Joint Communique

The fourth meeting of the EPA Committee under the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (iEPA) between the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region and the EU was held in Harare, Zimbabwe on 25 and 26 November 2014. The two Sub-Committees, the Customs Cooperation Committee and the Joint Development Committee, took place back-to-back with the EPA Committee.

The Parties reaffirmed their commitment to the iEPA as a mechanism for dialogue and partnership, as well as a tool to foster development and reinforce regional integration.

The Parties discussed progress made so far in the implementation of the iEPA.

The EU Party updated its partners on the developments concerning EPAs with other regional configurations. ESA Party sought for an extension of the more preferential treatment provided under such EPAs to the ESA Member States on the basis of the MFN clause contained in the iEPA, in particular, with respect to Rules of Origin. The EU Party indicated that it would be difficult to consider the request.

The ESA Party highlighted some of the challenges such as the Octroi de Mer they were facing in respect of exports to the EU market. The EU Party took note of the specific challenges the ESA States face as they seek to maintain or improve their competitiveness. Both Parties undertook to explore possible ways of addressing them.

Both Parties acknowledged the practical difficulties in concluding Administrative Cooperation Agreements for the purposes of cumulation. The EU welcomed the all-ACP Joint
Undertaking on Administrative Cooperation for the purposes of cumulation that is currently under consideration by the ACP Countries, and which could also include OCTs.

ESA Party raised issues relating to the tuna derogation rules.

The Parties agreed to accelerate the implementation of projects in support to ESA States' immediate needs arising from the iEPA implementation financed with a €4 million allocation under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF).

The EU Party confirmed that support to medium-term needs will be provided under the 11th EDF Regional Indicative Programme for Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean which will provide the majority of EU support to regional economic integration of the region. The EU Party confirmed its intention to include in the programme a separate allocation of €40 million for the ESA-EU iEPA implementation subject to the European Commission EDF decision making procedures.

The Parties also agreed that in principle the allocation will be split equally among the iEPA ESA Signatories, with an initial commitment of projects which may be subsequently increased on the basis of progress in implementation and absorption capacity. The ESA Party requested the EU to ensure flexible rules and procedures regarding access of funds to speed up absorption. The EU requested the ESA Party to expeditiously proceed with the identification of concrete projects. The Parties agreed that the identification and formulation of projects will be done through bilateral consultations between each country and its accredited EU Delegation; an Action Fiche for decision will be presented to the EU by May 2015. The Joint Development
Committee would guide and supervise the implementation of this special programme.

The EU Party underlined that the programme is available to the four ESA States and to any other country which may sign the agreement in the near future. The ESA Party requested that additional funds be allocated in that event. The EU Party undertook to consider this request.

The fifth meeting of the committees will take place in Brussels next year.