



## **Summary of the discussion held during the joint meeting of the European and Central American civil society advisory groups**

**Brussels, 28 May 2015**

Representatives of the European and Central American advisory groups, set up under the Trade and Sustainable Development Title of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America, held their second joint meeting in Brussels (Belgium) on 28 May 2015.

In line with the conclusions of the previous meeting held in Nicaragua in November 2014, the president of the CC-SICA board attended the meeting as an observer.

The participants took note of the progress made on setting up the advisory groups and appointing contact persons. This should facilitate inter session work to prepare joint meetings and also the exchange information and documents between advisory groups.

However, participants also noted delay in establishing the advisory group for Panama. Furthermore, they noted that the membership of some advisory groups does not reflect the balanced representation of civil society as provided for by the Agreement. The participants therefore decided to refer a request to the Board on Trade and Sustainable Development to speed up this process so that the civil society representatives meeting in the advisory groups could fulfil their mandates as set out in the Agreement.

Participants exchanged views *inter alia* on trade issues, especially those related to agricultural products, as well as related economic, social and environmental aspects.

Business representatives exchanged experiences and examples of best practice. In this context, they provided information on Corporate Social Responsibility practices and social dialogue.

The participants emphasised the importance of promoting sustainability in its three dimensions, which - in the case of agriculture - includes: the promotion of public support policies and sustainable agricultural practices; the promotion of small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises; gender equality (in the context of economic activities), and the promotion and protection of the most vulnerable groups, such as small farmers; sustainable management of natural resources; respect for biodiversity

and respect both in law and in practice for labour and environmental standards and human rights<sup>1</sup>.

In order to ensure that the Association Agreement's trade pillar contributes to the sustainable development of the EU and Central America, taking into account the issues discussed during the meeting, the participants decided to submit to the Board the following requests:

- that the Parties facilitate the access of civil society, in particular producers, food processors and SMEs, to information about the trade opportunities provided by the Agreement, market access, the rules to be complied with, the financial resources and technical assistance available, best practices, etc.;
- that the Parties ensure coherence between the trade policy carried out under the Association Agreement, cooperation, and political dialogue between the EU and Central America (including through technical and financial assistance), particularly with regard to agriculture and rural development;
- that the Parties ensure the Agreement's implementation is properly monitored and, where appropriate, take steps to prevent or mitigate imbalances and potential negative impacts, especially for farmers, small and medium-sized producers and rural communities, their working and living conditions, their right to food and the food security of the population at large;
- that the Parties promote corporate social responsibility, research, innovation and development, good production and investment practices and sustainable land use. Similarly, that they respect the mechanism providing free and informed prior consultation under national and international law;
- that the Parties ensure compliance with the fundamental ILO conventions and provide the advisory groups with information on the progress made on implementing these agreements in law and in practice;
- that the Parties, in cooperation with civil society, promote and adopt climate change adaptation and mitigation measures that benefit the whole of civil society, and especially producers and manufacturers of agricultural products;
- that the Parties adopt all appropriate measures to strengthen the capacities of the advisory groups to enable as many individuals as possible to attend the annual meetings (the joint meetings of the advisory groups and the Civil Society Dialogue Forum) as well as the capacities of civil society to participate fully in monitoring the implementation of the Agreement. In this context, the participants suggested measures to be taken, such as providing financial resources, prior information and the possibility of using more advanced media, such as video conferencing.

The advisory groups stated their readiness to cooperate with the Parties in these areas.

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The participants made reference to the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

Those present reiterated their commitment to fulfilling the role laid down in the Trade and Sustainable Development Title of the Association Agreement, namely to monitor implementation of the Title and to provide advice to the Parties to the Agreement.

The participants agreed to stay in contact and cooperate in the coming months in order to prepare the annual meetings to be held in 2016 as well as other events relating to the Title.

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