Does the EU support Fair Trade?

The European Parliament issued a Resolution on Fair Trade and Development in 2006 (1), endorsing the Fair Trade principles, as defined by the Fair Trade movement, and asking the European Commission and the EU Members States to support Fair Trade in a wide number of policy areas. Two years later the European Commission issued a follow-up Communication on Fair Trade (5 May 2009). The EC Communication recognizes Fair Trade's values and references the principles defined by the Fair Trade movement but is not, by far, a complete follow-up to the expectations laid down by the 2006 EP Resolution.

The second half of 2009 is a year of changes at EU level. A new European Parliament has started a new legislative term (2009-2014) and a new College of Commissioners will soon take office. In this context, the main Fair Trade networks (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International FLO, World Fair Trade Organisation WFTO, Network of European Worldshops NEWS! and European Fair Trade Association EFTA) decided to present to the EU Institutions their general demands for the period 2009-2014.

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1. Support Fair Trade as a unique tool to link producers in the South and consumers in the EU

The EU should match the support the EU citizens are showing to Fair Trade with their purchasing decisions. The EU should seize the chance to support Fair Trade as a tool to empower those most marginalized by the current rules and practices of International trade and, by doing so, contributing to achieving its own EU sustainable development goals.

The two complementary Fair Trade systems (the integrated supply chain route - Fair Trade organizations - and the product labeling - Fairtrade label-) have demonstrated to improve the livelihoods of Fair Trade producers.

Fair Trade is not about charity, it is about empowering people to work their way out of poverty. However, in order to get there, it is important that the EU continues financially supporting Fair Trade projects (for producers in the South and for consumer awareness in the EU).

Despite the recent proliferation of ethical & sustainability schemes, Fair Trade continues being the only system that sets out to tackle poverty and empower producers in developing countries. Initiatives to water down what is meant by Fair Trade should be avoided.

But is not only at EU level that the EU public authorities should support Fair Trade. Regional and local authorities are already engaged in supporting Fair Trade and the EU should provide the tools for cooperation between these authorities to take place and exchange experiences with other regional and local authorities in the EU.

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**2. Increase EU market access for marginalized producers and workers in the South**

Fair Trade cannot achieve its mission unless (public and private) consumers are made aware of the added-value of Fair Trade products as a tool available to public or private consumers that support sustainable development. EU should be encouraged to remove the obstacles that prevent such informed purchasing decisions.

There is a lot that the European Union could do. A first step is ensuring that the EU legislative framework allows public authorities across the European Union to give preference to Fair Trade products in their public procurement and supports Europe-wide cooperation between public authorities (in particular regional and local) to make it happen.

After that, it is important that potential Fair Trade consumers (public and private) are made aware of why, if they wish to, can support marginalized producers and workers in the South by buying Fair Trade. To get there, it would be necessary that the EU adopts policy documents and support instruments that recognize the added-value of Fair Trade as giving meaningful information to consumers on Fair Trade products. The EU should support public information campaigns on the situation of, and the added value of Fair Trade.

Last but not least, it is important that the EU does not fall prey to protectionist trends and facilitates the market access of sustainably produced products. A narrow understanding of environmental sustainability should not be used as an excuse to discriminate against products from the South.

**3. Make International trade fairer by promoting that the economic, social and environmental principles of Fair Trade become the normal conditions of production and trade**

Fair Trade can play a significant role in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (2015) as a successful alternative trading system to the conventional International trade and practices. Fair Trade aims at the economic, social and environmental principles of Fair Trade becoming the normal conditions of production and trade.

The European Union should lead the way internationally by ensuring that its own trade policy (Global Europe strategy, bilateral & multilateral trade negotiations positions & decision-making process) addresses the specific needs of marginalised producers and workers in the South.

Last but not least, in the context of climate change, it will be important that the EC takes the lead in ensuring that International Conventions are agreed and implemented in a way that adequately compensation & adaptation mechanisms adequately support marginalised producers and workers in the South. They are expected to be the ones suffering most from the impacts of climate change, while at the same time, they are amongst those most engaged in sustainable agriculture.

While the above demands are ambitious and long-term, the Fair Trade Organizations remains committed to continue engaging with continues to civil society organizations, charities and the EU Institutions to work towards this goal. Fair Trade producers know from experience of the “unfairnesses” in the global supply chains. We hope to be able to bring that experience to the fore in EU discussions and, by showing such clear examples, prompting wider change at policy level.

**Next steps**

The Fair Trade Organisations will shortly present to the incoming Members of the European Parliament a list of specific demands to MEPs for the period 2009-2014. An awareness-raising event will be organized to formally launch the Fair Trade demands. At the same time, pro Fair Trade MEPs are invited to join the existing Fair Trade Working Group. Its first meeting will be announced shortly. Interested MEPs should contact Sergi Corbalán, Fair Trade Advocacy Coordinator (corbalan@fairtrade-advocacy.org).

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The Fair Trade Advocacy Office speaks out for Fair Trade and trade justice with the aim to improve trading conditions for the benefit of small and marginalised producers and poor workers in developing countries.

Based in Brussels, the office coordinates the advocacy activities of the four main Fair Trade Networks: Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International FLO, World Fair Trade Organisation WFTO, Network of European Worldshops NEWS! and European Fair Trade Association EFTA.

These four networks bring together over 1.5 million Fair Trade producers from more than 60 countries, 20 labelling initiatives, hundreds of specialized Fair Trade importers, 3000 worldshops and more than 100,000 volunteers.