

### **Peter Custers:**

My name is Peter Custers and I represent the Dutch Convening Committee which has worked with the GUE/NGL to prepare for this international meeting.

Welcome to the MEPs, experts representing the academia, grass roots' organizations and NGOs from African countries, and representatives of European NGOs, the diaspora and other participants. It is a great pleasure to address you all as the coordinator of the Dutch Convening Committee. Having initiated the process towards the holding of this event, we feel proud that the conference has materialized. I would like to express my gratitude to the GUE/NGL and the democratic spirit displayed, to the funding agencies, foremost of which are HIVOS who came in at the initial phase, Christian Aid of the UK, and ICCO of the Netherlands. The organisers, the GUE/NGL and the Convening Committee, have consciously chosen to leave it to African experts to explain what have been the effects of globalization and globalization policies upon the Sub-Saharan countries and populations, and to put forward alternative policy proposals towards solution of the region's existing poverty crisis. I will therefore limit myself to just a few comments on the topicality of this Meeting.

Since proponents of globalization even as the crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa got further aggravated in the late 1990s, have continued to argue that Africa - instead of suffering from the consequences of globalization, rather suffers from lack of integration in processes of globalization, - it needs to be stressed over and over again that African Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and their populations more than any other Southern region or continent face the negative impact of several trading mechanisms at one and the same time. Not only has Northern protectionism around cotton production and around the production of other agricultural commodities increased the deprivation of peasant producers in Sub-Saharan Africa; moreover, since the terms of trade for primary products, through the second half of the 1990s, have continued to show an overall downward trend, the overlapping mechanism of unequal exchange too has hampered the possibilities of African LDCs to realize growth and increased welfare for their populations.

But the region of African LDCs, in particular since the later part of the 1990s, has yet coped with a *third* unjust trading mechanism, which needs to be analyzed in the context of globalization, i.e. the international exchange of raw materials against arms. My area of theoretical research being arms' production and arms' exports, I like to draw attention – if only very, very briefly – to the relationship between globalization and the numerous wars which have been fought in Sub-Saharan Africa causing the loss of many millions of human lives. Two links, I believe, stand out in particular, if both the preconditions leading to the wars, and the methods of financing these wars be analyzed. One common factor behind the majority of the civil wars has been the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) implemented at the behest of the Bretton Woods institutions, World Bank and IMF. These have led to the *de-legitimation* of the social state, and to the channeling of the energies of marginalized people into military and rebel activities (Rwanda/Sierra Leone eg.). Again - as by now is well known - there is a striking pattern in the way warring parties in Sudan, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Ivory

Coast have sought to finance their military campaigns, namely through the international exchange of raw materials against arms. Although this mechanism is not generally placed in the context of globalization, - in my view the emergence of this pattern is *indirectly* linked to the orientation of Sub-Saharan economies on the exports of primary commodities.

I now wish to briefly describe how the initiative of this Experts' Meeting came to be launched. Until September of last year the promotion of international campaign work in support of the populations of African LDCs was somewhat hampered by the fact that African governments appeared to be rather muted in their criticisms of globalization and globalization policies. Events during the Conference of the WTO in Cancun, however, have decisively changed our context of operation. As duly reported in the world's media – it was the impoverished cotton-producing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa which initiated the battle over Northern protectionism around agriculture, when they tabled the demand for withdrawal of Northern subsidies around cotton production on the very first day of the Cancun summit. And although the struggles which the weakest Southern states together put up against the US and against the EU was to be overshadowed by the resistance put up by the Coalition of Twenty led by Brazil, China and India, - there is no doubt that African peasant organizations, African NGO-campaigners and African governmental delegations played a very active role in Cancun, in opposing the unjust propositions of Northern governments and Northern-dominated institutions.

Further – the launching of this International Experts' Meeting on Globalization and Sub-Saharan Africa has also been influenced by experiences at the numerous Conferences and seminars which have been staged around globalization over the last five years, including at the annual World Social Forums (WSF). Although issues relating to the poverty crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa – such as the external debt issue - have figured at the forums that have been held, - it is also true that the given region has so far not received an attention from the critics of globalization that is in accordance with the size of the region's problems of undernourishment, violence and destruction. As I personally noted when attending the World Social Forum held in Mumbai, India, in January last – although a number of workshops were held here on specifically African issues – partly under the banner of the African Social Forum -; and although the number of African participants attending the WSF reportedly showed a rising trend, - there still was a mismatch between the quite limited attention devoted to Sub-Saharan Africa on the one hand, - and the catastrophic impact which globalization policies have had for this region. One of the aims behind the holding of this Experts' Meeting thus is to help promote that this situation be redressed.

The Convening Committee consisting of representatives of four Dutch organizations, i.e. the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA), Both Ends, the Transnational Institute (TNI) and XminusY Solidarity Fund, is convinced it's high time an international campaign be launched to question the policies of the international trade- and financial institutions (WTO, WB and IMF) vis-à-vis Sub-Saharan Africa. The need for such is underscored by the latest policy paper of the Dutch government for the region ('Strong People, Weak States'), which refers to the problem of 'bad governance' in Sub-Saharan

Africa, but fails to discuss the *de-legitimisation* of the social state under the influence of SAPs; the paper refers in one single sentences to the need to influence the policymaking of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) with regard to Sub-Saharan natural resources, but fails to target the drastic policy changes at the level of the IFIs, required to help restore the social state. We are deeply convinced that the poverty crisis existing in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be resolved, until and unless sustained campaign- and lobbying efforts of social organizations worldwide lead the international financial institutions to change gear with regard to their macro-economic policymaking vis-à-vis the region.

In order to prepare for the debates of this Experts' Meeting, the Convening Committee has drafted an *Introductory Paper*, which is included in the folder distributed towards all participants. At the explicit advice of African experts, including professor Yash Tandon, most sessions of this Experts' Meeting are oriented towards drawing up an *alternative policy-agenda*. Not without some hesitations, the four founding members of the Convening Committee, Basker Vashee, Wiert Wiertsema, Sihle Dube and myself, have concluded that we could best structure the debates on alternatives around *three topics*, i.e.: \* the debt issue which after years of international campaigning remains unresolved, \* trade-related issues, and the right of African countries to protect their economies against the negative impact of participation in international trade; and \* the restoration of the social state. In the *Introductory Paper* you find our *initial* positions on these issues. The issues of course need to be openly and frankly debated between African experts presenting keynote addresses and responses during the various sessions, and Europe-based participants. I would like to end my introductory speech by expressing the hope of the Convening Committee that this Experts' Meeting indeed will emanate in common positions laid down in a Declaration, so that the Meeting can immediately be followed by sustained campaign- and lobbying efforts.

I hope at the end of the session to discuss the formation of a drafting committee