

Africa-Europe: demonstration against the Economic Partnership Agreements

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As African and European trade unionists demonstrate in Brussels today against current Economic Partnership agreements; the International Trade Union Confederation has expressed its strong view that the agreements (EPAs) being negotiated between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries require fundamental changes in order to promote genuine trade and development opportunities for the ACP.

In the demonstration today, several hundred people mainly from Senegal and Europe are expected to gather in front of the European Commission to protest against the current EPA negotiations. Civil society organisations from Senegal including the ITUC affiliates CNTS, CSA, CNTS-FC, UDTs and UNSAS, as well as employers' organisations and several NGOs are taking part.

Despite growing opposition to EPAs from the ACP, the European Commission has not showed much flexibility in the negotiation process. Using the argument that a WTO waiver expired at the end of 2007, the European Union is currently insisting that ACP countries not in a position to sign full EPAs should at least initial interim agreements whereby they would accept to liberalise at least 80% of their trade in goods and commit themselves to further negotiations on opening up in services, investment, public procurement and competition policies.

At its General Council meeting in December 2007, the ITUC adopted a resolution on EPAs denouncing the lack of adequate time devoted to the negotiation process, leading some governments to sign up to interim agreements that may undermine existing regional integration processes, cause serious employment losses and deprive governments of tariffs revenues vitally needed for public services and investment. In its resolution the ITUC calls upon the EU to refocus its negotiating objectives towards obtaining real development for the African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

The ITUC is equally concerned by the lack of a social dimension in the current draft agreements. Indeed, to avoid trade between the ACP and Europe leading to the exploitation of workers, it is essential that all parties to EPA agree to uphold workers' fundamental rights such as the right to form trade unions and to bargain collectively. Yet, as of this date the inclusion of a social chapter has not been accepted by the West African region. This remains a source of serious concern to all trade unions both in Europe and in the ACP.

The ITUC has on many occasions demanded that EPA negotiations take place under conditions of full transparency and on the basis of formal consultations with the social partners. It goes against all basic principles of good governance to negotiate such important trade deals without involving the social partners whose members are ultimately the ones that will bear the costs and benefits of EPAs.

Links: [ITUC Resolution on EPA](#)

[EU: A joint Africa-EU Strategy](#)

2 Responses to “Africa-Europe: demonstration against the Economic Partnership Agreements”

1 **Collins Olayinka** January 11, 2008 at 11:44 am

Well, this is not new as the African continent and the Pacific are been forced into another era of

economic slavery.

While I agreed that there is nothing wrong in liberalizing economies, but when one of the trading partners is stronger in terms of goods production, it will then be unwise on the part of the weaker trading partner to open its economy without first seeking corresponding benefits.

Again, why was the issue of decent work agenda as observed by the ITUC, not form part of the negotiations?

I think a body like ILO should step in to intervene in this undue pressure on the developing countries to stall the growth of their economies and instead promote the economy growth of Europe.

It is a cheap blackmail that should not be entertained by the developing countries.

Just this morning, the EC office in Abuja, Nigeria posted a press release to my mailbox that it will commit about 42 million Euros to some projects in the Niger Delta and I just had a good laugh. This is because, we are familiar to the terrain very well. Economic slavery in the name of financial assistance.

It is high time that our governments knew these ploys and reject them and even tell the EC leaders to their collective faces.

Enough is certainly enough!

2 **RoseNP** January 11, 2008 at 12:01 pm

I agree with the protest since ACP countries basically need improved market access to Europe, changing the current scheme's "highly restrictive" rules of origin, which stipulate that 70% of content must be local and prevent Africa from realising its manufacturing export potential. EPAs must not force African governments to embrace policy change in which they do not believe in return for EU aid.

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