

NEWS: Pacific region urges EC engagement for EPA progress

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Suva FIJI, 14 May 2012/ PIFS: The Pacific bloc of the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) grouping has urged the European Commission (EC) to officially respond to its proposals on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU).

"The Pacific region remains committed to concluding negotiations for a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union by 2012, as directed by our Leaders last year," said Tonga's Minister for Labour, Commerce and Industries and the Pacific ACP Lead Spokesperson, Hon. 'Isileli Pulu.

The Pacific's Lead Spokesperson has expressed concern that the European Commission has yet to provide its formal written comments on the draft legal text, the development cooperation chapter, and the market access offers that were submitted by the Pacific ACP region in July 2011.

"The onus is now firmly on the European Commission to increase the level of engagement with the Pacific to conclude negotiations by 2012," said Minister Pulu, adding that the Pacific ACP region has worked hard over the last two years to conclude negotiations.

"Eight Pacific ACP states have submitted market access offers to the European Commission with another four Pacific ACP states intending to submit their offers over the coming months. The Pacific region also submitted a revised legal text after carrying out the relevant national consultations.

"The submission of the eight market access offers and a revised draft legal text are the results of substantial regional consultations and negotiations, and reflect the Pacific region's commitment to the EPA process."

The last formal, face-to-face negotiation session between the Pacific ACP bloc and the EC was in 2009.

"Despite several requests by the Pacific ACP States to have formal negotiation sessions, these have not eventuated, although other ACP regions have had numerous meetings with the EC at various levels over the same period," said Minister Pulu.

The Minister added that "the Pacific ACP States are ready to conclude a development friendly EPA that will contribute towards addressing the unique trade needs and challenges of the Pacific.

"Pacific ACP States are ready to finalise preparations for a formal negotiating session with the EC once we receive the EC's formal comments," he explained.

- *Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat*

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