

## NEWS: Pacific ACP trade ministers urged to look beyond national interest in EPA talks

### NEWS: Pacific ACP trade ministers urged to look beyond national interest in EPA talks



*Nukualofa, TONGA, 16 August, 2012/ PIFS/ ACP:* Trade Ministers of the Pacific ACP States have been urged to reach beyond their narrow national interests, and embrace their collective responsibility to each other when negotiating the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Commission (EC).

Speaking before opening the two-day Pacific ACP Trade Ministers' Meeting (PACPTMM) in Nuku'alofa, Tonga today, the Prime Minister of Tonga, Lord Tu'ivakano said it has been a long and challenging process since the Pacific ACP States stated the negotiation of the EPA with EC in 2004.

"Whilst two Pacific states have signed an interim EPA, I can recall Leaders in 2011, further mandating Pacific ACP Trade Ministers, to continue to negotiate a comprehensive EPA as a single region with the European Commission. I understand that to this extent, the interim EPA will always be a stepping stone towards a comprehensive EPA."

"The developments of the Pacific EPA has taken its rightful place in implementing the Leaders Vision through the Pacific Plan, to promote economic growth of the region, through sustainable development by strengthening regional cooperation, and economic integration in areas where the region could gain the most," said Lord Tu'ivakano.

The Tongan Prime Minister told the PACP Trade Ministers that as far as he understood the Pacific ACP Leaders decisions, "we need to reach beyond our narrow national interests, and embrace our collective responsibility to each other as Pacific ACP states, and to those states most vulnerable, and least able to address the economic, social and administrative implications of regional economic integration."

Lord Tu'ivakano explained that the fundamental considerations of Pacific's regional position throughout the negotiations is that "they include the regional consideration that the final EPA must be based on objectives and principles enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement, the special defining characteristics of our Pacific ACP states, and our long history of regional cooperation. It is within this context that your deliberations today and tomorrow must take into account our Pacific ACP States unique challenges, to be fully prepared for the next Pacific ACP and EC Joint Technical Working Group in October."

In his welcoming speech, Tonga's Minister for Commerce, Tourism and Labour and Lead Spokesperson for the Pacific ACP, Dr. Hon. Viliami Uasike Latu confirmed that the Joint Technical Working Group negotiation session between the Pacific ACP and the European Commission is now confirmed for October this year, thus the importance of the Meeting in Tonga.

"Tonga recognises that there is considerable contention against and between the EC and the ACP over the progress of the EPA negotiations. Nonetheless, the Pacific ACP at least through the Lead Spokesperson for Pacific ACP has been determined to persist with the EC in negotiating a comprehensive EPA with the Commission," said Dr. Hon. Viliami Latu.

“We have demonstrated flexibility on the negotiation of outstanding contentious issues with the European Commission, and can only expect the European Commission to show some flexibility on those key contentious issues from their part.”

The PACPTMM in Tonga will among other issues, provide the mandate for the region's technical negotiations team, in particular the range of outstanding contentious issues. The Meeting will also consider other related work concerning the implementation of the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA).

- *Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Press Release*

Tags: [News articles](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

---

**Source URL:** <http://acp.int/content/news-pacific-acp-trade-ministers-urged-look-beyond-national-interest-epa-talks>

**Links:**

[1] <http://acp.int/category/story-type/news-articles>