Resolution on world hunger and the elimination of barriers to trade with the poorest countries

2003/2512(RSP) - 30/01/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on world hunger and the elimination of barriers to trade with the world's poorest countries. It expressed its grave concern about the looming humanitarian disasters throughout the world and the impact of AIDS in Africa. For southern Africa the traditional pattern of humanitarian assistance is simply not a viable option at this time. The capacities of governments across the region to deal with the impact of the current humanitarian crisis have been weakened by the HIV/Aids pandemic, which is threatening an entire generation of working-age adults and leaving in its wake millions of orphans. According to UNCTAD, the number of people living in extreme poverty in LDCs for which data is available has more than doubled over the last 30 years, rising from 138 million in the 1960s to 307 million in the 1990s. If current trends persist, the number of people living on less than USD 1 a day will rise from 307 million to 420 million by 2015. Parliament pointed out that 900 people around the world die of hunger every hour and 800 million people, including 300 million children, do not have sufficient food supplies. The gap between the richest and the poorest has widened. Even worse, the gap between the least-developed countries (LDCs) and other developing countries has grown even wider since the 1990s. Long-term food security is of prime importance to the LDCs. Parliament stated that the latter need domestic protection in order to be able to strengthen their own agriculture. The best way forward is to implement a broad-based policy for sustainable development and growth and poverty reduction, and the elimination of barriers to trade constitutes an essential component of this policy. It applauded the Union's 'Everything But Arms' initiative -which aims to eliminate the customs duties applied to the exports to the EU (apart from arms) of the 48 poorest countries in the world - and called on other developed countries, particular the United States to take similar measures. This initiative is a first trade policy signal, and must be accompanied by other measures, and must also be brought into line with the Cotonou agreement, maintaining stable prices for the main sensitive products of the family-type small farming economy in both northern and southern countries. Apart from market access issues, including the non-tariff aspects, the Community should also address supply-side constraints and competitiveness, trade development measures, technology transfers, debt cancellation, access to information and global networks, strategies to promote investment and private sector development. According to World Bank estimates, the high level of duties imposed by the developed countries on the products exported by the developing countries (which, according to Oxfam, are on average four times higher than those imposed by the developing countries on the products exported by the developed countries) cost the developing countries around EUR 100 billion, or twice what they receive in aid. Parliament emphasised the importance of helping the developing countries to meet the European Union's regulatory criteria, in particular sanitary, phytosanitary and food safety standards. It felt that food security and access to resources should be the main focus of negotiations on future ACP-EU trade systems.Finally, it asked the Commission to step up its programmes to assist in the training of negotiators for the developing countries and to help them to implement what they have obtained in negotiations.