

African leaders refuse to accept EU's trade deal

By [Sholain Govender](#)

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Most African leaders have stood together at the 2nd European Union (EU)-Africa Summit and refused to accept the EU's proposed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), signing instead interim trade agreements.

The summit, held in Lisbon, Portugal, was attended by 67 heads of states from the two continents and concluded on Sunday, 9 December 2007, with the signing of the Joint Strategy set out by Africa and the EU, minus the initially proposed EPAs.

Heads of states including President Thabo Mbeki and Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade refused to accept Economic Partnership Agreements set out by the European Union and asked that different trade agreements be negotiated.

Trade deals for the New Year

"We are not talking any more about EPAs, we've rejected them...we're going to meet to see what we can put in place of the EPAs," President Wade told reporters on the second and final day of the EU-Africa summit.

Wade dismissed pressure for new trade deals by 31 December, when a waiver by the World Trade Organisation on preferential trade arrangements for developing countries expires.

Instead, by the close of the summit, interim economic agreements were put in place for signing in order to make sure that trade between the continents would not be disrupted by 1 January 2008.

At the press conference, only two heads of states from Africa were left to sign those agreements, according to the President of the EU Commission, Jose Barroso.

"What we are now initialing are not the EPAs, the discussion around the EPAs is ongoing, we understand the difficulties that exist when it comes to a new system of trade," he said.

He added that the formulation of the interim trade agreements was a good illustration of the spirit of partnership between the two continents.

Eight partnerships formed

Barroso said the summit had resulted in eight concrete partnerships on peace and security, climate change and migration,

amongst others.

“I now expect political leaders from the two continents to match their commitments,” he said.

Barroso added that climate change and good governance were also key issues that had been discussed at the summit along with trade.

Speaking on Saturday President Mbeki highlighted the need for good governance and human rights and said there was a great need to address the issue of migration.

“We continue to face challenges relating to governance in Africa, as this is the case with other regions of the world,” President Mbeki said.

“However, to put the matter frankly, by far, the biggest challenge we face in terms of implementing our programmes on good governance and human rights is the issue of resources.”

Zimbabwe situation detrimental to African image

President Mbeki, current mediator between the Zimbabwean ruling party and main opposition, also said German Chancellor Angela Merkel was out of touch with the political situation in Zimbabwe after she criticised Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe at the start of the summit.

Merkel told leaders present that the situation in Zimbabwe was damaging the new image of Africa.

Meanwhile, Barroso commended President Mbeki on the job he was doing as mediator in Zimbabwe.

Overcoming barriers

Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates said the summit was an extraordinary event and the fact that it was held was evidence that both continents had been able to overcome the impasse which had bogged them down over the last few years.

Socrates said the summit was a milestone for Africa and the EU and a Lisbon Declaration would definitely result from the meeting.

He said all goals that had been set were achieved for the summit.

“We have adopted a joint strategy, an action plan and a monitoring mechanism – an agenda for which we will face the challenges,” said Socrates.

He added that there would definitely be another meeting soon and that Libya had already offered to host the next such summit.

African Union chairperson, Ghanaian President John Kufuor agreed with Socrates saying that regular meetings were very important.

He also said the summit will mark a radical change in the relationship between Europe and Africa.

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