

AFRICAN UNION
الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE
UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone : 011-551 7700 Fax : 011-551 7844
Website: www.africa-union.org

EPA Negotiations Coordination Meeting

22-23 July 2009

Gaborone, Botswana

Aide-Memoire

A. Background

1. In accordance with the mandate to the African Union Commission to coordinate EPA negotiations, given by the Heads of State and Government in their Maputo Declaration of 2003, the Department of Trade and Industry holds coordination events at the technical level from time to time.

2. Following the initialling of the interim EPAs between some African countries and some Regional Economic Communities and the EC, a number of contentious issues were identified in these agreements. African negotiators are facing challenges in resolving the contentious issues and ensuring that EPAs do not undermine regional and continental integration and that they serve as a genuine tool for the development of Africa. Indications coming from the negotiating groups are that the deadlines that were set for the conclusion of full EPAs will not be met, as more focus is being placed on substance rather than meeting artificial deadlines. Divergent views still exist between the African negotiating groups and the EC in areas such as development cooperation finance, Singapore issues, and trade in services, the definition of substantially all trade, length of transition periods, additional resources and the most favoured nation principle among others.

3. As the negotiations for the conclusion of the full EPAs progress, countries that initialled interim economic partnership agreements also have to dedicate time and resources towards the implementation of the agreements. Some regions are concerned about the continued demand by the European Commission for the signing of the interim EPAs and their eventual notification to the WTO before the conclusion of EPA negotiations as this could undermine their negotiating leverage. A very critical point of note is that the EPA negotiations are continuing as the financial and economic crisis in the world economy continues to unfold. It has therefore become necessary that negotiators take into serious account, this development, in the negotiations.

4. It is against this background that the AUC is organising a coordination meeting for EPA negotiators and advisors. The workshop will facilitate harmonisation of positions in common areas among the negotiating groups and explore ways to ensure that EPAs promote the economic integration of Africa. The events that took place in the run up to the conclusion of the interim agreements showed that importance of coordinated negotiations at the regional and continental level cannot be over-emphasised.

B. Objective

5. The main objectives of the workshop are the following:

a. Bringing together the chief advisors and negotiators to compare the concessions their negotiating groups have obtained during the negotiations for full EPAs as well as on the resolution of the contentious issues – the importance of this exercise is to enhance information and negotiating latitude of African negotiators

b. Providing an important opportunity for chief negotiators to consult among themselves and facilitate the exchange of views and notes and reduce the level of information asymmetry between the negotiating groups

- c. Strengthening co-ordination among the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and between them and the African Union Commission, on the EPA negotiations.
- d. Facilitating consultations on the EPA Template with a view to strengthening the document, in light of the continuing financial and economic crisis in the world economy and also in line with the instructions of the AU Conference of Ministers of Trade that was held in March 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

C. Participation

6. The coordination workshop will bring together chief technical advisors and negotiators from the five negotiating groups and Regional Economic Communities. African trade negotiators representing the negotiating groups in Brussels and involved in EPA negotiations will also attend the coordination workshop. In addition, the coordinator of the African Group in the WTO will attend the workshop.

7. Representatives of collaborating institutions like UNCTAD, UNECA, ACP, UNCITRAL, ECDPM, South Centre and UNDP are also invited to attend the workshop. Furthermore, Representatives from CARICOM and the Pacific Group of States have been invited to share experiences and lessons on EPA negotiations.

D. Documentation and working languages

8. Materials will be provided by the AUC, the speakers and collaborating institutions. The workshop shall be conducted in English and French. Working documents for the workshop will be posted on the AU Website www.africa-union.org.

E. Venue and Financial Conditions

9. The coordination workshop will be held on 22-23 July 2009 in Gaborone Botswana. The AUC will provide for each sponsored participant a return air ticket at the standard conditions of the AUC and daily subsistence allowance at the applicable rate of the AU for the duration of the workshop.

F. Workshop Format

10. The two day workshop will be divided into various sessions as detailed in the agenda annexed to this aide memoire. The session will be chaired by the representatives of the negotiating groups and Regional Economic Communities. During each session, participants will have the opportunity to exchange views and share lessons.

G. Contact Persons

11. For more information on the organisation of the workshop you are kindly requested to direct all your inquiries to Batanai Chikwene, batanaich@gmail.com and Inye Nathan Briggs, inyebriggs@yahoo.co.uk or fax to +251 115 510 467.