

ANSA-SATUCC EPAs, Gaborone: BIG FIVE Declaration

DECLARATION OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICA TRADE UNION COORDINATING COUNCIL (SATUCC) AFFILIATE TRADE UNION LEADERS AND RESEARCHERS ON ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS (EPAs)

We, the trade union leaders and researchers from Southern Africa, meeting at the Big Five Lodge in Gaborone, Botswana from 16-17 February 2006 had the opportunity to discuss the SADC and East and Southern Africa (ESA) Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU:

- Concerned about the lack of trade union and other stakeholders' participation in the negotiations;
- Further concerned about the division of African countries through the EPA negotiations;
- Realising the fast pace of the negotiations, which has given very limited time for the carrying out of impact analysis studies, including the building of national and regional capacities;
- Worried about the limited use of technical experts at regional and national levels;
- Further worried by attempts to bring back the Singapore issues that were rejected at the WTO level;
- Aware of the supply constraints affecting most regional economies;
- Further aware of the adverse adjustment costs which threaten to nullify the perceived potential benefits;
- Mindful of the impact of past policies of liberalisation and in particular Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs);
- Further mindful of the limited intra-regional trade;
- Recognising the dire need to redress poverty, inequality and unemployment as a result of underdevelopment arising from colonisation, unfair and undemocratic trade practices.

We hereby declare that:

- EPA negotiations should address the multi-dimensional nature of the development process of ACP countries, namely, poverty reduction, sustainable development, gradual and smooth integration of the ACP countries into the global economy;
- ACP countries should have the scope to define and address development issues for themselves;
- EPA negotiations should be slowed down to allow for the carrying out of impact studies, in order to allow for proper consultations, and to ensure national and regional ownership of the outcomes;
- EPAs should take into account the asymmetrical development between the EU and ACP countries and hence recognise that reciprocal opening of markets would result in revenue loss due to tariff reduction. [Loss of revenue, would affect the budget, resulting in increased deficits, reduced spending on poverty reducing interventions in infrastructure, health care, education, safety nets amongst others, thereby exacerbating poverty].
- The EU must show political will in addressing the most serious problems ACP countries experience in attempts to access the EU market, including agricultural subsidies and non tariff measures;
- EPA Negotiations should be guided by past experiences with liberalisation policies and in particular Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The fear that trade liberalisation will result in a flood of cheap imports, thereby destroying 'infant' local industries, creating mass unemployment in the process is a reality in the SADC and ESA regions which should not be taken for granted;
- In view of the differences in the levels of development i.e. asymmetries in development, ESA and SADC states should not make the same level of commitment as EU countries under EPAs, especially with respect to market access;
- The EU must withdraw requests to negotiate the Singapore issues, namely government procurement, investment and competition policy which were rejected in the WTO;
- Furthermore the EU must withdraw all requests that will have the effect of undermining intra-regional trade and development initiatives, or weakening national governments' ability to drive development and meet the needs of the poor (e.g. calls to privatise the delivery of public services such as water and other basic utilities);
- Trade unions should continuously engage other stakeholders including Governments, civil society organisations and social movements, to defend and advance our members' interests with regard to EPAs;
- Trade unions commit themselves to mobilise their membership around issues of EPAs and development;
- Trade unions further commit themselves to revive and fully utilise SADC national and regional structures, e.g. SADC National Committees, Employment and Labour Sector (ELS) with respect to EPAs and other issues of development;
- Trade Unions must seek to meaningfully and effectively participate in both the SADC and ESA EPA Negotiations with immediate effect through tripartite negotiating fora, at the national level and regional level, including lobby, advocacy and studies.

ANSA Secretariat