

José Manuel Barroso
President of the European commission
1049 Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 5 March 2008

Dear Sir.

Re: civil society concerns about the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)

We are writing to convey our deep concerns about the interim Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which a number of African countries initialled at the end of 2007 under immense pressure and in haste. The deals were initialled primarily to avoid trade disruption and on the understanding that they were merely temporary instruments, the content of which would be revisited.

These interim arrangements have a number of fundamental flaws that threaten to seriously undermine the development and regional integration for African countries, as defined in the Cotonou Agreement, and to which Europe has firmly committed its support.

These proposed agreements require an unprecedented level of economic opening which is far higher than required by the WTO and prohibit African countries from using trade policies to foster value-addition and economic diversification, which are formal objectives of Cotonou. Moreover, the safeguards in the interim EPAs fail to provide adequate protection for agriculture. In addition, African countries are prohibited from giving more preferential treatment to third countries, undermining the objective of enhancing South-South trade. In return, Europe makes no binding commitments on the priority areas for African governments, such as improving rules of origin, addressing trade distorting agricultural subsidies, or increasing development assistance.

As a result of the contradiction between the contents of the interim EPAs and the development aspirations of African governments, more than half of the African countries have not initialled agreements, despite enormous pressures. Those who have initialled deals have done so with serious concerns about their implications for development.

Given the above, in their December declaration, African Trade Ministers “stressed the need for revisiting the provisions which might be incompatible with their development goals and inconsistent with the binding provisions of the Cotonou Agreement”. They welcomed the assurances you gave at the Lisbon Summit that the contentious clauses would be opened up for re-negotiation. Their statement was re-

affirmed by African Heads of State in the African Union Assembly Declaration of February 2nd.

We are therefore concerned that “in-action” could worsen the already tense relationship between Europe and Africa. We strongly urge you to honour your commitment and ensure that African governments have the opportunity to effectively address the fundamentally flawed interim EPAs. In addition, we urge you to respect the strong reservations from those countries that did not initial, by ensuring that real alternatives are negotiated.

Yours sincerely.

Signed by:

ACORD – Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
ActionAid International
Action for Southern Africa, UK
Africa-Europe Faith & Justice Network (AEFJN)
Africa Contact, Denmark
AGEZ – Austrian NGDO Platform
Alternative Information and Development Centre, South Africa
ATTAC France
ATTAC Denmark
Both ENDS , Netherlands
Brot fuer die Welt (Bread for the World), Germany
CBM (Christian Blind Mission), Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, United Kingdom
Centre for Development Initiatives, Uganda
Centre National de Coopération au Développement-11 11 11, Belgium
Christian Aid, UK
Church Development Service (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst), Germany
Civil Society Trade Network, Zambia
Coalition of the Flemish North-South Movement -11.11.11, Belgium
Coalition nigérienne contre les APE, Niger
Comhlamh, Ireland
Coordinadora de ONGD de Euskadi, Spain
Coordinating Assembly of Non Governmental Organisations, Swaziland
Congress of South African Trade Unions - COSATU, South Africa
Conseil National des ONG pour Développement du DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo
Council of Swaziland Churches
CRBM, Italy
Das Hunger Projekt, Germany
Desafio Miqueias - Micah Challenge, Portugal
Development for Peace Education, Lesotho
Diakonia, Sweden
Econews Africa, Kenya
Economic Justice Network, South Africa
Enda Tiers Monde, Senegal
FAIR, Italy
Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme
Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), Finland
Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung, Germany

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
Friends of the Earth, Ireland
Foundation for Socio-Economic Justice (FSEJ), Swaziland
Germanwatch, Germany
Gresea, Belgium
ICCO, The Netherlands
Institute of Global Responsibility, Poland
Kenya Human Rights Commission, Kenya
Kepa, Finland
Kirchliche Arbeitsstelle Suedliches Afrika, Germany
KOSA Koordination Südliches Afrika, Germany
Labour Resource and Research Institute, Namibia
Mani Tese, Italy
Mwengo, Zimbabwe
MS Danish Association for International Co-operation
National Union of Namibian Workers
Netzwerk Afrika Deutschland, Germany
Oxfam international
PELUM Association, East & Southern Africa
RODADDHD (Réseau nigérien des ONG de Développement et Associations de
Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie), Niger
SADC Council of NGOs, SADC region
SEATINI, Uganda
Skillshare Southern Africa
Solidarité, France
Solsoc, Belgium
Tearfund, UK
Terra Nuova, Italy
Terre des hommes, Germany
Third World Network Africa, Ghana
Traidcraft, UK
Trade Watch, Italy
Transnational Institute, the Netherlands
Trócaire, Ireland
Vredeseilanden, Belgium
Wallie Roux, formerly of MEATCO, Namibia
War on Want, UK
Welthaus Bielefeld, Germany
World Development Movement, UK
World Rural Forum, Spain

Please reply to our letter via Marc Maes, Trade Policy Officer of 11.11.11 (Flemish North-South Movement), Vlasfabriekstraat 11, B-1060 Brussels, marc.maes@11.be, Tel: +32 2 536 11 36; fax +32 2 536 19 06.