



BULLETIN October 2021

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1. Introduction

Dear Members,

In this month’s Bulletin, we’re bringing you some major updates on our campaigns on RCEP and global vaccine equity.

In disappointing news, Parliament has given the green light to RCEP by passing its enabling legislation. Despite AFTINET and community concerns about the trade deal’s impact on human rights and labour rights, the Labor Opposition voted in support of the Government, with the Greens and Independent Senator Rex Patrick voting against.

Meanwhile, the campaign for global vaccine equity through a waiver on WTO rules on medicines monopolies continues to gain momentum in the lead up to a WTO Ministerial meeting at the end of the year. At home, Labor called on the Government to co-sponsor the proposal, while activists across Europe and the globe rallied to pressure the WTO to take urgent action on the TRIPS waiver. But despite mobilisations in a global ‘Day of Shame’, the WTO TRIPS Council failed to reach agreement, deferring the debate until key meetings in November and December.

AFTINET relies on your support to continue our campaigns. If you have not already done so, you can renew your AFTINET membership [here](#), donate [here](#) or buy the unique AFTINET 20th Anniversary cloth banners or T-Towels with Wilcox and Tandberg cartoons [here](#).

Thanks and keep safe.

The AFTINET Team.

2. Welcome! Tim Ginty joins AFTINET as our Trade Justice Coordinator



We would like to welcome our new Trade Justice Coordinator, **Tim Ginty**, to the AFTINET team. Tim will be using his expertise in communications, fundraising and campaigning to help us continue advocating for fair trade.

Tim has previously worked in social justice and international aid organisations, and he has a passion for internationalism and global justice.

“I’m very excited to be part of an organisation that has been leading the fight for fair trade in Australia for more than 20 years. I’ll be working hard to help AFTINET achieve its campaigning goals, and I look forward to getting to know everyone in the AFTINET community.”

If you would like to meet Tim and hear about his role, join us by Zoom at the [AFTINET 2021 AGM](#) at 5.30 pm on November 10!

We would like to thank our generous supporters and members whose contributions have helped us bring Tim on board as our new Trade Justice Coordinator.

We would also like to give special thanks to **Peter Murphy** for his work over recent months in delivering AFTINET’s communications and social media.

3. Join us at the AFTINET 2021 AGM, 5.30 pm Wednesday November 10!



At our Annual General Meeting on **November 10** at **5:30pm**, Associate Professor **Deborah Gleeson** (La Trobe University) will join us in a discussion on how the global trade system can help or hinder efforts to vaccinate the world.

Deborah Gleeson is a recognised international expert on trade and public health. She has published widely and been a leading voice in the Australian debate about the need to temporarily waive some World Trade Organization (WTO) intellectual property rules during the pandemic.

If you have not renewed your membership, but would like to join the AGM, you can renew [here](#)

As the AGM is an online event, registration is essential.

[Register your attendance!](#)

4. Campaign update: Parliament passes RCEP, despite acknowledging flaws

Despite acknowledging many of our criticisms of the RCEP, [the Labor Opposition has voted with the Government](#) in support of the RCEP enabling legislation. The Greens and the independent Rex Patrick voted against the legislation.

The government will now proceed with the ratification process by exchanging letters with RCEP governments as required by the agreement.

AFTINET urged parliamentarians to delay the vote to allow for amendments to be made to the text.

Writing on behalf of 13 national civil society organisations, collectively representing millions of Australians, AFTINET re-circulated a [letter detailing community concerns](#) that the agreement has no commitments to human rights and labour rights, would legitimise the brutal military regime in Myanmar, could restrict local industry development, increase the risk of exploitation of temporary

migrant workers, restrict regulation of aged care services, and restrict State Government regulation of emissions from power stations.

The **Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)** also called on parliamentarians to “oppose ratification of RCEP in its current form”, citing recognition of the Myanmar regime, dangers of further abuse and exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers, and threats to regulation of Aged Care, including by implementing the important recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission.

The **Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)** also warned in a media statement that the trade deal will hurt aged care workers, saying:

“If you agree that the Aged Care system needs more regulation, then you must ensure that there are absolutely no impediments to implementing change. If the RCEP deal goes ahead in its current form it runs the risk of providing loopholes for private overseas companies to avoid being held accountable for how they provide care to aged care residents.”

In Indonesia, civil [society organisations have also urged](#) the Indonesian House of Representatives to “not ratify the RCEP Agreement before conducting a comprehensive analysis on the RCEP agreement’s impacts and disclose the results to the public”

AFTINET’s [media release](#) urged Parliament to monitor the impacts of the agreement and seek changes at the two -year review scheduled to take place after its implementation.

5. One year on since the TRIPS Waiver proposal, Global civil society mobilises in support of vaccine equity

One year ago, and seven months into the COVID-19 pandemic, India and South Africa put forward the “TRIPS Waiver” proposal: a ground-breaking solution for a temporary waiver on WTO rules that give pharmaceutical companies 20-year monopolies on COVID-related vaccines and related products.

