



Joint Press Release (EU, PIFS, OCO, SPTO)

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For Immediate Release

European Union signs over €12 million for Pacific Tourism and Customs Capacity Building

The European Union yesterday signed assistance of €12.3 million to increase Pacific-ACP countries' ability to benefit from global trade and regional economic integration. These activities are financed under the 10th European Development Fund and are part of the **Strengthening Pacific Economic Integration Through Trade (SPEITT) programme**. The agreement was signed on 20 December 2011 between the EDF Regional Authorising Officer, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), and the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) as well as with the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) Secretariat in Suva, Fiji.

The OCO Secretariat and SPTO have been allocated Euro 7,572,880 million and 4,733,981 Euro million respectively which is part of a larger 30 million euro package agreed with the Pacific Island States to help strengthening Pacific Economic Integration through Trade, a programme that also includes funding to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

The SPEITT programme aims to:

- improve technical capabilities by facilitating trade negotiations at the regional and multilateral levels;
- promote greater integration of trade policy into national development frameworks;
- introduce better customs management and systems; and
- increase productive export capacity in key economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism.

Four regional agencies, namely the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) and the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) will implement the different components of the programme.

At the signing ceremony, the Acting Head of Delegation of the EU office in the Pacific, Ms Annick Villarosa said the EU was confident in the ability of the four agencies to deliver the ambitious targets set in the SPEITT programme for the benefit of the fifteen Pacific ACP (PACP) countries.

"The Pacific benefits from a strong regional network of organisations that have developed a comprehensive range of skills and expertise that benefit their member countries," Ms Villarosa said.

“This is why the EU is strongly committed to enhance not only the capacity of the countries themselves but also the capacity of their regional bodies. Under the 10th European Development Fund Regional programme for the Pacific, the EU committed 95 million euro for activities implemented mainly by regional organisations in Aid for Trade and sustainable management of natural resources.”

EU funding to the SPTO goes towards the **Pacific Regional Tourism Capacity Building Program (PRTCBP) project**. Implemented over 36 months (2012-2015), the total cost of the project is 5,917,476 million euro of which the SPTO contributes 1,183,495 million euro (20 per cent). The objective of the PRTCBP project is to strengthen PACP States’ productive capacity in the sustainable development of the tourism sector.

EU funding towards the OCO is for the implementation of the **Trade Facilitation in Customs Cooperation (TFCC) project**, which costs a total of 9,466,100 million euro, of which 7,572,880 (80 per cent) is from the EU and the remaining 1,893,220 million euro (20 per cent) is the contribution of the OCO Secretariat. The TFCC project aims at improving trade facilitation through improved customs management and efficient systems.

SPTO Chief Executive Officer, Ratu Ilisoni Vuidreketi assured the EU of its commitment saying it would work towards the improvement of the Pacific ACP countries’ economic integration through strengthened national systems and institutional frameworks and increase private sector competitiveness in tourism-related activities.

“The programme will significantly expand SPTO’s work programmes through more activities geared towards directly benefiting the region’s stakeholders, both public and private sector,” Mr Vuidreketi said. “We have learnt from previous EU funded programmes on the importance of sustainability and SPTO’s work plans under this programme are based on future long term sustainability, especially in the area of regional tourism capacity building.”

Mr. Kulu Bloomfield, Head of Secretariat of the Oceania Customs Organisation stated that the TFCC project has been formulated according to the needs of the PACP member countries in the Oceania region. It is focused primarily on reforms & modernisation, capacity building, legislative review & updates, trade management & facilitation, law enforcement and security. The TFCC project will assist Pacific ACP countries by contributing to their overall economic growth, ensuring sustainable development, enhancing good governance, adhering to International Free Trade Agreements terms and conditions, and improving security of trade at the border.

Mr Bloomfield said that one of the expected outcomes of the TFCC Project is to guarantee that PACP Members’ Customs Administrations maintain a level playing field for all traders by ensuring openness, transparency and fairness. It has an extremely important role to play in protecting society from prohibited and unsafe goods, detecting the minority of dishonest traders, while facilitating trade for the vast majority of compliant traders and travellers. These are amongst the many challenges and demands confronting the contemporary Customs administrations in the 21st Century.

“Customs remains the primary revenue collector in many developing countries, hence reform and modernization of this institution is critical to improving the fiscal circumstances of Pacific economies,” Mr Bloomfield added.

The Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, Mr Tuiloma Neroni Slade thanked the European Union on behalf of the Pacific saying the EU was a longstanding and important development partner for the PACP States, one which continued to demonstrate its commitment to the region in many ways.

“On behalf of the region, I thank the European Commission for its ongoing support of the goals of Forum and the region’s development priorities articulated through the Pacific Plan. We thank you for the partnership you have forged with us, and we look forward to working closely with you for many years to come,” Mr Slade said.

“Regional Economic Integration is an important objective of both the Pacific Plan and the European Commission’s ongoing engagement with Pacific ACP States. Economic growth together with sustainable development, good governance and security for Pacific countries, are key goals of the Forum, goals that the Member States of the European Union have supported for many years through the European Development Fund. The 10th EDF Regional Indicative Programme sets out an ambitious agenda to support the Pacific as it strengthens shared regional approaches to critical development challenges and deepens cooperation and integration. The projects that are being initiated today directly support the goal of deeper integration through regionalism, and I urge the implementing agencies to effectively coordinate their work and assist in progressing the Pacific Leaders’ desire for regional integration,” Mr Slade added.

Background

The EU has earmarked €95 million for the Pacific region under the 10th EDF Regional Indicative Programme (RIP). It is broken down as follows: Regional economic integration - €45 million (including the programme adopted today); Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment - €40 million; and Non state actors, technical cooperation, etc. - €10 million.

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