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*From the Secretary of State*

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*Dear Charlotte -*

Thank you for your letter of 16 May ahead of the GAERC meeting which took place on 26-27 May, and for your policy recommendations.

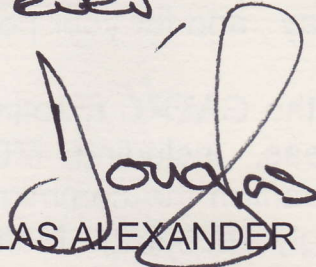
As you will be aware, the GAERC meeting produced positive outcomes in a number of areas, including MDGs and aid volumes. The conclusions strongly reaffirm the commitments made on aid volumes in 2005. They also strongly encourage Member States to establish rolling multi-annual indicative timetables, as soon as possible, for reaching their targets.

I agree that it is important for the EU to take a strong lead on aid effectiveness. 2008 is a critical year in the international effort to increase the quantity and quality of aid. The quality of aid is as important to reaching the MDGs as its quantity. The Accra High Level Forum's drive for better aid stands alongside Doha's "Financing for Development" meeting for more aid, and the "MDG Call to Action" for better results. It is vital that Accra delivers concrete measures to accelerate progress.

I welcome the GAERC Conclusions on aid effectiveness. They set a strong basis for the EU's leadership to secure maximum impact agreements at the High Level Forum on key issues identified as critical to the effectiveness of aid by partner countries. I hope you will be pleased by the positive statement that the EU will provide international leadership on strengthening transparency and accountability and will drive improvements in delivering more predictable aid vital to enable governments to plan, spend and deliver aid effectively to meet the MDGs.

On Economic Partnership Agreements, we have worked closely with a range of Member States to set out Council expectations at this important stage in the EPA process. The Conclusions cover a range of issues but specifically highlight the importance of Commission flexibility, particularly in moving from interim to regional agreements; and the important role EPAs have to play in supporting regional integration processes. The process and outcome of the next phase of negotiations will be pivotal in underpinning future relations between the EU and ACP. The UK remains committed to working with EU and ACP partners to ensure that future efforts on both EPA negotiations and implementation reflect the development-friendly objectives of EPAs, and as such will be following both issues closely over the coming period.

I welcome your valuable lobbying efforts and ongoing support on these important issues. Our next big challenge is the June European Council, where we aim to get endorsement at Heads of State level.

Yours ever,  
  
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER