

## **The Economic Partnership Agreement is a Dangerous Neo-Liberal Project and is not in the Interest of the Peoples of the Caribbean**

We the undersigned, representing social movements, workers, farmers, women, youth, community based organizations, NGOs and other sections of civil society from the Caribbean and the entire Americas unambiguously state that the so-called Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) initialed between the European Community and CARIFORUM countries is a dangerous neo-liberal integration project and is definitely not in the interest of the peoples of the Caribbean.

Well before the December 2007 initialing of the EPA by the negotiators for Cariforum and the European Commission and with growing intensity since that moment of infamy, throughout the Caribbean, there has been considerable disquiet about the implications of the EPA for our economies, the well-being of citizens generally and of working people and the vulnerable in particular. In fact many very important sectors of civil society have articulated the unambiguous position that the EPA, in its present form, will not be in our best interest, will result in considerable disadvantage to our economies as against advantages to the European Union, runs counter to our sovereignty and will contribute to the worsening of the socio-economic conditions of the majority of citizens; workers and farmers and the vulnerable – women, youth and the elderly in particular.

This position is underpinned by very detailed, professional analyses of the EPA conducted by highly respected Caribbean citizens and by the knowledge and practical experience of organizations representative of civil society. Interestingly, this position has also been expressed by important European bodies, as articulated in diverse studies including one commissioned by the French President and major international NGOs involved in advocacy.

Of major significance is the fact that a number of Caricom Governments are very uncomfortable with the EPA and recognize its dangers. To their very credit, the leaders of two countries – Haiti and Guyana - have openly expressed their disagreement with the document as negotiated. The European Commission has responded in the most despicable manner by openly threatening these governments with punitive economic measures, including the loss of development assistance, if they refuse to sign. This is nothing short of “economic terrorism” and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

This strategy of “economic terrorism” was used consistently by the European Commission in the lead up to the December 2007 initialing and has influenced several other Caribbean Governments to believe that they have no choice but to sign given the EU’s open threat of penalties for failure to sign. The Europeans are guilty of openly seeking to divide Caribbean countries over the EPA and this rift can only result in the weakening of Caricom and the undermining of the project of Caribbean integration as identified through the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

In fact, one of our critiques of the EPA is that it will make the CSME redundant. This is not in our interest. We hold that Caribbean integration is an essential pre-requisite to the well-being of all Caribbean citizens and particularly so in the era of “globalization”. We find it totally absurd to be implementing this EPA which includes many of the “Singapore issues” that have been rejected by our countries in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Indeed, given the present collapse of the neo-liberal paradigm and the crisis of the capitalist financial system, it is unthinkable that the Europeans are insisting that countries such as Guyana and Haiti should sign on incorporate financial services in the EPA.

It is clear that the collective interest of the Caribbean would be best served by having the EPA subject to a re-negotiation with the limited objectives as stated at points 1-4 below, as called for by Caribbean civil society.

***1. Limit the EPA only to what is required to make it World Trade Organisation (WTO) compatible;***

***2. Insert Protocols on the identified and agreed upon CARIFORUM principal productive sectors. The Protocols should identify the bilateral cooperation measures needed and should form the basis for the subsequent preparation of detailed CF-EC Sectoral Partnership Development Programs.***

***3. Insert legally binding development benchmarks designed to measure the socio-economic impacts of the EPA on key segments of our societies - women, youth children, farmers, workers and fisher-folk,***

***4. Include a mandatory review of the EPA provisions within three years of signature of the agreement, with the possibility of renegotiation***

We therefore call on the European Union to change its position, stop its use of “economic terrorism” and agree to renegotiate the EPA with Cariforum countries. We further call on those Caribbean governments that have decided to sign out of fear of economic reprisals by the EU, to return to the negotiating table as this is what the interest of Caribbean people demands.

Guatemala City, Guatemala  
2008 October 11.

Assembly of Caribbean People