

For immediate release: 12 September 2003

News hook: all media covering WTO Cancún Ministerial, 10-14 September

EU splits in face of call to drop new issues from Cancún

Developing countries have sent their strongest message yet to the EU to abandon its call for negotiations on the four ‘new’ issues of investment, competition policy, government procurement and trade facilitation at the WTO’s Fifth Ministerial Conference in Cancún.

ActionAid welcomes the new statements made at Cancún by the African Union and by African parliamentarians, as well as the communiqué from a broad coalition of developing countries which has formed in opposition to the EU’s insistence on expanding the WTO’s agenda into new issue areas. This coalition includes among its members China, India, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, the states of the Caribbean Community and all least developed WTO member countries.

Jane Ocaya, trade policy specialist from ActionAid Uganda, said:

“The EU is more isolated than ever in its call for negotiations on new issues. It is unacceptable to maintain this stance in the face of worldwide opposition. The EU must now listen to the voice of developing countries and abandon new issues at Cancún.”

There is also disagreement among EU member states over the importance of launching negotiations on the four new issues. EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy has said that the launch of these negotiations is a “deal breaker” for the Cancún Ministerial. Yet several EU member states have distanced themselves from his hardline stance, saying that they do not consider the launch of new negotiations to be a deal breaker at all.

On the contentious issue of investment, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland have said they do not consider negotiations to be a priority for Cancún. Germany’s development minister has reiterated her sympathy with developing countries’ resistance to the EU’s agenda. As documented in ActionAid’s recent report *Chips Off the Bloc: Disunity Within the EU on the Singapore Issues*, the UK government has affirmed publicly on several occasions that it does not see new issues as a priority for Cancún.

EU member states have also expressed their anger at the European Commission for its handling of negotiations at Cancún. In an attempt to defend itself following this week’s leak of internal documents revealing controversial proposals for the Ministerial text, the Commission has reportedly called in its legal office to trace the source of the leak.

John Hilary, trade policy analyst from ActionAid UK, said:

“Pascal Lamy cannot be allowed to hold the world to ransom by threatening to use new issues as a deal breaker at Cancún. His refusal to respect developing country opposition is clearly out of step with many EU member states. Our fear is that he is now beyond the control of his political masters, the elected governments of Europe.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information or interviews, please contact: Hannah Crabtree in Cancún, tel: +52 998 107 6303 (local mobile), or +44 7734 581 738

ActionAid’s report *Chips Off the Bloc: Disunity Within the EU on the Singapore Issues* is available online at: www.actionaid.org/resources/pdfs/chips.pdf

In Cancún the ActionAid team is staying at the Best Western – Cancún Clipper Club, Boulevard Kukulcan. KM 9, Hotel Zone, Cancún. Tel: +52 998 891 5999.

NOTE FOR MEDIA IN CANCÚN:

NGOs from across the EU are holding a press conference at 10.15am today (12 September) in Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Hotel, room II, on the position of EU member states in Cancún and the negotiating strategy of the European Commission.