

CALL TO ACTION AGAINST EUROPE'S AGGRESSIVE ECONOMIC AGENDA IN AFRICA

**Declaration of civil society organisations at the meeting of the Africa
Trade Network, Cape Town, South Africa
22nd February 2008**

We, civil society organisations, including farmers, workers, women's, faith-based and students' groups and organisations, call on our people to redouble their efforts to stop the self-serving free trade agreements, misleadingly designated as 'Economic Partnership Agreements' that Europe seeks to impose on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, and which will destroy the economies of these countries.

At our meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, from 20-23 February 2008, under the umbrella of the Africa Trade Network, to review the latest developments in the EPA negotiations, we reaffirm our unequivocal opposition to these agreements.

When the EPA negotiations were launched, civil society organisations from all over Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Europe warned that the EPAs were profoundly anti-developmental. We pointed out that the EPAs posed a threat not only specifically to government revenue, local producers and industries, food sovereignty, essential public services, and the regional integration of African countries; but also to the right and capacity in general of African countries to develop their economies according to the needs of their people and their own national, regional and continental priorities.

The latest developments in these negotiations have exposed even more sharply the fundamental outrage represented by the EPAs.

At the end of 2007, Europe deployed manipulative and heavy-handed tactics in an attempt to force African governments into so-called 'interim' agreements. When it became clear that no African regional bloc would agree to its demands, the European Commission, with the active support of its member states, resorted to blatant divide-and-rule tactics. Europe capitalised on the fact that, for historical reasons, a few export sectors in Africa are largely dependent on the European market. By threatening to close access to these markets and throw export sectors into chaos, Europe rode roughshod over the regional negotiating processes and instigated bilateral deals with individual countries.

The more vulnerable African governments were forced to concede to Europe's demand for 'interim' trade deals, and in the process, completely undermined regional negotiating positions.

These Interim Economic Partnership Agreements reveal Europe's true face. The deals are classical free trade agreements that clearly serve Europe's commercial and geo-economic interests. All the claims about supporting Africa's development and regional integration have been exposed as false.

Merely to secure a level of market access that is remarkably similar to previous levels, ACP countries involved in the interim agreements have had to concede to opening up their economies to historically unprecedented levels even beyond the commitments required at the multilateral level.

In addition, Europe took advantage of the circumstances to insert clauses in the interim agreements that were not even part of earlier negotiations. These include the 'most favoured nation' clause, a standstill clause that forbids countries from ever raising tariffs on imports from Europe, and restrictions and even outright prohibitions on export taxes. These provisions only serve to lock in further these countries into Europe's agenda, and prevent them from exploring other options and relations within the changing global order. This will take away their space for autonomous policy to create jobs, secure livelihoods and pursue equitable economic development and regional integration.

Throughout the negotiating process, aid has been used as a bait to lure African governments into long and protracted debates, which have diverted attention from the fundamental economic issues at stake and misled them into taking on onerous commitments. As the 'Interim' deals make abundantly clear, promises of additional financing are illusory.

The negotiating agenda for 2008 aims to deepen the above processes. Europe intends to lock in the 'interim' agreements with all their outrageous provisions as quickly as possible. This is a clear breach of the understanding on which they were provisionally initialled – namely that the deals were merely a means to avoid possible retaliation at the WTO and that any contentious elements would be renegotiated.

In addition, Europe is exerting high levels of pressure on African governments to expand the negotiations to open up the services sector and to include binding rules on investment, competition policy, and government procurement. Such rules will take away the right of African governments to manage investment and investors in ways that serve Africa's own development. The inclusion of such issues is not necessary at the multilateral level and against the expressed wishes and declarations of Africa's governments and peoples.

Today it is clear more than ever, that the EPAs are Europe's means of locking-in the fundamentally unequal relationships between Africa and Europe. Viewed from Africa, this is nothing less than re-colonisation.

It is more urgent now, than ever, that Africa's people and their allies unite in action to defeat this agenda.

To this end,

We demand that:

- The 'interim' agreements that have been entered into are nullified; and, to avoid threats of trade disruption, options such as enhanced GSP Plus and Everything But Arms are utilised;
- There must be no negotiations on services, investment, intellectual property, competition, government procurement and any other new issues in order to ensure that all sovereignty on these issues is retained at the national and regional levels;
- There must be a return to our own development agendas based on national priorities within consolidated regional communities in Africa;
- Any relationship between Africa and Europe must be based on our development agenda and recognise the principles of non-reciprocity, the right to protect our domestic and regional markets, and our economic sovereignty.

We salute the majority of African Governments that have so far-resisted any form of agreement with Europe. We call on these governments to work with the more vulnerable countries in order to reverse the 'interim' arrangements. We further call on the governments that have initialled agreements not to sign and for parliaments to refuse to ratify them in case they are signed.

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

We call on civil society organisations 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.

**Stop EPAs!
Stop the re-colonisation of Africa!**