

## Intra-Africa trade may ease stalled EPA negotiations, says ACP Group

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Brussels, 5 February 2012: The 79-member African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States has shown its strong support for efforts towards an Africa-wide free trade area - the key focus of the recent African Union summit for Heads of State, held 23 to 30 January in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Secretary General of the ACP Group, Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas attended the conference, urging leaders and stakeholders to strengthen interregional approaches to trade in order to deepen trade flows and enhance their participation in the global economy.

“Boosting interregional trade for Africa will also provide an opportunity for African members of the ACP Group to strengthen their regional integration processes and to deepen their trade flows. A free trade area for Africa could be seen as a building block for future all-ACP free trade area and a ‘way out’ of the current impasse from EPA negotiations,” said Dr Chambas.



Almost all African Regional Economic Communities are members of the ACP inter-regional coordination mechanism. They have been negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union since 2002.

During deliberations, the summit endorsed the Common ACP/ AU/ UNECA/ Oxford University Proposal for Improved and Enhanced Trade Preference System for Least Developed Countries and Low Income Countries. According to the ACP Group, the scheme will be able to provide flexibilities to enable a smooth finalisation of the stalled EPA negotiations.



African leaders agreed to further discuss this theme during the next summit to be held in Lilongwe, Malawi in June 2012 while mandating the AU Commission to explore practical solutions that will lead to the creation of a continental free trade area.

On his visit, the ACP Secretary General was received by the President of Ghana John Evans Atta-Mills, the President of Equatorial Guinea Teodoro Obiang Nguema and other leaders and key dignitaries from international organisations such as the United Nations. Equatorial Guinea has agreed to host the 7<sup>th</sup> ACP Heads of State Summit this December.

*(Photos: AU Summit (Photo by The Guardian); ACP Secretary General Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas greets the President of*

*Tanzania Jakaya Kikwete; Dr Chambas with African leaders, including President of Benin Yayi Boni (left most)*

-ACP Press

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