

AFTINET Bulletin 20, 7/6/01: WTO International Sign-on Statement

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The statement below is sponsored by the Council of Canadians and the Third World Network, Malaysia. It is for organisations only to sign. If your organisation wishes to sign, you can do so at www.canadians.org. (click on the "Our World is Not for Sale" logo).

Letter from Martin Khor, Third World Network, Malaysia

Following the original WTO Shrink or Sink statement (<http://www.tradewatch.org/gattwto/ShrinkSink/shrinksinkhome.html>) signed by many hundreds of groups and first issued in March 2000, there have been new developments in the WTO, such as the new push by the EU, Japan and other countries for new issues (investment, competition, government procurement etc) in a New Round, and the increased frustration of many developing countries due to continuing lack of interest by the developed countries to rectify the problems arising from many existing agreements.

There has also been increasing interest by groups that did not sign the original statement, to take part in improving the statement with their own ideas. Due to this, some groups and individuals have attempted to revise, update and improve the original SOS statement to make it more relevant to the current situation and thus to articulate better the NGOs' and social movements' opposition to the New Round, and our views on what's wrong and what needs to be done. Hopefully the original signatories will now join in to sign the new SOS statement whilst new groups will also join in, so that we have a stronger articulation of civil society's current stand on the WTO.

Martin Khor, Third World Network, Malaysia.

This new statement is titled "Our World is Not for Sale. WTO: Shrink or Sink" and can be found on www.canadians.org.

All groups who signed the previous Shrink or Sink statement are urged to sign the new statement again by following the instructions below. Soon there will also be versions in Spanish, French, Portuguese and Arabic on the web-page (if you plan to translate the statement into other languages let us know so that we can post them on to the web as well).

You can sign the statement by visiting the web site of the Council of Canadians (<http://www.canadians.org/>) and click on the "Our World is Not for Sale" logo. This is an organizational sign on letter only. For general inquiries about the statement or for more information on how to sign, please contact Steve Staples at the Council of Canadians (sstaples@canadians.org)

OUR WORLD IS NOT FOR SALE WTO: Shrink or Sink

It's time to stop corporate globalization and to fight for another world we know is possible. In November 1999, the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Third Ministerial Meeting in Seattle collapse in spectacular fashion, in the face of unprecedented protest from people and governments around the world. Since then around the world in rich and poor nations alike, millions of people have joined the fight for a just and sustainable future and against corporate globalization.

Despite the promises to improve the system made at the end of the Seattle ministerial aimed at countering the WTO's crisis of legitimacy, no improvements have taken place and instead things have gotten worse. The time is overdue to roll back the power and authority of the WTO. The democratic, transparency and accountability deficits in this institution, which supposedly promotes free trade, have in fact only contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich few, growing inequality within and between nations, increasing poverty for the majority of the world's peoples, displacement of farmers and workers especially in third world countries, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. The protestations of workers and farmers, human rights and environmental activists, religious and indigenous leaders world wide and of third world governments regarding imbalances and problems in implementation of the GATT Uruguay Round Agreements are being swept aside.

The WTO's allegedly neutral Secretariat, a group of mainly wealthy governments and the corporate lobbies are struggling to put the WTO back to business as usual - expanding corporate globalization. The built-in review negotiations of the WTO Agreements on Agriculture, