

## 2007: Last Chance to Stop EPAs

As the deadline for signing Economic Partnership agreements (EPAs) looms, the European Commission is rushing to complete negotiations in time. But opposition to these unjust trade deals is growing

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2007 is a critical year for the EPA negotiations as the deals are due to come into force at the beginning of 2008.

The European Commission (EC), which is responsible for carrying out the negotiations on behalf of the European member states, is determined to get the deals signed regardless of whether they are suitable for the poor countries involved.

This has added to the pressure being exerted behind the scenes, while there continues to be a chronic lack of information available to campaigners, European MPs and even the governments of developing countries that are negotiating.

Most importantly, there has been no sign of a comprehensive review that Traidcraft and others have been demanding and which was promised at the outset of the talks.

Meanwhile, unease has been growing in the governments of both European and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, while trade negotiators are locked behind closed doors. In October, Traidcraft hosted a very successful conference in Brussels, where invited Trade Ministers voiced their concerns about effects of EPAs on their people.

"At the beginning of negotiations, we expected a lot of the idea of the EPAs becoming a tool for development. But as things stand now, the agreement is threatening to overwhelm our fragile economies," said Fijian minister Kaliopote Tavola.

Dr. Aliyu Modibo Umar of Nigeria agreed, saying EPAs will "probably destroy the little development that some ACP countries have managed to achieve over the past years."

Even the French Parliament, which recently held an enquiry into EPAs, expressed reservations about the benefits of EPAs, while the African Union declared in December that "at this advanced stage of the negotiations, Africa's priorities have not been positively and adequately addressed by the European Commission".

These worries have been echoed by international trade unions fearing a "race to the bottom" in labour standards, as well as by farmers' groups representing many thousands of poor producers who will be directly affected by the deals.

In response, campaigners around the world have increased pressure to get the negotiations halted. Thanks to the efforts of UK campaigners, the British government made a public stand in an open letter to the EC, restating their opposition to forcibly opening markets in developing countries.

But we urgently need to step up our pressure to the European level to really get the EC to listen. That's why we are acting together with campaigners in eleven European countries to target the German government, which holds the EU presidency and the G8 meetings this year.

This rare combination was last seen in 2005 when [Make Poverty History](#) put its demands to the UK government. Germany has stated its intent to put Africa at the top of the agenda again this year and we intend to make build on the momentum of Make Poverty History.

Actions currently underway include:

- [An open letter to Chancellor Merkel](#) from more than 180 organisations across Europe
- A joint email action from campaigners across Europe
- Mobilising international trade unions using briefings produced by Traidcraft
- Simultaneous media work around key meetings of the EU in March
- Strengthening links between campaigners in Europe and the developing world, made at the recent World Social Forum (pictured above)
- [Protests at German and EU embassies](#) around the world on the 19<sup>th</sup> April.

Crucial decisions about the future of EPAs will be made this year, and it is not too late to make them work to reduce, rather than increase, poverty.