

ICAC Plenary Meeting, 2-4 Dec, Mumbai

EU speaking points

Honorable Ministers and Representatives, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting the EU to present its perspectives on the cotton sector on the occasion of this Plenary.

1. On behalf of the EU, I would like to present a brief update from three perspectives. Firstly as a producer of cotton. Secondly, as an important financial partner in Africa for a sustainable, resilient and viable cotton sector for smallholders. Finally, as world's top importer of textile, striving for sustainable value chains of products consumed in the EU.

COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE EU

2. As you know, cotton production in the EU is concentrated in Greece and Spain mostly. Greece is the top producer in the EU and the 13th in the world (in volumes), it is also the 7th most important global exporter.
3. We are proud that more than 75% of production in the EU is now organic, including integrated pest management techniques. Exemplary is also the governance of the cotton sector in the EU, with strong farmers associations, ginners associations and interprofessional organizations working closely with research institutions.
4. In both countries, cotton farmers benefit from support under the new Common Agricultural Policy of the EU that is conditioned to the use of good environmental and agricultural practices.
5. Resilience of cotton production against extreme weather conditions, including drought, is probably the biggest challenge for EU's cotton production. We believe that the strong governance, linked to research and good agricultural practices, will play an essential role in building this resilience.

EU FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

6. The EU is also a strong donor and technical partner for the cotton sector, especially in Africa and in the Cotton four countries (C4). The sustainability and resilience of the cotton sectors in these regions are at the heart of our engagement. Of concern are the heavy use of pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers, combined with slow adoption of adequate agricultural practices and the resulting exhaustion of soils in cotton lands. This undermines the resilience of the sector against climate change, pests and many other shocks.
7. Evidence shows that the benefits of transitioning to organic production can be very high for farmers, but that transition is also challenging, for example because of lack of access to

finance for MSME's to switch to organic solutions. The EU applauds the expansion of initiatives such as 'Cotton Made in Africa' and 'Better Cotton in Africa' which provide good perspectives.

8. The sustainability challenge is important but it is key because cotton was and remains a crucial crop for sustainable development in Africa and in the C4. Considered together, West African countries come on the sixth place in world production of cotton. As a whole, Africa takes 18% of world exports of cotton lint. For some countries (Mali, Tchad...), more than 30% of export earnings from cotton and millions of farmers depend on cotton for their livelihood (in total they represent about 2.4 Mill people in the least developed countries in Africa).
9. For these reasons, the Commission, through the EU DG INTPA, and EU Member States continue to be the most important financial partners supporting sustainable cotton production in Africa. Taken together, they have more EUR 230 Mill worth of ongoing or recently finalized projects. In the C4 countries, the Commission, France and Germany are the biggest European donors. The focus is on environmental sustainability, like in the SODECOTON project in Cameroon, on organic production, on resilience, and on developing local value chains, including that of the by-products of cotton.

SUSTAINABILITY REQUIREMENTS OF THE EU

10. Finally, and this is our third topic, the EU is the most important importer of textiles – with the value of EU imports representing 43% of total imports globally. With the adoption of the EU Green Deal, the EU is taking major steps to increase sustainability in both production and consumption and looking at ways to work along the entire value chain to promote its ambitions in terms of sustainability. The cotton sector makes no exception, and there is increased scrutiny and regulatory pressure regarding the environmental footprint of cotton production as well as labor and human rights issues in textile production. The ICAC should be the forum where we discuss some of these issues together, in agreement with other Member states, that is in a multilateral manner.

CLOSING

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. To conclude, I would like to reiterate mostly that the EU promotes sustainable cotton production and believes that this issue should be even further mainstreamed in the ICAC dialogue.
12. We wish to thank the ICAC for hosting this country presentation and we look forward to working further with all of you. Thank you and best regards [from Brussels].