

NEWS: Pacific ACP committed to concluding comprehensive EPAs with EU in 2012

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Suva, Fiji, 17 December 2011/ PIFS Press Release: Tonga's Minister for Labour, Commerce and Industries and the Pacific ACP Lead Spokesperson, Hon. 'Isileli Pulu on behalf of the Pacific ACP Group provided an update of the Pacific ACP Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations to the 94th ACP Council of Ministers on Friday 9th December 2011 in Brussels.

Hon. Pulu reaffirmed to the Council the region's commitment to continue negotiating a comprehensive EPA as a single region and conclude the negotiations in 2012 as mandated by Pacific ACP Leaders in September 2011.

He highlighted that the Pacific worked hard over the last year to complete eight (8) additional market access offers for Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

"These offers were submitted to the European Commission in July 2011 for their consideration. After an intensive and thorough process of national consultations, the Pacific also revised the draft Pacific ACP-European Union EPA legal text and submitted it to the European Commission in July 2011 for their consideration," Hon. Pulu said

The Pacific Lead Spokesperson also emphasized that the Pacific has demonstrated flexibility on market access offers and key contentious issues.

"The Pacific region expects to engage in negotiations with the European Commission in the first half of 2012 to consider flexibility on these key contentious issues. They include the most favoured nation, non-execution clause, export taxes, infant industry clause, standstill, degree of liberalization, and the transitional period. In the meantime, work on the part of some Pacific ACP member countries also needs to be done before the formal negotiations of 2012."

Hon. Pulu further drew the attention of the Council to the successful conclusion of negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) by Samoa and Vanuatu, which will be formalized at the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference that will be held on 15-17 December 2011 in Geneva.

In addition to the WTO and EPA negotiations, the Minister also informed the Council that the Pacific ACP States are concurrently negotiating several regional trade agreements such as the extension of the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) to trade in services and PACER Plus negotiations with Australia and New Zealand.

"These negotiations have stretched the already limited capacity of Pacific ACP States. However, the progress that has been made by Pacific ACP States demonstrates the Pacific region's serious commitment towards regional integration as well as integration into the world economy."

The speedy undertaking by Pacific ACP States including Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga to ratify the revised Cotonou Agreement was also noted.

The Deputy Prime Minister for Samoa and Minister responsible for Commerce, Industry and Labour, the Hon. Fonotoe Nuafesili Pierre Lauofo, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Vanuatu, the Hon. Alfred Rolland Carlot were also present at the meeting. Hon. 'Isileli Pulu was accompanied by HE Dr. Sione Ngongo Kioa, Tonga's Ambassador to the European Union and Ministry of Labour, Commerce and Industries CEO Tatafu Moeaki. - ENDS.

(Pictured: Pacific ACP spokesperson, Tongan Trade Minister Hon. Isileli Pulu in Brussels for the ACP Council of Ministers meeting Decemberr 2011.)

For media enquiries contact Mr Johnson Honimae, the Forum Secretariat's Media Officer on phone: 679 331 2600 or email: johnsonh@forumsec.org.fj [1]

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