In the past year, the TRIPS Waiver has received a surge of global support and solidarity from civil society activists and over 100 governments, determined to make the waiver a reality. Despite this overwhelming support, a small minority of high-income governments (including the EU, UK, Norway and Switzerland) do not support the waiver.

Meanwhile, more than 3.6 million people have lost their lives since the proposal was first introduced to the WTO on 2 October 2020.

Coinciding with the **WTO TRIPS Council** meeting in Geneva earlier this month, [activists across Europe and the globe mobilised](#) to call on European countries to #StopTheBlock of a waiver on intellectual property monopolies on COVID vaccines.

Campaigners declared a ‘Day of Shame’, as activists protested in front of embassies and parliaments in London, Oslo, Vienna, Geneva and South Africa.

[See photos from the ‘Day of Shame’](#)

6. 'To be continued': WTO decision on vaccine monopolies delayed 'till end of year

This month's meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Council has [failed to decide](#) on the temporary waiver on monopoly rights for COVID-19 vaccines and related products, despite support from over 100 WTO member countries and numerous [expert reports](#) and [protests](#) urging it to do so.

Informal bilateral and other discussions will now continue towards a **WTO TRIPS Council** meeting on November 5 and a **WTO General Council Meeting** on November 22-23 which will consider a broad statement on trade and health, which will include a section dealing with the waiver proposal.

This statement will then be debated at the **WTO Ministerial Meeting** on November 30-December 3. Pharmaceutical companies are still pressuring a few governments like the UK, Germany, Norway and Switzerland to block the waiver, while millions die and more infectious strains of the virus develop.

In the lead-up to the meetings, the White House has reiterated its support for the waiver, [saying](#): "*We also need every WTO member to step up as well and support an intellectual property waiver, and every company must act ambitiously and urgently to expand manufacturing now.*"

The necessity and urgency of the waiver for vaccine monopolies has been dramatised by a [report by the US Public Citizen organisation](#) which has analysed secret leaked contracts that expose Pfizer's ruthless use of its monopoly over the supply and price of vaccines to extract maximum profits, and reduce its own risks.

AFTINET will be joining allies in actions leading up to the WTO November meetings. **To keep up the pressure, please share [this video](#) from [The People's Vaccine Alliance](#):**



7. Campaign update: Labor calls on Government to co-sponsor WTO vaccine monopolies waiver

Ahead of the WTO's TRIPS Council meeting, [Labor called on the Government](#) to co-sponsor a waiver on medical monopolies.

In a media statement, Shadow Minister for Trade **Madeleine King**, called on her counterpart, **Dan Tehan**, to “build a coalition of support for the TRIPS waiver in the WTO” and to “co-sponsor the COVID-19 vaccine waiver in the WTO”, saying:

“Our global economy will only move through the COVID-19 global pandemic if vaccines are available to all. Vaccine accessibility in both developed and developing nations is imperative for global supply chains to recover.”

The Shadow Minister adds her voice to the growing coalition of civil society organisations calling on Australia to co-sponsor the vaccine waiver at the WTO, including **AFTINET, ActionAid, Amnesty International, Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Catholic Bishop's Office for Social Justice, Ecology and Peace, The Salvation Army, Medecins Sans Frontieres, Oxfam, Public Health Association of Australia, Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA**, and the **Uniting Church**.

8. AFTINET in the news: Campaign for global vaccine equity featured on ABC

The campaign for global vaccine equity through a TRIPS Waiver was featured across ABC News, with AFTINET Convenor **Dr. Patricia Ranald** telling ABC Radio National AM:

“If the World Trade Organization cannot respond to the needs of the majority of people in the world... this will be a significant failure for the WTO.”

[Listen to the interview](#) and [read the story](#)

9. Colombia: Environmental defenders criticise ISDS tribunal decision favouring Canadian mining giant

An investor–state dispute settlement ([ISDS tribunal has released its final decision](#)) on a 2018 case launched against the Republic of Colombia by Canadian mining giant Eco Oro Minerals under the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

While the Tribunal concluded that the environmental protection measures adopted by Colombia were legitimate and did not constitute an indirect expropriation of the property of Eco Oro Minerals, it ruled that the Colombian Government's process of decision-making had not granted the mining company "fair and equitable treatment" in accordance with the "minimum standard of treatment" for foreigner investors.

Environmental defenders have rejected the decision, saying in a joint media statement: “This decision allows mining investment to prevail over the Colombian State's obligation to protect the environment and the water of Colombians.”

Protesting the decision and ISDS clauses in the Canada-Colombia FTA, environmental activists rallied in front of the Canadian Embassy in Bogota.

While the tribunal has yet to make a decision about compensation to be paid, Eco Oro Minerals is claiming nearly \$700 USD million.

The company's legal costs are being funded by hedge fund investors who will get a percentage of any costs awarded, a process [which encourages large ISDS claims at the expense of public interest regulation.](#)