

SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE MINISTERIAL ACP/LDC-EU MEETING ON SUGAR

Right Honourable Jack Straw

Honourable Ministers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to express at the outset our sincere gratitude to you for having accepted our request for a dialogue on the impending review of the EU Sugar Regime and for giving us the opportunity to convey to you first hand our concerns in that regard. Also, allow me, on behalf of my colleagues, to congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the EU

Sugar cane plays a vital and multifunctional role in our vulnerable economies by providing productive and gainful employment, which is the best way to fight poverty and bestowing dignity on our people and to achieve the MDGs.

The ACP and LDC States recognise the need for reform. We are aware that the sugar regime, of which the ACP-EU Sugar Protocol and EBA Initiative are an integral part, is being subjected to internal and external pressures, including in the WTO.

But we need a reform that is fair and equitable to all stakeholders, particularly for the small, weak and vulnerable economies of the ACP and LDC States. We believe that the reform should be socially and politically acceptable, and environmentally sustainable. Indeed, the reform should improve the situation of the ACP and LDC States and help them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to which we are all committed. In this respect, I would like to commend the European Union, in particular your Prime Minister, for the pro-active role it is playing on the MDG front.

We are seriously concerned that the Commission's reform proposals do not meet our legitimate concerns in terms of safeguarding the benefits we derive from the Sugar Protocol and EBA Initiative and that they will have devastating effects on our economies. Our sugar industry needs a long-term perspective, many of which have recently been revitalised and therefore need a long term transition to build a new and sustainable cane industry cluster. This will require significant financial resources.

Given the political will and the commitment of the UK and the EU, we have no doubt that the concerns and legitimate expectations of the ACP and LDCs will be fully taken into account when the reform proposals are examined and finally adopted.

It is a question of the very survival of our sugar cane industry and the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people. We cannot and should not let them down especially when we are meeting to reaffirm our commitment to accelerate the achievements of the MDGs.

With these few introductory remarks I would like to invite the Right Honourable Jack Straw to make his initial observations, where after I will call on the representatives of the ACP and LDC States for comment.

Right Honourable Jack Straw I now invite you to take the floor.

SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE PREPARATORY ACP/LDC MINISTERIAL MEETING ON SUGAR

Honourable Ministers, Dear Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are here today to prepare for a most important interaction tomorrow with representatives of the United Kingdom, the current President in office at the EU.

We are well aware of the importance of sugar cane production in our countries, not only as an economic activity but also as an engine for socio-economic development, and the need for ongoing access to remunerative markets to sustain those benefits. Consequently we are all justifiably alarmed at the proposed changes to the EU Sugar Regime that could see prices for sugar slashed by 39% over a very short period, and the offer of uncertain assistance to ameliorate the adversity about to be visited upon us.

Consequently, we need to be united in our approach, and firm in our resolve to ensure that the EU honours its commitments to the ACP as it adapts its Sugar Regime, as it must. Our unity should also continue to include the LDCs as expressed in the Joint ACP and LDC Sugar Group Platform adopted in Brussels yesterday.

We recognise the need for reform and are aware that the sugar regime, of which the ACP-EU Sugar Protocol is an integral part, is being subjected to internal and external pressures, including in the WTO. However we want a reform that improves the situation of the ACP States and helps them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to which we are all committed.

The present statements on assistance are vague as to both quantity and timing. They are also inadequate to provide the bankable assurances needed for reform and modernization programmes, which have already been initiated by many ACP/LDC producers.

With these few introductory remarks I would like to invite comment and guidance on our approach for tomorrow's meeting and would like to invite firstly the spokesperson for the ACP states to comment, and thereafter the spokesperson for the LDC states.