

ACP senior officials debate free trade deals at pre-WTO sessions

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Brussels, 7 December 2011/ ACP Newsdesk: Senior trade officials from ACP member countries concluded two days of intense discussions in preparation for key meetings within the coming weeks.

More than 150 trade executives and experts, accompanied by their ministers, met on Monday and Tuesday to address changes in the ACP-EU trade regime, the state of regional Economic Partnership Agreements, and to consolidate a position for WTO talks in Geneva.

The gathering was a lead-up to the ACP Trade Ministers Meeting on Friday, which will be combined this year with the ACP Council of Ministers taking place 7 – 9 December. Representatives will then hold discussions with European counterparts in the Joint Ministerial Trade Committee next Monday, before attending the 8th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation on 14 – 15 December.

“The ultimate objective is to put before the ACP Ministers a solid document that will assist them, first to participate effectively at the Joint Ministerial Trade Committee and secondly, to make a forceful contribution during the forthcoming WTO Ministerial Conference. As a result, you will have succeeded in forging path towards strengthening ACP-EU trade cooperation and partnership, and also making a contribution to the sustenance of the multilateral trading system,” said ACP Assistant Secretary General and Head of the Macroeconomics, Development Finance and Intra-ACP Programming Mr Paulo Kautoke in the opening session.

Mr Kautoke outlined three areas for debates, including the EPA negotiations, taking into account certain “contentious issues” that have deterred full endorsement by some member states, ACP-EU trade regime issues and WTO negotiations.

“As the ACP Group prepares to participate at the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference, we cannot hide our disappointment by the failure to conclude the promised development round.... The situation is exacerbated by the serious financial and economic crisis confronting the more developed countries, including the Euro zone, while the devastating effects are being felt by the developing countries of the ACP. This is a major and serious challenge that needs sharp minds to focus the way forward for the Group.”

Trade regime issues entailed the European Commission’s (EC) Communication on trade and investment for development, the EC’s negotiations of Free Trade Areas with third countries, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) reform after 2013, and trade building capacities after the closure of the Trade.com facility.

A report of their discussions will be presented to the Council of Ministers on Friday.

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