European Union
Delegation of the European Commission
to South Africa

For more on any covered issue/s, please 'click' on the blue headings and / or text

EU Perspectives

Regular publication that seeks to provide information on EU-related activities of interest to SA readers

24 November – 7 December 2008

Headline News

European Commission response to cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe
The European Commission responded to the growing cholera crisis in Zimbabwe by deploying humanitarian funding aimed both at treating victims of the disease and at stemming its spread. More than €9 million from the Commission humanitarian 'global plan' for Zimbabwe (IP/08/1404) is being provided to UN and non-governmental partner agencies working in Zimbabwe to support water, sanitation and hygiene actions, epidemic response and the provision of essential drugs. Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid said: "I am shocked at the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe and call upon the authorities there to respond quickly to this cholera outbreak by allowing full assistance from international humanitarians and regional partners. With almost no local capacity left in Zimbabwe to tackle the epidemic due to the collapse of so many basic community services, help from outside is crucial. This is a preventable tragedy and our priority is to save lives and relieve suffering."

Africa and the European Union join forces to work together against climate change
Africa and the EU outlined their common concerns for global warming and their common interest for an ambitious post-Kyoto international agreement through the endorsement today of a joint declaration on climate change. The vulnerability of Africa to climate change is exacerbated by widespread poverty, limited access to capital and technology, ecosystem degradation, disasters and conflicts. Speaking at the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Doha, Qatar, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, and European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel jointly declared; "Tackling climate change is a real challenge for both Africa and Europe. This is a priority that we must face head-on together to achieve our common aims. We are all aware that a failure to act now will mean even more dramatic consequences down the line – especially for the most vulnerable populations of Africa. Both the EU and the AU are committed to an ambitious post-Kyoto agreement on climate change."

Euro-African Conference in Paris on migration and development
France hosted the second Euro-African Ministerial Conference on migration and development, during which the African and European partners took note of the reinforcement of the dialogue in the context of the Rabat process and the existence of a Euro-African consensus on a global approach to migration. They also committed themselves further to developing a genuinely operational relationship by adopting a multi-annual cooperation programme to ensure balanced and concerted management of migration in West Africa. Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for migration, said: "We have made significant progress: the Euro-African dialogue on migration is now a reality. We must now focus on practical action for our commitment to be credible". Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood policy added: "I am convinced of the significance of the approach of shared responsibility between the countries of origin, transit and destination as well as the need to engage in a strong and balanced dialogue on the entirety of the relevant questions on the management of the migratory flux. The North-African neighbourhood countries are interested in visa facilitation as well as the prospects for temporary legal migration, but the EU also has expectations in the field of readmission and international protection."

Other News

Commissioner Ashton says remaining DDA issues solvable
EU Trade Commissioner has addressed the European Parliament's INTA committee on the Doha Round of world trade talks. Having just returned from meetings in Geneva with WTO chief Pascal Lamy and Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso

Amorim, Commission Ashton stressed the benefits of a Doha deal for the European Union and other WTO members. She argued that the value of the package that was on the table during the last ministerial meeting in July was even more clear in the current economic climate, in terms of real market opening and the insurance policy it provides against future protectionism. Commissioner Ashton said that revised negotiating texts for agriculture and industrial goods were expected in the coming week, and that the issues that remained on the table for discussion were solvable. The Commissioner also reminded European Parliamentarians that if the 'modalities' package is confirmed in Geneva, the final Doha deal would provide further benefits, such as opening in services, protection of Geographical Indications (GI) and improved trade facilitation.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The European Commission underlined its commitment to fight any form and expression of gender-based violence and to protect and reintegrate victims, in close cooperation with Member States and civil society organisations. “Fighting violence against women means promoting peace and human security on the international stage”, said Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy. She added: “Today is an important moment to reiterate our opposition to all forms of gender-based violence and to underline our support for the international movement for women’s empowerment and gender equality.

The EU and Côte d'Ivoire sign stepping stone trade deal

Côte d'Ivoire's Minister for African Integration and Karl Falkenberg, Deputy Director General for Trade at the European Commission, signed the deal in the Ivorian capital Abidjan. The agreement combines the benefits of a trade agreement with development assistance targeted at accelerating growth and development in Côte d'Ivoire. The final goal remains to conclude a full EPA with all the members of the West African region, which will promote competitiveness, growth and investment, while accelerating regional integration. EU Trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton said: "I congratulate the government of the Côte d'Ivoire and especially Minister Koné for the leadership they have shown in bringing our negotiations for a stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreements to a successful conclusion. I hope that we can now make progress in negotiations for a regional Economic Partnership Agreement with West Africa, addressing concerns and building confidence." EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel said: "Economic Partnership Agreements will allow developing countries to benefit from open trade, while protecting some of their key interests over a long period of time. They have a strong development dimension, and will bring the reforms necessary for economic integration within the region and beyond."

Commission calls on donors to stick to increased aid promises at UN financing conference in Doha

Ahead of the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Doha/Qatar, the European Commission called on donors to stick to their promises and increase aid for poor countries, stressing that the financial crisis should not be used as an excuse to cut development assistance. José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, said: "Developing countries face many crises: the food crisis, the energy crisis, climate change and now the financial crisis. We face an historic choice: if we want developing countries to reduce extreme poverty as pledged in the UN Millennium Development Goals, we need to act to keep our promises". Louis Michel, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, said: "The main problem for developing countries is not the global financial crisis as such, but a growing crisis of political will. We need to stick to the collective commitments we have made. I launch an appeal in favour of development: as we tackle the financial crisis, let's not forget the human crisis".

Developing links in higher education between Europe and Africa

For the first time, major African and European universities, higher education experts and Erasmus Mundus Alumni students gathered in Brussels to examine ways to strengthen links between higher education institutions in Africa and Europe and increase the mobility of students, researchers and teachers between the two continents. European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture & Youth, Mr Ján Figel', said: "By promoting the mobility and academic excellence of young people in higher education with the Erasmus Mundus programme, we help break down barriers of misunderstanding that can exist between individuals, societies and cultures, and thereby contribute to creating a stable and peaceful world". European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, said, "Education is the single most important key to unlocking Africa's potential. Strengthening ties between African and European students and their higher education institutions is crucial as we face increasing global challenges, such as climate change or the financial crisis, that we will have to tackle together through sharing ideas and knowledge."

New European Union prize for literature

The European Commission is launching a new EU prize for contemporary literature. The aim is to put the spotlight on the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe’s contemporary literature, to promote more circulation of literature within Europe and encourage greater interest in non-national literary works. The first edition of the Prize will be awarded in autumn 2009. The European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Mr Ján Figel’, said: “Books are an essential part of our history and the intellectual heritage of Europe. I welcome this new European Union prize, as it will help publicise and promote Europe’s richness and cultural diversity. The fact that it will be awarded for the first time in 2009 is excellent timing, since 2009 is designated as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.”

For further information please contact Frank Oberholzer on 012-452-5200