

**Economic Partnership Agreement SADC Information Seminar, 20 JUNE 2007**

**Opening Statement**

**by**

**Her Excellency, Ambassador Dr. Elisabeth Pape, Head of the EC Delegation to**

**Namibia**

**DRAFT/CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Honorable Minister of Trade and Industry in absentia, represented by Ms Bernadette Artivor, acting Permanent Secretary, Undersecretary for the Investment Promotion Center,  
Participants from the SADC EPA countries,  
Representatives of the public and private sector and the civil society,  
All protocol observed,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here this morning. We appreciate the positive response of representatives of the civil society, the private sector and the donor community to our invitation to contribute to the public debate on Economic Partnership Agreement. As you know we are currently negotiating such an EPA on behalf of the European Union Member States with our partners of SADC Member Countries. This information seminar is a joint initiative of several services of the

Commission and forms part of the process established to create a confident working relationship between us and the civil society.

The SADC EPA negotiations were launched officially in this same city nearly three years ago. After several rounds of discussion and a rather difficult start, the partners have now exchanged their offers. We hope that this will allow us to move towards a conclusion on important parts of the agenda. Exactly this should happen during the negotiations that will take place later this week in Walvis Bay, hosted by the Government of Namibia.

At this crucial stage of the negotiations, it is of utmost importance for the negotiators, whether from the European Commission or the SADC side, to listen to the views of the stakeholders in the private sector and the civil society. One of the panel discussions is proposing to deal with this more specifically in the SADC regional context, focusing on how to take into account your interests in the negotiations.

Trade negotiations are carried out between official representatives of their respective countries. The beneficiaries, however, those who will eventually gain, and also those that might be affected negatively and lose from the conclusion of trade agreements, are the private sector and the civil society. The quality of the EPA that will be concluded will in the end depend on the degree to which the interests of those affected have been taken into account by the negotiators. They have to assess the capacity of adaptation of the stakeholders of the economies that will embark on liberalization. The discussions proposed in the different panels, shall, with your contributions, achieve this.

The EPA negotiations have generated all sorts of reactions in the ACP regions, and SADC is not an exception. I have sometimes the feeling that EPA's benefits might not have been properly emphasized during our dialogue with the civil society and the private sector. Rather, I have the impression that the voices of the stakeholders who stand to benefit from a successful and ambitious economic partnership agreement have sometimes been ignored. By extending the invitation to this information seminar to all of you, the European Commission has the ambition to

present the situation as it is, with its hurdles, its difficulties, but also with clear and precise explanations of its benefits, opportunities and the improvements it will offer. We have ensured that the subjects that will be covered address all the specific characteristics of the SADC region, including the linkages of the EPA negotiations with the TDCA.

You all know that one of the objectives of EPA is to foster the smooth and gradual integration of the ACP states into the world economy. This is only one part of the objectives that were agreed upon by the EU and the ACP Member States that signed the Cotonou Partnership Agreement back in June 2000. Article 34 of Cotonou makes it clear that such integration will take place in accordance to the political choices and development priorities of the ACP States, and that economic and trade cooperation should contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The European Commission attaches particular importance to ensuring, that with financial support if required, countries within the SADC region

are equipped with the proper resources and capacity to participate actively in the negotiations, for all instruments and issues related to trade. Resources and capacity which, in the spirit of Cotonou, are to be extended to the stakeholders of the private sector and the civil society.

On behalf of the European Commission I can confirm that we will pay a lot of attention to the outcome of this seminar. What you are debating here today is highly relevant to us in these negotiations. We hope to finalize them shortly, with a view to maximize the development benefits the EPA will deliver to all stakeholders, in the private sector and the civil society in the SADC region. Thanking you again for accepting our invitation, I wish you all fruitful discussions.

It is my pleasure to hand over the microphone to the Acting Permanent Secretary to deliver the speech on behalf of the Honorable Minister of Trade and Industry.