

REACH nears final stage

The European Parliament looks set to give the final go-ahead to a European law that from April 2007 will set up a system for the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals (REACH). It will force manufacturers and importers to list the substances they produce and any of their possible dangers, affecting an estimated 30,000 of the 100,000 chemicals currently on the EU market. Many of these are found in everyday items like soap, toys and garden products. A key factor driving the legislation has been uncertainty over the impact of chemicals on human health and the environment. Since 1981 EU legislation has made testing compulsory but safeguards still do not exist for the estimated 100,000 substances, which were already on the market. The objective of REACH is threefold: to control dangerous chemicals, to substitute the most dangerous chemicals with less hazardous ones and finally to replace 40 incoherent pieces of legislation with one law. All this must be done whilst minimising the testing on and suffering of animals by the sharing of information amongst chemical companies and maximising the use of non-animal tests.

Commission must honour ILO agreements

The move by European Commissioner Peter Mandelson to include International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions for decent working conditions in trade agreements, and in negotiations for general systems of preference (GSPs) deals, is to be welcomed. However, on closer examination, the level of implementation of existing ILO conventions in many third world countries has been negligible. So, while the rhetoric and the content of EU trade deals signify an appetite to push for global improvements in workers' rights, the real test of how serious the Commission is about decent work lies in its willingness to insist that third countries outlaw the persecution of trade unionists and ban child and indentured labour before agreements are signed.

Plan to Ban Primate Experiments in Europe

Being one of the joint sponsors of the European Parliament Declaration to end primate research across the European Union (EU) I believe that we must halt the use of chimpanzees and monkeys in experiments in Europe in the next six years. A new report called 'Primate Nations' has highlighted the suffering of Europe's 10,000 laboratory primates – uncontrollable diarrhoea, liver failure, brain damage, and death - and describes how these tests can be replaced with advanced techniques based upon human data. As well as the ethical considerations and the suffering our near relatives go through, there is much evidence that research on primates does not benefit human health. For example, chimpanzees – our nearest genetic kin - are essentially immune to AIDS, common malaria and hepatitis B. Countless treatments for strokes have been developed on primates, yet many of them have failed or even harmed human patients in clinical tests. The recent TGN1412 experimental drug trial, which caused serious damage to human volunteers, such as head swelling, had previously been given to monkeys with no side effects thus illustrating the non-transferability of test results. We are asking for the European Commission to bring forward legislation to end all non-human primate experiments

Continuing concern at situation in Gaza

MEPs adopted a joint resolution on the situation in Gaza expressing their serious indignation at the military operation carried out in Beit Hanun and in Gaza. The European Union (EU) must do everything in its power and use every instrument at its disposal, including the EU association agreement with Israel, to end the violence in Gaza. The ongoing violence condemns the Palestinians to a slow death and risks setting the whole of the Middle East on fire. Death and famine are not fertile ground for peace. We need an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza, resumption of aid to Palestine and support for a government of

national unity. I fully support the idea of an international peace conference bringing together all the political forces in the Middle East, including Syria and Iran. We need an international force in Gaza as a matter of urgency.

European Union to ban import of cat and dog fur

Following a huge public campaign and consistent pressure from MEPs the European Commission has finally agreed to bring forward legislation to ban the import of cat and dog fur for use in clothing and the making of toys. Most dog and cat fur comes from countries in the Far East, especially China, and investigations have revealed animals kept in horrific conditions and brutally slaughtered. Every year, about 2 million cats and dogs are killed for their fur - 5,000 each day. Some dogs and cats are bred on farms, others are rounded up and sold for their skins. An estimated 500,000 cats are raised only for their pelts. German Shepherds are the most commonly killed dogs in China, as their fur resembles that of wild animals such as coyote or raccoon. Last year, 364 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) signed up to a Written Declaration supporting such a ban.

MEPs set to back more funding for democracy and human rights

One of the most exciting developments to come from the European Parliament in recent times is the active promotion of 'soft power' - the idea that you promote and export your key values, not by force, but by argument and example. The European Parliament is supporting the 'European initiative for democracy and human rights' in over 1000 projects in 32 countries. With funding due to dry up for these projects by the end of the year MEPs are pushing for a 1.1 billion Euro budget for the next seven years. These funds are crucial for projects in some of the world's toughest places on earth - such as assisting reconciliation in Sudan's 22-year civil war. The European initiative for democracy and human rights was created in 1994 at the behest of the European Parliament.

European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

This month the European Parliament will debate an agreement between the Employment Committee and the Council on the proposal to establish a European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF). The fund will provide 500 million Euros each year to help reintegrate into the labour market workers made redundant due to changes in global trade patterns.

Parliamentary conference on WTO calls for talks to resume

A Parliamentary Conference on the WTO consisting of 200 parliamentarians from over 70 countries has called for a resumption of talks. A successful completion of the Doha round of trade talks is vital if we are to enable developing countries to trade their way out of poverty. What we must ensure is that the various commitments that have been made up until now within the Doha round are delivered upon. If Doha is to genuinely be a development round it is absolutely essential that developed countries stand by their commitment to abolish agricultural export subsidies by 2013. However market access is not enough, developing countries need 'aid for trade' that will help them build the capacity to enable them to exploit market access and help them create jobs. Decent work is vital in the fight against poverty. It is vital that pledges made at the WTO and Gleneagles last year, such as the commitment from the EU and its Member States to deliver annually a billion Euros each in 'aid for trade' are delivered upon, regardless of the outcome of the Doha round. Developing countries need this assistance both to provide the investment and institutions which will enable them to trade their way out of poverty, and to supply the tools required to represent themselves more effectively within negotiations at the WTO. I am currently drafting a report for the European Parliament's International Trade Committee on 'Aid for Trade', which will call for greater transparency, scrutiny, and more coordinated delivery of the European Commission's and Member States' aid for trade commitments.

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