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print article

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PEOPLE'S SUMMIT AGAINST THE EU'S APA OFFENSIVE IN SADC

By People's Summit

STOP THE 'EPAS' OFFENSIVE BY THE EU AGAINST THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

Hundreds of representatives of social and labour organisations, faith-based, community-based and health networks, small farmers, traders, women and youth organisations, and developmental, human rights and environmental NGOs from across the whole of the Southern African region have gathered in a Peoples Summit in Lusaka, Zambia, 15-16 August 2007, parallel to the SADC Heads of State summit.

We have discussed many issues of common concern to us all over many years, but we are agreed that there is now an urgent generalised threat hanging over the whole future of SADC. This arises from the insistence of the European Union (EU) that SADC, like other regional groupings in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (the ACP countries) must sign a far-reaching trade liberalisation agreement with the EU. This has been misleadingly entitled an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

However, we have already experienced the damaging effects of trade liberalisation on

- small farmers facing floods of subsidised agricultural exports from the EU, and losing their livelihoods;
- small traders being ousted by large retail stores, and other strong traders from more developed countries;
- workers losing their jobs as manufacturers and workshops are forced to close down, contributing further to the catastrophic rates of unemployment in all the countries of our region;
- governments' loss of customs duty revenues contributing further to their failure to provide essential social services, particularly to address gender inequities, and to invest in national infrastructures.

We are also aware that the 'trade-related' terms that the EU is inserting centrally within the EPAs as "new generation" issues - above all investment liberalisation, the opening up of all services sectors and of governments procurement to foreign companies - have already been resisted by alliances of developing countries within the WTO, including by ACP countries as part of the Group of Ninety (G-90). This united opposition is because they are aware of the potential dangers of such externally imposed liberalisation terms against their own national and regional development options and strategies.

Thus WE DEMAND that

- there must not be any such externally imposed trade-liberalisation between SADC and the EU;
- there must be no agreements on the "new generation" issues of vital concern to our development;
- there can be no "reciprocity" between economies of such totally different size as SADC and the EU.

We DEPLORE the splitting up of SADC into two groups negotiating EPAs with the EU. This is not only weakening them now but is also placing at risk the future development cooperation and integration of the whole of SADC. We are already facing drawn-out and complicated processes of coordinating and accommodating the needs of our peoples, and our countries of different size and levels of development. This will be made much more complicated and even contradicted by separate external trade and trade-related agreements signed by half the members of SADC. This is also why South Africa's separate bilateral trade agreement with the EU is already a complicating factor within SACU and within SADC.

Thus WE DEMAND that the governments of SADC

1. re-unite and face the EU together, in order to promote and protect the interests of our all-round development, as SADC is not merely a 'trade' region;
2. do not accept the EU negotiating deadline on 31st December 2007;
3. insist very firmly that the EU is legally bound by the terms of the Cotonou Agreement that it signed with the ACP to maintain their levels of market access to the EU no worse than they have at present;
4. resolve internal differences within the SADC region and advance decisively with SADC developmental cooperation and agreement according to our peoples aims and interests;
5. do not allow EU 'development cooperation aid' to lure them into far-reaching and irreversible commitments that can place the entire future of SADC in jeopardy

[This statement has been endorsed also by the SADC Civil Society Forum, meeting in Lusaka 14-16 August]

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