

Final Declaration of Caribbean civil society organizations regarding economic partnership agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and Caribbean countries

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Preamble: Organizations of small agricultural producers, women, business leaders, academic institutions, youth, national and international NGO's from the Caribbean region gathered in Santo Domingo for the Fifth round of EPA negotiations declare the following:

- The model of trade liberalisation, deregulation of capital and erosion of labour standards has not translated into an improved standard of living for the people nor has it eliminated poverty, rather it has led to the weakening of public policies, particularly social policies. We think that these negotiations are framed in and deepen the same model.
- We consider that the rationale behind these negotiations is based on the US and European governments' strategy to push through bilateral and regional agreements issues that they were not successful in imposing within the framework of the WTO. Deep liberalisation and inclusion of issues, which have not been negotiated at a multilateral level, threaten the policy space the Caribbean countries need in order to promote their present and future development.
- The existing system of preferences with the EU has contributed to securing a stable market for ACP countries, but it has favoured the continuation of a mono-exporting economic model providing raw materials. This has not contributed to improved living conditions, nor has it encouraged development and the diversification of production. We are concerned that the attempt to replace preferential treatment by reciprocal treatment in the trade negotiations does not take into account the existing asymmetries and would only result in a more unfavourable deal for Caribbean countries.
- On the other hand, the elimination of tariffs will lead to reduced fiscal revenues, thereby weakening states' capacity to promote social policies aimed at poverty reduction.
- The implementation of trade liberalisation without resolving the issue of subsidies for European producers that lead to exports at below cost of

production constitutes a real threat for small producers of dairy and other sensitive products in the Caribbean. In addition, tariff and non-tariff barriers to products with greater added value continue to limit access to European markets of Caribbean products.

- Participation in this process has been limited to a few economically powerful sectors with access to information and with a capacity to influence, who are the only ones able to benefit from free markets.

EPA NEGOTIATIONS AS THEY ARE CURRENTLY BEING PROPOSED SHOULD BE STOPPED.

For these reasons we demand that governments ensure that:

1. Effective compliance with basic human rights should take precedence over trade aspects in any such negotiations.
2. Investment in improved national productive and infrastructure capacities become the priority of economic and cooperation policies of the Caribbean and European Union governments.
3. Caribbean countries have the right and obligation to promote food sovereignty by protecting agricultural and industrial producers, especially small producers.
4. Caribbean countries secure public policy space for development, including market access, government procurement, industrial policy, services, appropriate regulation of foreign investment and the activities of trans-national companies.
5. Caribbean regional integration is not subjected to a free-trade agenda. Integration should become a process that contributes to the development of local, national and regional markets.

In this context we call upon the different sectors of society to inform themselves and mobilize to stop the negotiations in their present form. At the same time we commit ourselves to work together to formulate alternative proposals and to redirect the course of EU and ACP trade and development relations.