

Brussels, 9 February 2009

Catherine Ashton in Southern Africa, 9-12 February

EU Trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton will travel to Southern Africa from the 9th to 12th of February, visiting South Africa and Botswana. She will hold talks with key government leaders with a view to moving forward the bilateral and region-to-region trade relationships. A key goal of the visit is to discuss the Economic Partnership Agreement with Southern African countries. Aside from meeting government leaders from South Africa and Botswana, Commissioner Ashton will also have a joint meeting with Angolan, Namibian, and South African (ANSA) ministers while in South Africa and a meeting with ministers from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) while in Botswana.

Speaking ahead of the trip, Commissioner Ashton said: "I want to engage with Southern African countries so that we can all gain more from our economic relationship. I am particularly committed to discussing South Africa's concerns over our Economic Partnership Agreement while in Cape Town. I am keen to express our commitment to regional integration."

Commissioner Ashton will spend the 9th and 10th of February in Cape Town, where she will meet with South African Trade Minister Mandisi Mpahlwa and Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. She will also meet with the group of ANSA (Angola, Namibia, South Africa) ministers, as well as representatives from the South African parliament and civil society.

Travelling to Gaborone, Botswana on the 11th of February, Commissioner Ashton is due to meet with the President of Botswana, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, Trade and Industry Minister Neo Moroka and Foreign Minister Phandu Skelemani. Minister Moroka has also invited ministers from SADC to meet with Commissioner Ashton while she is in Gaborone. Commissioner Ashton said: "Botswana has played a key role in co-ordinating discussions in the region. I look forward to talking with President Khama and Minister Moroka about our future relationship."

Background

EPA Negotiations with members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) group of countries were launched in 2004. In 2007 South Africa joined as an official member of the "SADC EPA" Group. An interim EPA was initialled at the end of 2007 with Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and Mozambique. Angola can join the agreement, but as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in the meantime maintains full market access through the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) provision.

The EU and South Africa signed the Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement (TDCA) in 1999. The objective of the TDCA is to create a free-trade area between South Africa and the EU over a period of 12 years, with the EU opening its market at a faster pace.

At the same time, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), consisting of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland now provides for a deeper level of integration amongst some of the countries of the SADC grouping. One of the key challenges in implementing an EPA with SADC is to reconcile these various trade relationships.

For more information on the Economic Partnership Agreement with Southern Africa, please see the Memo 09/55.

For more information on Economic Partnership Agreements, go to http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/acp/index_en.htm