that EU member states face. Campaigners responded that if the Commission refuses to take the concerns raised by member states seriously, it is clear that member states will have to take a stronger position and revise the mandate they give to the Commission. Campaigners in the UK are also concerned that the

UK Government may use the Commission's 'wrist-slapping' as an excuse not to actively promote or defend their position.

For the UK Government position paper see: [www.dti.gov.uk/ewt/epas.pdf](http://www.dti.gov.uk/ewt/epas.pdf)  
Link to leaked letter [www.epawatch.net](http://www.epawatch.net)

### **Global Week of Action highlights EPAs**

The Global Week of Action on trade justice took place from 10-16 April. Amidst the variety of actions and protests a number specifically highlighted the problem of EPAs.

#### **Arusha Seminar**

X members of the Confederation of Africa Fair Trade Organisations (COFTA) met during the week of action in Arusha, Tanzania to debate fair trade and trade justice issues. The workshop looked in detail at the recommendations of the recent Commission for Africa report, the EPA negotiations and looked ahead to the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial.

#### **Kenya activities**

Across Kenya activities included an unfair football match between a premier league team and a team of local farmers, rallies and public processions.

Following a workshop bringing together over 46 representatives of small scale farmers from 14 countries across East and Southern Africa organised by EcoNews Africa and PELUM, a procession of farmers handed in a memorandum to the European Commission office in Nairobi. The memorandum called on the EU to stop EPAs, to base future negotiations on the interests of ACP small scale farmers. The statement also called for EPAs not to go beyond what has been agreed at the WTO and for the European Commission to look at alternatives to EPAs.

#### **Brussels protest**

A powerful funeral procession, held by European and Belgium civil society groups (1), carried a message right to the heart of the European Institutions in Brussels on April 14. The simple slogan on the coffin read: 'trade justice not free trade'. Dozens of 'mourners' followed the coffin, carrying water, fish, tomatoes, rice and chicken to symbolize the livelihoods that are being destroyed by unfair international trade.

Marc Maes from 11.11.11 Belgium made reference to the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements which the EU is currently negotiating with the ACP countries: *"These agreements are supposed to be about development, but they will force 37 developing countries and 40 least developing countries to open their markets almost completely to EU competition"*.

The procession was designed to highlight the EU's role in enforcing unjust trade rules, which are destroying communities and the environment across the world's poorest regions. The focus on food and water served as a poignant reminder that trade is not just about economics and business. It's about peoples' lives, basic needs and the environment they depend on.

*"The low-down on EPAs" is an initiative of Traidcraft Exchnage based in the UK. Each issue will examine recent developments in the EPA negotiations and will explain their significance in a way that is accessible for non-trade experts. Its aims to raise awareness about the talks themselves, to contribute to popular debate and to share information about civil society activity around EPAs.*

For further information or to suggest items to include, please contact [policy@traidcraft.co.uk](mailto:policy@traidcraft.co.uk)