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Workshop for Parliamentarians and Civil Society on EPAs

29-30 July 2009

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Aide-Memoire

A. Context

1. The negotiations for Economic Partnership Agreements started in the year 2002 and in the year 2007, some African countries and Regional Economic Communities initialled Interim Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Commission. In some instances, these interim Agreements managed to avert the disruption of trade between African countries and the European Union.

2. A number of studies conducted on the interim agreements have revealed that in their current form, these agreements will lead to regional fragmentation and do not provide adequate financing required to make EPAs a genuine tool for regional integration and development of Africa. They also deprive African governments of the policy space needed to deal with extremely important issues such as the protection of infant industries and food security among others.

3. The negotiations process is fraught with challenges for African negotiators and African countries. A number of contentious issues were identified in the interim agreements and negotiations to resolve them are taking place in the context of negotiations for full and comprehensive EPAs. Not much progress has been made as the EC has maintained some hardline positions on some of the most sensitive issues. For example, the EC maintains that the MFN provision underpins its Duty Free Quota Free (DFQF) offer to ACP countries in the EPA negotiations; as such, no EPA can be concluded without it.

4. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement provides for the involvement of Non State Actors in the EPA negotiations process. In some countries, parliamentarians and the civil society organisations were involved in the EPA negotiations process but this was not the case in most African countries. In most cases, national parliamentarians only got to know of EPAs after their governments had initialled interim agreements. In regions where EPAs were debated in parliament it was only after the agreements had been initialled and calls for the repudiation have so far not been headed. Though there has been parliamentary involvement in some regions, some regional parliaments are only consultative bodies with no legislative and oversight mandates.

5. As the negotiations for full EPAs progress, 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. As a result of the divergent views and other challenges being faced by the regions, the deadlines that have been set for the conclusion of the negotiations might not be achieved.

6. At the Continental level, various ministerial meetings have been held since the year 2003 to give technical and political guidance to the EPA negotiations. In the most recent AU Conference of Ministers of Trade that was held in Addis Ababa in March 2009, Ministers called for the contentious issues identified in the interim agreements to be adequately addressed in the context for full and comprehensive EPAs. They also adopted an EPA template, as a broad set of guidelines, to be used by the negotiating groups in the negotiations.

7. It is against this background therefore, that the African Union commission (AUC) has decided to organise a workshop for parliamentarians and civil society on EPAs. As negotiating groups/regional economic communities and individual countries conclude the negotiations, at some point, parliamentarians will be called upon to ratify and domesticate the EPAs. Considering the role that parliamentarians play in the ratification and domestication of international trade agreements like EPAs, it is imperative that they are well informed and prepared for the task that lies ahead of them it is therefore important for parliamentarians to ensure that the EPAs they ratify EPAs are balanced and development oriented as well as capable of fostering regional and continental integration. Such an EPA would also entail a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

B. Objective

8. The objectives of the Workshop are to:

- a. Provide updates on the EPA negotiations to Parliamentarians and Civil Society, as critical stakeholders.
- b. Provide an opportunity for African parliamentarians, EPA negotiators and advisors and civil society to share experiences and exchange views on EPA negotiations and other trade related issues.
- c. Provide useful insights and generate ideas on how parliamentarians could deal with the domestication, ratification and monitoring of the EPA negotiations and implementation

C. Expected Outcome

9. It is expected that, at the end of the workshop, parliamentarians will be more informed and better equipped, during national and regional parliamentary sessions when debating the ratification and domestication of EPAs as well as monitoring their implementation.

D. Participation

10. The workshop will bring together Parliamentarians from the various regions and key actors in the EPA negotiations in the negotiating groups and Regional Economic Communities. It is envisaged that the workshop will be attended by various parliamentarians' and civil society organisations. It is expected that the workshop will be attend by the representatives of the EPA negotiating groups and RECs. Members of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) Committee on Trade and Customs. Representatives of the Regional Parliaments in Africa which are the East African Legislative Assemblies (EALA), the ECOWAS Parliament, SADC Parliamentary Forum, Central African Parliamentary Forum and the North African Parliamentary Forum will attend the workshop.

11. To facilitate sharing of experience on the EPA process with parliamentarians from other regions, representatives of the European Parliament, the Caribbean

Parliamentary Forum and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Trade will also be invited to attend. Non Governmental Organisations and civil Society organisations will also be invited to participate in the workshop.

E. Documentation and working languages

12. Materials will be provided by the African Union Commission, collaborating institutions, the speakers and may also be provided by the participants. The working languages of the workshop shall be English and French only. Working documents for the workshop will be posted on the AU Website www.africa-union.org , to facilitate easy access for participants.

F. Venue and Financial Conditions

13. The workshop will be held on 29-30 July 2009 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The African Union Commission 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.

G. Workshop Format

14. The two day workshop will be divided into various sessions as detailed in the agenda annexed to this aide memoire. At the end of each session, participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and exchange views with presenters.

H. Contact Persons

15. 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.