

## PRESS RELEASE

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The Caribbean Banana Exporters Association (CBEA) representing the banana exporting interests of Belize, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Suriname and the Windward Islands met with their counterparts of Cameroon and Cote d' Ivoire to discuss pressing concerns over the European banana trade.

The meeting welcomed the various Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the Caribbean region, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and the European Union (EU) in so far that they provide a World Trade Organization (WTO) compatible framework for preference for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) banana trade. However, grave concerns were expressed that, despite prior assurances, the EU now appears willing to dilute or nullify the benefits of the agreements even before they are formally signed and ratified.

In an effort to safeguard the viability of the ACP banana industries and the livelihood of the producers, the meeting calls on the EU to enter into substantive dialogue as required by the EPAs before making proposals for other bilateral free trade agreements or in the WTO arena.

In particular, the meeting called on the EU to:

- Recognize the structural, social and economic factors that justify the long standing preference granted to banana industries of the ACP;
- Recognize that under the current EU tariff structure, from January 2006 to November 2007, ACP exports have grown by 74,000 tonnes while Latin American exports have grown by 635,000 tonnes;
- Not make a premature offer for bananas in their negotiations with Central America or other non-ACP regions;
- Vigorously defend the existing tariff preference for bananas in the WTO Doha Round negotiations.

Representatives at the meeting reiterated the determination to defend, with their governments and other interested parties, the vital interest of the banana industries. This is a critical test of whether the ACP banana trade will flourish or die under the EPAs.

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