

EU-CARIFORUM EPA signature

Speech by European Commission Vice-president Siim Kallas

Barbados, 15 October 2008

Your Excellencies, Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great privilege to be here today to sign this Economic Partnership Agreement. The signature of a trade deal is not something we do everyday and is therefore worth celebrating. I want to start by passing on to you the warm regards of my colleagues, Development Commissioner Louis Michel and Trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton, who could not be here with us today. I can assure all of you that they and the whole of the European Commission are committed to making this agreement a success.

We are doing more today than concluding a set of trade negotiations that began four years ago. We are transforming a trade relationship that began over thirty years ago. We are transforming a relationship of dependency into a far reaching and comprehensive partnership between equals. We are, together, putting the CARIFORUM region firmly on the map as an expanding market where traders and investors can find innovation. Where they can find opportunities for growth, and security for their investment.

As Sir Arthur Lewis, the distinguished Caribbean Nobel laureate showed us more than 50 years ago, investment is essential for development. I believe the agreement we are signing today will send a message beyond the Caribbean – to other ACP countries and to the world.

We have shown through this agreement that it is possible to renew an historic partnership. We have shown that it is possible to build an economic partnership with sustainable development and regional integration at its heart.

We have shown that a trade agreement can go beyond simple trade in goods, to promote innovation and support broader economic reform. Together we will show, I believe, that our renewed partnership can help give the young people of the Caribbean a bright economic future. At a time of uncertainty in the global economy, of scepticism about the very ability of trade to deliver for development, I believe this agreement sends a powerful message of commitment and of hope.

So I would today like to pay tribute to all those who worked so hard in challenging circumstances to make this Economic Partnership a reality.

First of all I would like to pay tribute to the CARIFORUM leaders and negotiators. They have done an incredible job. They have tackled a large number of very complex issues as a group, across a very diverse region. Working in the European Commission, I know the work involved in bringing together the interests of a diverse group of countries. We have taken a deadline given to us by the WTO and turned it into an opportunity for change. This has taken vision and determination.

Let me recognise two people who are present here today. First Dame Billie Miller, the former lead negotiator at Ministerial level for CARIFORUM. And Richard Bernal former director general of the RNM, who lead the technical negotiations on the CARIFORUM side. Without their untiring commitment the agreement would not have been possible. They deserve a round of applause.

I would also like to pay tribute to my Commission colleagues. This Economic Partnership Agreement would not have been possible without the personal commitment of Development Commissioner Louis Michel, of Peter Mandelson and the tireless work of Commission staff.

Today the EU and its member states, and 13 of the 15 Caribbean countries are signing the agreement. Unfortunately Guyana and Haiti are not signing today. However, President Jagdeo has said that Guyana intends to sign in the coming days.

The benefit of trade agreements comes not from negotiating them, but putting them into practice. That implementation must now begin in earnest if we are to deliver new opportunities for growth and employment. We are at the start of a 25 year process of opening on the CARIFORUM side. We have important cooperation and development finance provisions to put in place. And we must establish a new set of shared institutions to make this EPA work in practice. With the signature of the agreement today we have taken the first step on this journey. The European Union pledges today to continue that journey with you.