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ACP and EU Parliaments demand transparency on European aid

European, African, Caribbean and Pacific parliamentarians meeting in the 12th session of the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) in Barbados, on 18-23 November 2006, criticized the process of programming European aid for ACP countries. Discussions with the European Commissioner for Development, Louis Michel, during this session, highlighted the fact that aid is being used to serve Europe's economic and geopolitical interests rather than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as a consequence of the lack of parliamentary oversight.

"I am surprised to see a development commissioner putting so much emphasis on 'improving' trade capacities of ACP countries as the key aid strategy to address poverty issues. We all know it is very risky to assume that trade liberalisation will benefit poor people and there is enough supporting evidence on the potential impact on small farmers' productive capacity;" said Raphael Yves Pierre, ActionAid International country director in Haiti.

Members of the ACP/EU JPA also expressed concern on the potential use of European aid money to finance the repatriation of ACP migrants. Regrettably, Ms Paula Lehtomaki, Finnish Minister for foreign trade and development, president in office of the Council, confirmed that *"the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) is one of the essential tools to address migration."* Commenting on this, Angela Haynes, from Help Age International stated that *"using part of the 10th EDF to send migrants back to their home country, instead of investing in sustainable poverty eradication, would not be in line with the Cotonou Agreement".*

Discussions in the ACP/EU JPA have revealed that the failure to involve ACP parliaments in the 10th EDF programming process has encouraged the allocation of EC aid to suit EU migration and trade interests rather than the achievement of the MDGs.

"A credible and legitimate European aid policy must involve national parliaments and civil society meaningfully throughout the programming phase, as stipulated in the Cotonou Agreement. A programming process conducted behind closed doors cannot meet the aspirations of people living in poverty." noted Florent Sebban, policy advisor at Eurostep.

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