

>>> "ITUC Press" <press@ituc-csi.org> 16.11.2007 13:51 >>>

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

199/161107

European and international trade unions call for the Commission to do the right thing in EPA negotiations

Brussels, 16 November 2007 (ITUC OnLine): On the eve of a critical decision on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) at the European Union General Affairs and External Relations Council on 19 November, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) today reiterate their call for an extension of the EPA negotiating deadline.

Furthermore, they call for the Cotonou Agreement trade preferences to be extended until the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries are in a position to conclude EPAs - if, and only if, they choose to do so.

"The Commission needs to do the right thing, legally and morally. It should include in the Generalised System of Preferences plus (GSP+) those ACP countries that currently meet the criteria - including ratification and full implementation of the eight ILO core labour standards - or undertake to meet those criteria within six months at the most," said ETUC General Secretary John Monks.

"It is clear that many countries are not in a position to sign EPAs. It's time to offer them some breathing space and seriously explore the alternatives, as the European Commission is obliged to do under the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement."

If necessary, development assistance and cooperation with the ILO should be offered to countries in order to facilitate the implementation of the ILO conventions. The Least Developed Countries not able to access GSP+ preferences can be offered trade preferences under the Everything But Arms scheme.

"We understand that the Commission is worried about the end of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) waiver, but in the unlikely event of a challenge the ACP countries can state convincingly that given the lack of progress on the Doha round and the fact that their group contains some of the poorest countries on earth, an extension of the Cotonou preferences would hardly be unjustified," argued ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

"For those countries that do choose to negotiate EPAs, a greater degree of non-reciprocity and a period of up to 25 years for implementation are necessary preconditions to boost sub-regional integration, which is a stated aim of these negotiations. ACP countries should not be pressured into negotiating areas such as intellectual property and investment provisions if they do not wish to do so."

Concluded John Monks: "At the upcoming meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GGAERC) we urge all Member States to take seriously the concerns of the many ACP governments, trade unions and civil society representatives. It's time to stop the deadline game and look for creative solutions to the ACPs' development needs."

See ETUC-ITUC statement at:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/07-11-14_EPA_Proposals_ITUC-ETUC.pdf

More information:

Patricia Grillo

Head of Press and Communications

Tel: + 32 (0)2 224 04 30 - GSM: + 32 (0)477 77 01 64

E-mail: Pgrillo@etuc.org

Mathieu Debroux,

Press Officer, International Trade Union Confederation

Tel: + 32 (0)2 224 02 04 - GSM: + 32 (0)476621018

E-mail: mathieu.debroux@ituc-csi.org

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>.

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018

You are currently subscribed to ituc-online as: Rainer.Gries@fes.de

To unsubscribe send a blank email to leave-ituc-online-333432T@forum.ituc-csi.org