



The Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for International Development  
1 Palace Street  
London  
SW1E 5HE

16 May 2008

Dear Secretary of State,

#### **GAERC Meeting: May 26-27**

We are writing to you ahead of the above meeting to request urgent action from the UK government to ensure that real progress is made on the EU's commitments to developing countries. The EC's recent MDG Communication set out the scale of the challenge for the EU in 2008. If the June Council is to deliver a high-level political commitment on the MDGs, the GAERC meeting must set out the concrete steps that the EU will take to contribute to the achievement of MDG milestones. In particular, the UK must ensure that the EU lives up to its promises on aid and trade - we have enclosed policy recommendations on these issues.

We welcome the UK's continuing focus on the MDGs in the EU context, but remain concerned that the EU is not yet meeting its commitments on **aid**. NGOs from all 27 EU Member States will come together later this month to launch a report which shows that the EU is making slow progress on aid, and that the EU15 are in real danger of missing the landmark 2010 target to give 0.56% of GNI as aid. The UK must ensure that the GAERC adopts strong conclusions requiring all member states to publish binding year-by-year timetables showing how they will meet their aid targets. These timetables must be endorsed at the June Council by the EU heads of government, as called for by President Barroso and Commissioner Louis Michel.

The GAERC is also an opportunity for the EU to take a strong lead on **aid effectiveness** in the run up to the Third High Level Forum in September. The GAERC must re-affirm the EU's commitments to make aid more predictable and coordinated, to improve the quality of technical assistance, and to put country ownership at the centre of all aid. The GAERC conclusions must provide for effective monitoring of these commitments. The UK should also be pushing for more ambitious EU commitments: to make aid more transparent and accountable, to end the use of economic policy conditions, to make aid more predictable in the medium term, and to untie all aid.

The GAERC should signal a new approach to **Economic Partnership Agreements** (EPAs). We urge the UK government to work with other Member States to use this opportunity to put pressure on the European Commission to adopt a more flexible approach to the EPA negotiations, in order to allow for development-friendly agreements to be agreed, to reinforce regional integration processes, and to restore damaged relationships with ACP countries.

We wish you a successful GAERC meeting and look forward to hearing from you about positive outcomes from the GAERC meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Charlotte Imbert, General Secretary, British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND)



Glen Tarman, Global Council (Representative for Europe), Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)



Sarah Mulley, Coordinator UK Aid Network (UKAN)

The following BOND, GCAP and UKAN members have endorsed this letter:

- ActionAid
- CAFOD
- Christian Aid
- Concern Worldwide
- DATA
- One World Action
- Oxfam GB
- Trade Justice Movement
- World Vision

**Cc: Gareth Thomas**

BOND, Regent's Wharf, 8 All Saint's Street, London, N1 9RL  
Tel: (+44) 020 7837 8344 Fax: (+44) 020 7837 4220  
Email: [bond@bond.org.uk](mailto:bond@bond.org.uk) [www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk)

## **Policy recommendations**

On aid, the GAERC should agree Council Conclusions that:

1. Require all member states to publish **binding year-by-year timetables** showing how they will meet their aid targets.
2. Commit the EU to respecting real **democratic ownership** of the development process, and allow partner countries to be in the driving seat by:
  - **Untying** all EU aid to all countries; and
  - Phasing out **economic policy conditionality**.
2. Radically improve the **accountability** of aid, particularly to developing countries and their citizens by:
  - making monitoring and evaluation of aid truly independent;
  - establishing a complaints mechanism open to aid recipients; and
  - supporting in-country mechanisms for holding donors to account.
3. Commit the EU to good practice standards of **openness and transparency** for aid - both at home and in recipient countries. In recipient countries this includes full disclosure of all external assistance flows, programmes and projects; along with details of all conditions, benchmarks, triggers, and prior and agreed actions.
4. Set new, more ambitious targets to make multi-year, **predictable and guaranteed aid commitments** based on transparent criteria, with clear reporting to recipients of spending plans both within year and in the medium term, in line with their national budget cycles.
5. Call for further reforms to **technical assistance** (TA) to ensure that all TA responds to national priorities and builds genuine capacity in partner countries.
6. Make available the necessary human and financial resources to implement international and regional commitments towards **gender equality and women's empowerment**, and support the participation of gender advocates and women's rights organizations in the development process.
7. Ensure EU aid is **conflict sensitive**.

On Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), we urge you to push for Council Conclusions that include the following principles:

1. The most contentious clauses of interim EPA texts should be opened up for renegotiation, given the haste in which they were concluded and their potential to undermine development and regional integration.
2. The European Commission should refrain from insisting on the liberalisation of services, investment, competition, government procurement and intellectual property in EPAs, as there is no legal requirement to include them

in EPAs. ACP development concerns and choices must be allowed to drive the negotiations.

3. EPAs must contain strong and effective monitoring and review mechanisms, enabling ACP countries and regions to assess the development impact of EPAs and including the legally enforceable right to revise commitments in the light of the findings.
4. Pro-development alternatives should be provided for those countries that have not signed an EPA.