



'We're not ready for EU trade deals' – African Union

African trade ministers have decided they are not ready to conclude controversial new trade accords with the European Union.

During discussions in Nairobi last week, the African Union's governments endorsed the findings of a recent UN study on the Economic Partnership Agreements being negotiated between the European Commission and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) bloc. The UN Economic Commission for Africa found that none of the African regions had sufficient information to sign an accord by the official deadline of 31 December 2007 and that there has been "an alarming lack of transparency" in the talks. Non-governmental organisations have strongly denounced recent threats by the European Commission to impose higher import duties on ACP countries if the deadline is not met. Marc Maes, a trade campaigner with the Belgian anti-poverty group 11.11.11, said that ACP countries must not be browbeaten into signing accords that do not reflect their development needs. "The EU Commission should stop bullying developing countries into submission and instead work with them to overcome the obstacles to a mutually acceptable proposal," he said.

ActionAid, Bread for the World, Oxfam and Christian Aid last week (14 February) called on EU governments to ensure that trade preferences granted to ACP countries are extended beyond the end of 2007, if the EPA deadline is missed. Source: <http://epa2007.org>

Better leadership needed on fighting poverty - Eurostep

A declaration marking the Treaty of Rome's fiftieth anniversary should recognise that the EU's future challenges will be defined as much by the role the Union plays in the wider world as by its internal activities, Eurostep has said.

The EU's heads of state and government are to issue the Berlin Declaration on Europe's future at a 25 March summit in the German capital.

Simon Stocker, director of Eurostep, said the declaration "will be a critical indication of how the Union defines its global responsibility". His comments are contained in a letter sent to the 27 EU governments, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

While the EU has shown some leadership on climate change and aid to developing countries, he argued that "considerably more is expected of the Union, given its size, its wealth and the principles and values on which it is founded".

"Many people living in different parts of the world look to the Union to constructively promote universal values but often perceive a different reality where the promotion of human rights has been sacrificed in the fight against terrorism, where aid is being used to promote Europe's own commercial interests instead of delivering the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and where securing Europe's borders is given emphasis in the Union's role in the world."

Last week (13 February), the Commission's President José-Manuel Barroso said the Berlin declaration will represent a "confirmation of what the European Union is for and a mission statement for what we want to achieve in the twenty-first century".

Source: Barroso's speech

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/77&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

MEPs campaign for cheap medicines goes to Indian court

The Indian court hearing a challenge by Novartis to the country's laws on allowing the manufacture of cheap medicines is to receive a submission from the European Parliament.

Six left-wing and Green MEPs have called on Novartis to drop its case against a 2005 patent law allowing for patents on medicines to be waived in cases of a public health emergency.

The deputies are to forward their call to the court in the Indian city of Chennai, which will resume hearing the case on Thursday (22 February). In a letter to Novartis' chief executive Daniel Vasella, the MEPs recognised the importance of intellectual property rights but argued that these must not be used to deny the needy cheaper medicines.

While Novartis' case focuses primarily on the leukemia drug Gleevec, campaigners have voiced fears that it could threaten the entire Indian generic medicines industry. India is the leading supplier of generic medicines to other developing countries; these include anti-retrovirals used to treat AIDS.

Church leaders last week also demanded that Novartis halt its challenge. "People, not profits, must be at the centre of the patent law for medicines," said Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a veteran anti-apartheid campaigner in South Africa.

Source: www.msf.org

Consider oil embargo on Sudan – MEPs

The EU should consider imposing an oil embargo on Sudan in protest at the mass slaughter in Darfur, MEPs have said.

In a resolution passed last week, the European Parliament also urged that the UN should set a date for deploying peacekeepers in Darfur, regardless of whether the Khartoum government approves such a move. And it called for the EU to supply equipment for enforcing a no-fly zone over the war-torn western province.

The Welsh Socialist MEP Glenys Kinnock said: "The EU must urgently impose its own targeted and phased smart sanctions and not wait for the UN Security Council to agree on essential new measures – on an arms embargo covering all of Sudan, asset-freezing, travel bans and consideration of an oil embargo."

Targeted sanctions, she added, should include banning Sudan from participating in the 2010 World Cup. The EU would have to apply pressure on the soccer world's governing body FIFA for a ban to materialise, according to Kinnock.

Source: www.ipsterraviva.net/Europe/article.aspx?id=4408

Commission keeps aid plans secret

The European Commission has refused to make public a series of documents outlining how EU development aid should be spent.

Bernard Petit, the Commission's deputy-director general for development, recently wrote to the European Parliament, informing it of discussions taking place under the EU's new Development Cooperation Instrument. The committee of EU diplomats in charge of the DCI is to discuss food security, migration and asylum this week (21 February), the involvement of non-governmental bodies and local authorities, environment questions

and the 'investing in people' programme on 27-28 February and aid to South Africa on 24-25 April.

Although Petit said that the Parliament will receive the aid strategy papers drawn up by the Commission, he added that these will not be made public until they are formally adopted by EU governments. Dialogue on them "can therefore only involve the European Parliament and the Commission."

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