

Statement from the first Meeting of the CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee

The Inaugural Meeting of the CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee (CC) took place on 13 and 14 November, 2014 in Brussels. The Chair of the EU delegation to the CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee is Brenda King (European Economic and Social Committee) and the Chair of the CARIFORUM delegation to the CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee is Renrick Rose (Caribbean Policy Development Centre). The CC is finalising its rules of procedure with the aim to adopt and present them to the Joint Council as soon as possible.

Preamble:

Having regard to Article 232 of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the CARIFORUM States, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (hereinafter referred to as "the EPA"), signed on 15 October 2008, and provisionally applied as of 29 December 2008, establishing a CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee, with the task of assisting the Joint CARIFORUM-EU Council in promoting dialogue and cooperation between representatives of organisations of civil society;

Having regard to Decision No1/2014 of the Joint CARIFORUM-EU Council concerning participation in the CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee;

Recognising the role of the CC in (1) monitoring the implementation of all economic, social and environmental aspects of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU, its Member States and the CARIFORUM States and (2) in strengthening dialogue between representatives of civil society.

The CC discussed the practical components of the implementation of the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), its social, environmental and economic impact, a monitoring framework and noted the challenges related to and during its implementation.

The CC notes that the EPA is an opportunity and a tool to assist CARIFORUM States to address the sustainable development challenges of the CARIFORUM region and that the market access granted still needs to be converted into market presence and these combined should result in an overall positive social, environmental and economic impact for both parties.

The CC commits to its role as a valuable tool to bring the perspective of civil society (including the private sector) in a consolidated and balanced manner thus ensuring that the monitoring aspect of the CC can serve to bring continuous feedback to the administration of the EPA.

The CC underlined that several prerequisites are needed for the agreement to generate tangible economic, environmental and social benefits in the EU and CARIFORUM Member States: These include but are not limited to:

- i the need for greater focus on accelerating the implementation of EPA elements that are not fully developed so far, including provisions on services and intellectual property rights
- ii- the urgency of signing financial agreements and the disbursement of funds in a timely manner in order that support projects for the implementation of the EPA are not delayed, and furthermore that it ensures support for the functioning of the Committee and its work in a sustainable manner. Special focus should also be given to the capacity building of civil society organisations, including business support organisations and trade associations.
- iii- build capacity to deal with technical barriers to trade as well as sanitary and phyto-sanitary requirements, which are of crucial importance for increasing market penetration and exports.
- iv- develop the necessary trade infrastructure and mechanisms. With respect to goods trade, these would include port infrastructure, and for services trade there are issues with respect to movement of persons. Emphasis must also be placed on trade facilitation and greater intra-regional economic integration
- v- address the market access obstacles to trade between the CARIFORUM and the EU Caribbean Outermost Regions for example the discriminatory elements of the Octroi de Mer, which should be removed
- vi- the need for specific attention for traditional products and fair trade products exports in order to promote businesses that bring positive social impact to rural communities
- vii - the need to increase diversification through support for non-traditional commodities sectors
- viii- the need to raise awareness and promote CARIFORUM as an attractive investment destination for European companies and to facilitate contacts between the EU and CARIFORUM businesses
- ix- promote trade in services via implementation of the EU commitment for short term movement of CARIFORUM services suppliers, including the cultural sector and the establishment of a specific Service Export Helpdesk, which provides information similar to the existing EU Export Helpdesk for trade in goods
- x- make provisions which focus on the development and inclusion of indigenous peoples. These must be compliance with frameworks such as the UN Declaration of the rights of indigenous people, in the implementation of the EPA. The implementation for the EPA must include specific resources to support indigenous people groups.
- xi- the importance of taking proactive action in the implementation of the EPA in respect of the SMEs and small farmers to ensure that sustainable development is achieved
- xii- examine innovative and affirmative action that leads to successful market penetration of the EU market even if by collaboration and co-competition

The CC raised issues beyond the strict implementation of the EPA but which can seriously affect or undermine its ability to achieve the objectives of trade and competitiveness, such as the lack of visa facilitation by EU Member States, lack of access to affordable and reliable energy and the restricted access to financing for some of the CARIFORUM States that can be a major impediment for co-financing of EU funded projects.

The CC recommends using indicators that reflect the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the monitoring of the EPAs in order to incorporate the social and environmental impact.

The CC recommends using specific monitoring indicators for the implementation of the EPA, which go beyond the traditional economic indicators such as GDP and World Bank “Doing business” indicators. The monitoring indicators should take accounts of specific development needs and strategies and allow for increased flexibilities, tailor-made adjustments or exemptions.

The CC calls for consultation on the draft terms of reference for the monitoring framework, before it is decided upon.

The CC calls on the EPA bodies to share and provide access to relevant documents discussed at their meetings, subject to the meeting protocol, as these are necessary to the comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the EPAs

The CC calls for greater involvement of CC in the negotiations related to the 11th European Development Fund.

On behalf of the Consultative Committee, the Chair accepted an invitation from the 4th CARIFORUM-EU Trade and Development Committee, which will take place in Brussels on 18-19 November 2014, and will present this initial statement there.