

Malawi will not be forced to sign unfair trade deal

Malawi says it will not sign an EPA until it feels ready to do so.

1 July 2009

Malawi, currently negotiating a trade deal with the European Union as part of the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region, has said it will not sign the agreement until various contentious issues have been addressed.

"We have not signed and we are not signing the EPAs. We cannot be put under pressure", the Director of Trade in the Ministry of Industry and Trade Harrison Mandindi said on Tuesday.

Last year the president of Malawi, Bingu wa Mutharika stressed that the country was not ready to enter into an EPA until it improves its manufacturing base to compete on an equal footing.

This position was reaffirmed by members of the ESA bloc at a summit held in Zimbabwe last week.

A statement from the Eastern and Southern African Trade, Information and Negotiation Institute underlined the importance of political leadership in seeking the best outcomes for the region:

"This means all those targets of reducing poverty, child and maternal mortality and increasing access to education for the people should be used as tools for making informed decisions, especially with regards to trade negotiations."

ESA countries have argued that liberalising their economies under the EPAs will further weaken the countries' ability to develop and respond to the challenges posed by liberalisation, as already evident with the interim EPAs.

Information obtained from Nation Online 19th June 2009, Chikondi Chiyembekeza