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MEDIA RELEASE

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Door slammed on unions, health organisations at latest RCEP negotiations

More than sixty civil society organisations covering all sixteen Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) countries have called for meaningful stakeholder engagement after they were locked out the latest negotiating round in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

In their [open letter](#) to RCEP governments, the group writes that the RCEP negotiations will have an impact on the daily lives of citizens, including in essential areas like medicines, quality work opportunities, small businesses, financial stability, indigenous knowledge and environmental protection.

The letter states: “The diverse communities who are affected by such an important negotiation need to know what is being proposed and have effective opportunities to express their views and concerns, and provide analysis and advice to the negotiators.”

AFTINET Convener Dr Patricia Ranald said civil society groups had hoped that the level of stakeholder engagement would improve after the last two negotiating rounds provided some limited opportunity for representatives to present their views.

“However, instead of improving the level of transparency and engagement with civil society, at Ho Chi Minh the door was once again slammed in our faces,” said Dr Ranald.

“Even the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, which were infamous for their secrecy, contained more opportunities for civil society consultation.

“We know that business groups have been invited to express their views to RCEP governments and civil society organisations representing millions of people deserve the same level of engagement.

“This agreement will have an impact on the daily lives of citizens in each RCEP country, including Australia. We’re calling for the release of all negotiating texts and for civil society organisations to have a seat at the table at all future negotiating rounds.”

Contact Dr Patricia Ranald 0419 695 841

An open letter to the sixteen governments negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

According to the guiding principles for negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) you aim to achieve ‘a modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial partnership agreement’ among the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN’s free trade agreement (FTA) Partners, covering trade in goods, trade in services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement and other issues.

These matters all affect the daily lives of the peoples of all sixteen countries involved in these negotiations¹ – access to affordable life-saving medicines, stable good quality work, the viability of small farms and businesses, financial stability, indigenous knowledge, environmental protection, climate change mitigation, and much more.

The diverse communities who are affected by such an important negotiation need to know what is being proposed and have effective opportunities to express their views and concerns, and provide analysis and advice to the negotiators.

Six of you - Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam – have already recognised the importance of stakeholder engagement during the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement negotiations by including a stakeholder process as part of the negotiating rounds that you hosted. That was still not adequate, especially given the secrecy of the negotiating texts, and stopped before the agreement was concluded.

We understand that commercial interests have been invited to share their views with you during previous RCEP rounds. Yet the RCEP process has remained closed to civil society. It was not until the twelfth round of negotiations that stakeholders, other than commercial interests, were given even a limited opportunity to express our concerns.

We had assumed that engagement with stakeholders in Perth and at the next round in Auckland would continue into the future and expand to something at least akin to the TPPA. But in the latest round the door was shut again. The exclusion of civil society will only heighten suspicion and concern about what is being negotiated.

We therefore call on you to provide an effective opportunity for stakeholder interaction in all future rounds with advance notice of when and where they will be held, and release the working texts at the end of each round to allow a full assessment and informed debate to begin about the implications of RCEP, even at this late stage in the negotiations.

¹ Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Viet Nam,

Signatory civil society organisations

Organisation	RCEP country
Electronic Frontier Foundation	Global
GRAIN	Global
International League of Peoples Struggle (ILPS) - Peasant Commission	Global
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)	Global
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development (APWLD)	Regional
Building and Wood Workers' International Asia-Pacific	Regional
Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN)	Regional
Public Services International, Asia-Pacific	Regional
Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance	Regional
Asian Peasant Coalition (APC)	Regional
People's Health Movement Australia	Australia
Public Health Association of Australia	Australia
Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network	Australia
Social Action for Change	Cambodia
Women's Network for Unity	Cambodia
Cambodian Grassroots Cross-sector Network	Cambodia
Cambodian Labour Confederation	Cambodia
The Messenger Band	Cambodia
United Sisterhood Alliance	Cambodia
Rainbow Community Kampuchea	Cambodia
Forum Against FTAs	India
Thanal	India
Alliance for a Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture	India
Save our Rice Campaign - India	India
Tamilnadu organic farmers federation	India
Vithu trust	India
Serikat Perempuan Indonesia	Indonesia
Indonesia for Global Justice	Indonesia
Kolektif Anarkonesia	Indonesia
Institut Perempuan	Indonesia
Ahimsa Society	Indonesia
Federation of Indonesian Labours Struggle (FPBI)	Indonesia
People's Action against TPP	Japan

Organisation	RCEP country
Pacific Asia Resource Center, PARC	Japan
Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+)	Malaysia
Consumers' Association of Penang	Malaysia
Sahabat Alam (Friends of the Earth) Malaysia	Malaysia
Cooperative Committee of Trade Union	Myanmar
It's Our Future	New Zealand
New Zealand Council of Trade Unions	New Zealand
Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas or Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP)	Philippines
Resistance and Solidarity against Agrochem Transnational Corporations (RESIST)	Philippines
Sentro ng Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa	Philippines
Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services	Philippines
Knowledge Commune	South Korea
IPLeft	South Korea
The International Trade Committee of the MINBYUN	South Korea
Korean Federation of Medical Groups for Healthrights (KFHR)	South Korea
People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy	South Korea
AIDS ACCESS Foundation	Thailand
Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN)	Thailand
BioThai Foundation	Thailand
Drug Study Group	Thailand
Ecological Alert and Recovery – Thailand (EARTH)	Thailand
Foundation for AIDS Rights	Thailand
Foundation for Consumers	Thailand
Foundation for Women	Thailand
FTA Watch	Thailand
Indigenous Women's Network of Thailand	Thailand
Renal Failure Patient Group	Thailand
Rural Pharmacy Association	Thailand
Thai Holistic Health Foundation	Thailand
Thai Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (TNP+)	Thailand
The Women's Network for Progress and Peace	Thailand
Vietnam Network of People living with HIV (VNP+)	Vietnam

