



## **ACP Ministers reiterate concerns at EU Agriculture Council and stress the need for further dialogue**

Brussels, 20 September 2005: Ministers from African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) sugar supplying states, and representatives of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), described as encouraging their meeting with EU Agriculture Ministers and the European Commission on Monday 19 September as they were able to communicate their concerns and position on the proposed reform of the EU sugar regime. Proposals to slash prices by 39% over four years threaten to wreak socio-economic havoc in several sugar producing developing countries.

*"We welcomed the opportunity to impress upon the Commission and the Member States the very real macro-economic and human devastation these proposals would cause. We emphasised the need for a just, equitable and meaningful reform, not one that would hit the most vulnerable stakeholders the hardest,"* said Arvin Boolell, Minister of Agriculture of Mauritius and head of the ACP delegation, speaking at a press conference following the meeting. *"We are confident that our concerns are now better understood by our European partners and look forward to continuing our dialogue on this crucial issue."*

In a two-hour meeting in the Council of Ministers, Minister Boolell was joined by colleagues from Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica, Malawi, Sudan and Swaziland, some of the countries which would be hit severely by the proposed reform. Discussions focused from the appropriate level of price cut and timeframe for implementation, the need for a managed market system, the legitimate expectations of the ACP under the terms of the ACP-EU Sugar Protocol and the accompanying measures required to offset the damaging impact of reform in the ACPs.

The ACP/LDC Ministers reiterated that they appreciate the pressures for reform, but will not be able to survive a drastic reform that is too deep, too fast and too soon, and one that will drive them backwards into poverty. *"We are fighting for survival and to save our society,"* said Roger Clark, Minister of Agriculture of Jamaica, addressing the meeting on the socio-economic impact of the reform. *"The proposed reform would have devastating knock-on effects in Jamaica. It would lead to an uncontrollable rise in anti-social behaviour, criminal activity and drug running."*

Dialogue on accompanying measures took place between the ACP delegation and Commissioner Louis Michel, with both parties agreeing on the need to hold further detailed discussions on this topic in light of ACP concerns regarding the vagueness of the Commission's assurances and its ability to deliver immediate assistance to anticipate the effects of reform. *"We welcomed Commissioner Michel's appreciation of our concerns,"* stated Albert Shabangu, Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland. *"It is essential that we receive sufficient assistance as we cannot send our people to a non-existent dole queue."*

Speaking on the issue of price cuts, ACP/LDC Ministers re-stated their argument that the proposed price cut of 39% goes far beyond the EU's requirement for compliance with WTO rules. *"Nothing justifies this level of price cut. Talk of WTO pressures and the threat of EBA is nothing but a smokescreen,"* said Clement Rohee, Minister of Foreign Trade of Guyana. *"There is a total lack of balance and equity in the Commission's approach and the ACP, as the most vulnerable stakeholders, will bear the burden of the reform and most of the pain,"* he added.

The delegation also once more pointed to the lack of coherence in the EU trade, agriculture and development policies, with the ACP standing to lose up to €300 million a year in direct export earnings under the proposed reform. *"With the focus on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we strongly question*

*moves to dismantle a successful existing trade agreement that has brought security and stability to developing countries,”* said Kaliopate Tavola, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Fiji.

With discussions on the proposed reform set to continue over the coming months, ACP Ministers vow to continue to push for a just and equitable reform which respects political and legal commitments, in an attempt to secure a politically, economically and socially sustainable final agreement. *“We will leave no stone unturned, as the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people in our countries are at stake. This will impact on our position at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong,”* stated Minister Boolell.

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For general background information visit the ACP Sugar website at:

[www.acpsugar.org](http://www.acpsugar.org)

Background document, The ACP countries and the Reform of the EU sugar regime, 22 June 2005

<http://www.acpsugar.org/docs/Media%20Backgrounder%2022%20June%2005.PDF>