



Push forward as one region, urge Leaders

By Online Editor

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Forum Leaders in Auckland

Pacific ACP Leaders have called for continued negotiations on a comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union as a single region with the support from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Addressing Leaders at the 9th meeting of the Pacific ACP Leaders held yesterday in Auckland, New Zealand, Lead Spokesperson for the Pacific ACP bloc on the EPA negotiations with the European Union, Trade Minister Lisiate ‘Akolo of Tonga, said the region had progressed substantially.

“Since Pacific ACP Trade Ministers met in February this year, our officials have been very busy with preparatory national and regional EPA work, including national consultations and regional meetings coordinated by the Forum Secretariat, all with the aim of concluding the negotiations as soon as possible,” said Minister ‘Akolo.

“I am pleased to report that the region has made substantial progress, in particular, in finalising a regional position on the draft Pacific ACP-European Union EPA legal text as well as finalising

market access offers for eight Pacific ACP States, namely Cook Islands, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.”

The draft Pacific ACP-European Union EPA text and the eight market access offers were submitted to the European Commission for their consideration in mid July.

A joint Pacific ACP Fisheries and Trade Ministers’ meeting as well as a Pacific ACP Trade Ministers Meeting was held on 8 and 9 August, respectively, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

“As you are aware, fish is a key resource for our region and the fisheries industry has the greatest potential for increasing exports to the European Union.

“The fisheries sector is one area where positive economic gains can be realised as a result of concluding an EPA. In particular, tuna is by far the most important fisheries resource, in terms of both volume and value in the region as well as in terms of exports to the European Union.”

Pacific ACP States have been considering and advancing various strategies and approaches in the negotiations to maximize benefits from their tuna industries, while at the same time considering evolving developments in the fisheries sector.

Minister ‘Akolo also updated Pacific ACP Leaders on the Kava Initiative submitted by Fiji, FSM, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu to Pacific ACP Trade Ministers.

“Kava is an important product for many Pacific ACP States, and, until the EU ban on kava in 2004, was a significant commodity export to the European Union,” said Minister ‘Akolo. “While a number of initiatives are being undertaken by Pacific ACP States at a multilateral or bilateral level to regain access to the European Union market, Ministers noted that the negotiation was an opportunity to hold a dialogue with the European Commission on the issue.

“In this regard, Ministers agreed that I should request the European Commission’s assistance to implement a number of proactive actions to regain EU market access for kava exports.”

At their meeting yesterday Pacific ACP Leaders also endorsed the Revised EPA Roadmap establishing the EPA negotiations as top priority for the region in 2012.

Pacific ACP Leaders also endorsed the convening of an Eminent Persons Group to discuss the issue of the management of Pacific ACP issues further, agreeing that the Forum Secretariat would continue to coordinate the negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreement pending the agreement of any outcomes of the deliberations of the Eminent Persons Group.

The 9th meeting of the Pacific ACP Leaders marked one of the first in a series of meetings held in advance of the 42nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting which started in Auckland today.

SOURCE: PIFS/PACNEWS