



Press Release

EUROPEAN KAVA BAN PROBABLY UNJUSTIFIED

This is the opinion of many delegates attending the PRO€INVEST* / CDE** sponsored Pacific European Kava stakeholders meeting. The event, which took place on the 25th and 26th August in Brussels, was attended by leading professional and scientific associations, herbal experts and representatives from the most important manufacturers of kava products in Europe as well as leading exporters from the Pacific. The meeting also included representatives of international organizations such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), World Health Organization (WHO), European Commission (EC), Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) and the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC).

Kava is a traditional beverage that is consumed in the Pacific region and plays an important role in the social life in the communities of the region. For about two thousand years it has been used without showing any kind of adverse effects. Due to its positive effects in the treatment of patients suffering from anxiety disorders and stress as well as its good tolerability, kava soon became a highly appreciated drug all over the world, particularly in Europe.

Last year the German Health authorities (BfArM) banned kava-containing products due to reports of cases of liver damage that, in their opinion, were related to kava intake. Many other European governments followed the German example and ordered kava off the shelves.

Now a comprehensive report by Phytopharm Consulting (Berlin, Germany), commissioned by the Centre for Development of Enterprise (CDE), concludes that kava can be regarded as a safe and effective herbal medicinal product, and that the measures taken by European health authorities are inappropriate and unjustified. The report was presented at the meeting and handed out to all the participating organizations and parties.

Jaindra Kumar, Director of Trade and Investment of the PIFS drew a frightening picture of the negative economic effects of the ban on the four major kava-producing Pacific Islands of Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. Largely unrecognized in Europe thousands of hectares in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu put under kava culture have had to be abandoned due to the massive decline in kava exports; their export markets have been practically destroyed overnight. Many companies were forced into closure and the livelihood of thousands of people of the poor rural communities have been threatened. Furthermore, it revealed that European companies, too, suffered massive losses and that patients are deprived of a valuable medicine against anxiety and stress.

As a first step in fighting the ban the meeting agreed to establish a Pacific-European “Kava Executive Committee” to coordinate a lobbying campaign to get kava back into European pharmacies. Dr. Joerg Gruenwald of Phytopharm Consulting who organized the meeting on behalf of PRO€INVEST and CDE said: “It is a scandal how herbal products are treated. All synthetic products used in the same indications have a much higher incidence of toxicity or strong addiction potential. Kava is safe and effective proved by many studies compared to most other drugs in this indication. Therefore, the situation has to be re-analyzed.” Anthony Bush, who attended the meeting on behalf of the European Health Product Manufacturers Association went on to say "it is important that consumer choice is protected and that the public have the widest possible selection of herbal solutions available.”

*The meeting was sponsored by PRO€INVEST (*Note 1) www.proinvest-eu.org and the EU-ACP Center for Development of Enterprise (CDE) (**Note 2) www.cde.int*

For further details on the meeting and follow up activities please contact:
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*Note 1: **PRO€INVEST** is a EU-ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) partnership programme developed and undertaken by the European Commission on behalf of the ACP countries. PRO€INVEST is managed by the CDE under the supervision of the EuropeAid Co-operation Office of the European Commission.

Note 2: **CDE (Center for Development of Enterprise) is a joint EU-ACP institution devoted to private sector enterprise development in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific under the Cotonou Agreement.