Pacific officials meet with EU to progress EPA negotiations

Pacific officials meet with EU to progress EPA negotiations

Brussels, 2 October 2012/ PIFS/ACP : Senior officials and trade negotiators from the Pacific ACP (PACP) States are meeting with the European Commission (EC) this week in Brussels to progress the negotiation of their Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU).

In his opening remarks at the negotiations, the PACP Co-Chair of the negotiations, Tonga’s Chief Executive Officer at the Ministry for Commerce, Tourism and Labour, Mr Tatafu Moeaki confirmed to the EC that the Pacific ACP States are ready to conclude negotiations of a meaningful comprehensive EPA as mandated by the PACP Leaders, and urged the EC to engage into technical negotiations in good faith and in a spirit of partnership.

The formal negotiations between the EC and the PACP States at the officials’ level takes place through the Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) meeting, which commenced today in Brussels.

The last formal negotiation of the PACP-EU EPA was held in October 2009. The PACP States have undertaken significant preparations for the negotiations.

“To demonstrate their commitment to the EPA process, all Pacific ACP States have submitted their revised draft conditional market access offers to the European Commission,” Mr Moeaki confirmed.

Over the next 5 days, both sides will discuss the outstanding and contentious issues. The Pacific ACP States believe that with goodwill and constructive dialogue, many of these outstanding and contentious issues can be resolved.

For many Pacific ACP States, particularly the Smaller Island States, the fisheries sector has the greatest potential to contribute to their development. “The EPA would only be meaningful for the Pacific ACP States if it addresses their development aspirations as owners of fisheries resources,” Mr Moeaki stated.

The Pacific ACP States also look forward to working with the European Union to ensure that there are adequate resources to implement the EPA and to take advantage of the benefits of EPA.

“The Pacific ACP region is ready to engage in meaningful discussions on how we can ensure that the final EPA is a tool for development as envisaged under the Cotonou Agreement. We have come here with a mandate to conclude negotiations, and the political support for the conclusion of the EPA is at the highest level,” Mr Moeaki affirmed.

The PACP States stated their appreciation of EU’s financial support for the negotiation and the technical assistance provided by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in preparing for the negotiations.

(Photo: Co-Chair for Pacific ACP negotiations with EU on EPAs, Mr Tatafu Moeaki (right) with Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum H.E Tuiloma Neroni Slade (left most) and other Pacific representatives during a meeting in Brussels earlier in the year)

-Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat