



## Civil Society Accuses EU of 'Bribing' Continent

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### NEWS

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Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have condemned the European Union (EU) for abusing the December deadline to put unjustifiable pressure on African governments to concede to its terms in the ongoing negotiation in the Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

They cautioned African governments not to buy into the EU's false claims. The CSOs from several African countries meeting in Accra yesterday re-stated that Africa has everything to lose and nothing to gain by signing Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union.

Contrary to European Union claims, African countries do not need to sign the EPAs to maintain their current market access levels to the European market. Ads by Google

Civil Society stressed that African countries can adopt the General System of Preference plus (GSP+) which will enable African countries to continue to have access to EU market at levels similar to what they enjoy now, and even an improved one.

"The EU claim that only the EPAs can guarantee this continued access is totally false", said Tetteh Hormeku of Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Af).

He said signing onto the EPAs will trigger severe loss of jobs, threaten the peace of the continent, and strangle Africa's right to evolve and pursue its own development agenda and lead to recolonisation of Africa by Europe.

According to him, the EPAs, if signed in its state now, will lead to the elimination of tariff but any tariff reduction and elimination will necessarily involve huge fiscal costs and many costs of implementation to Africa and other African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

The EU's promise of two billion euros under the European Development Fund (EDF) to help with the cost of adjustment under EPAs was also described as false, misplaced and at best self-serving.

He said in the first place, the so-called additional two billion euros for adjustment is non-existent. "The additional funds is in fact only 700 million euros and this is meant to be shared between the 71-member ACP group of countries and other developing countries in Latin America," he stated.

The Civil Society stressed that the EU money is not even sufficient to cover ACP losses arising from EPAs. EU's promised aid "has nothing to do with development. It is more about buying acceptance of agreements by giving money", said Marc Maes (of 11.11.11, Belgium), adding "EU aid will not right EPA wrongs".

It further noted that the EU is also manipulating the expiration of the Cotonou waiver on December 31, 2007 to send panic waves to African leaders that African exporters will lose access to the European market after this deadline.

According to the outcome of the civil society meeting, the European Union is bound by obligation under the Cotonou Agreement, which has the force of international treaty, with the ACP to maintain market access for countries that decide not to sign the EPAs.

"The EU has deceived our governments, private sector and the horticultural sector that They will lose their markets after December 2007 and about alternative to EP As" said Jane Nalunga' of SEA TINI, Uganda.

The EU is hiding its own offensive interests in market access, service, investment, and intellectual property interests. The EU contends that it has no offensive interests in market access negotiations in West Africa for instance. However the EU has raised concerns in its member countries about 'buy national' products campaigns in ECOW AS countries, said Ofei Nkansah of the Ghana Agricultural Workers Union.

Again EPAs claim to support regional integration was seen as false as ACP producers will lose regional markets to cheap and subsidized European products.

Civil Society went on to note that in spite of the obviously severe handicaps of the EPAs and the damage they will inflict on African economies and peoples, African leaders and regional blocks continue to negotiate for the EPAs.

"This is too high a price to pay" said Thomas Deve, the Project Officer of MWENGO, Zimbabwe. He said the Cotonou Agreement

provides for countries not to sign on EPAs, African and therefore CSOs call on governments and negotiators to call the bluff of the EU and reject the EPAs.

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