



PRESS RELEASE

“Time to Make Trade Fair in the Pacific – Lift the Kava Bans and stop unfair EPAs!”

Today, fair trade advocates in the Pacific joined campaigners, workers, farmers and activists around the world to call on the European Union (EU) to stop bullying African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) nations into signing an unfair Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA).

In Suva, regional fair trade organisation Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) organised a symbolic kava ceremony to highlight the potentially damaging impact of unfair trade deals on Pacific people. PANG invited representatives from the EU, spokespeople from the local kava industry, and fair trade advocates from concerned civil-society organisations to sit around the kava bowl (tanoa) to discuss concerns about the EPA negotiations and the ongoing ban on kava products in Europe.

The EU representatives heard from PANG Coordinator Roshni Sami, Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo, Chairman of the Fiji Kava Council, and Professor Subramaniam Sotheeswaran, co-author of a recent World Health Organisation study on kava-products. Ratu Nawalowalo and Dr Sotheeswaran both outlined the case for reopening the sale of kava-products in Europe.

PANG coordinator Roshni Sami said the EU delegates were “very brave” to come along to the action, given that there was a lot of concern in the Pacific about the potential negative impacts of the EU’s proposed EPA. The EU’s ban on kava imports demonstrated the EU’s failure to match its actions to its rhetoric of development friendly trade deals for Pacific countries.

“Pacific Island countries have lost over a billion US dollars worth of export revenue since the kava bans in Europe came into place...” (Roshni Sami, PANG)

She said the European bans on kava products illustrate how significant the EU’s non-tariff barriers can be to Pacific products in the export market. “The Pacific has effectively had duty free and quota free access to the EU since 1975, yet we still export predominately raw commodities – sugar and tuna,” said Ms Sami. “Part of the reason we

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do not have more value-added processing, and more jobs for Pacific people, is because of these non-tariff barriers. The EU is constantly lecturing developing countries that they should be creating export industries to lift people out of poverty, yet they place this giant barrier to kava exports, and what could be a big growth industry for the Pacific.”

“These types of barriers highlight the hypocrisy of the EPAs. There is currently no such thing as a ‘level playing field’ in world trade,” said Ms Sami. “The EU has an economy 1,400 times bigger than the economies of the Pacific Island countries. The EPA will benefit European business at the expense of Pacific nations’ ability to set their own development agenda. They would also reduce Pacific government revenue, putting essential services such as healthcare and education at risk”

“...Now the Pacific Islands face further losses from being pushed into an unfair agreement that threatens Pacific livelihoods.” (Roshni Sami, PANG)

MS Sami said EPAs in their current form would open Pacific Island markets to devastating competition from EU exports, leading to increased social inequality and poverty through the destruction of local industries and small-scale agriculture, damaging employment and livelihoods. “The EPAs would curtail the ability of Pacific Island countries to regulate and design policies to meet their developmental goals and needs,” Ms Sami said.

The EU is putting tremendous pressure on the Pacific (and other ACP countries) to sign the EPAs by the end of the year. They have even made threats to reduce development aid and increase tariffs on Pacific exports into the EU market. For the Pacific, this would mean huge duty on important exports. For example tuna from Papua New Guinea, would be charged 20 percent duty on entry into the European market. Such high tariffs would put the PNG fishing industry and thousands of jobs at serious risk.

PANG is calling on the EU to stop bullying smaller nations in the Pacific to sign up to the EPA. European bans on kava products have cost Pacific Island producers \$US1.4 billion in the past six years. Now the Pacific Islands face further losses from being pushed into an unfair agreement that threatens Pacific livelihoods!

Photograph Notes:**1.) Feeling the heat ... EU Delegates drinking kava in Suva.**

L to R: Andrea Salviati - Trade and Political Officer, Delegation of the European Commission for the Pacific, with Ritva Sallmen - Counsellor, Delegation of the European Commission for the Pacific and Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo (see below).

2.) Unfair ... Fiji Chief and kava produce

Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo - Chair of Fiji Kava Council, Kadavu chief, campaigner against kava-bans and kava grower.

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“Make Trade Fair in the Pacific”

Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) is a Pacific Islands regional fair trade organisation based in Suva, Fiji.

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