



NEWS!



Fair Trade: a lever for change

How can the EU support the growing interest of consumers in sustainable production and social responsibility?

17th October 2007, 8:30 am to 12:45 pm

EESC, Jacques Delors Building, 99, rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels, Belgium
Room CIVITAS - JDE 62, 6th floor

8:30 Registrations

9:00 Welcome Richard Adams, EESC

9.10 Opening remarks MEP Linda McAvan

9:20 Fighting poverty through trade

Moderator: Linda McAvan, MEP

Challenges for small-scale producers in international trade: Geraldine Labradores, Southern Partners and Fair Trade Corporation, Philippines

What does Fair Trade mean for small producers in the Windward Islands? George R.E. Bullen, Ambassador Eastern Caribbean (invited)

The development impact of Fair Trade Liselotte Isaksson, DG Development

Fair Trade: a lever for change in business practices? Brad Hill, Co-operative Group, UK

10:00 Questions & Answers

10:15 Fair Trade refreshments (in the atrium)

10:45 From niche to mainstream: the role of consumers and public policy

Moderator: Pia Valota, Ass. Consumatori Utenti, Italy

Consumers: not just bargain-hunters Christian Rousseau, Test Achats, Belgium

Supporting the drivers for change: the role of public institutions Gudrun Grosse Wiesmann, German Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development

Towards a coherent EU policy framework on Fair Trade Renate Nikolay, Cabinet Commissioner Mandelson (invited)

11:15 Questions & Answers

11:30 How can the EU support the growing interest of consumers in sustainable production and social responsibility?

Moderator: Anja Osterhaus, Fair Trade Advocacy Office, Brussels

Debate with all panellists (both sessions)

12:40 Conclusions Glayson Ferrari dos Santos, World Vision, Brazil

The conference will be translated simultaneously into English and French

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"Fair Trade teaches us that consumers are not condemned to be only bargain-hunters... Fair Trade reminds us that trade is about people, their livelihoods, their families, sometimes their survival."

Peter Mandelson, EU Commissioner for External Trade

The international conference "Fair Trade: a lever for change" aims at contributing to the ongoing debate regarding the development of a coherent EU policy framework in the area of Fair Trade. It will explore the impact of Fair Trade from different perspectives and discuss how public policy can support the growing interest of consumers in ethical purchasing.

Fair Trade can be a significant lever for change. It has not only helped to lift poor and disadvantaged producers out of poverty by providing market access and training and by paying a fair price for their goods. It has also been a significant lever for change in business practices and it has raised the awareness of European consumers about the impact of their purchasing behaviour on people and the environment.

Over the last years, the interest of consumers in ethical purchasing has been steadily increasing. With constant annual growth rates of 20 to 30% Fair Trade has reached the shelves of supermarkets in many European countries. Some retailers have converted their entire range of bananas, tea or coffee into Fair Trade and market shares reach 10 or more percent in countries like the United Kingdom, Belgium and France.

This success has led to the establishment of many other ethical and sustainable trading initiatives and company codes. This is a welcome development as long as it creates additional benefits for producers and the environment. However, a recent European Parliament resolution on Fair Trade and development has also identified a "risk that the concept may be abused by companies that enter the Fair Trade market without complying with the relevant criteria"¹. An opinion on consumer assurance in the area of ethical trade, issued by the European Economic and Social Committee², suggests some practical steps for public policy makers to help European consumers to find their way through the increasingly crowded ethical market place.

European Institutions have repeatedly recognized the contribution of Fair Trade to sustainable development, poverty reduction and consumer awareness raising³. In its Renewed Sustainable Development Strategy, approved by the Council in June 2006, the EU has identified sustainable consumption and production, including the promotion of Fair Trade, as key areas of action. Will the upcoming Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan translate these commitments into concrete policy proposals? The European Parliament resolution on Fair Trade and development called on the Commission to step up their support to Fair Trade and to issue a related recommendation⁴. When and how will the Commission respond to this call? What can private actors and consumer organisations do to support Fair Trade? These are some of the questions the conference will address.

¹ P6_TA(2006)0320, 6 July 2006

² EESC REX/196, 27 October 2005

³ Such as: Council Conclusions on Aid for Trade (9555/07), Council Resolution on EU Sustainable Development Strategy - Renewed Strategy (10117/06), Communication from the Commission on Trade and Development (COM (2002) 513 final, etc.

⁴ P6_TA(2006)0320, 6 July 2006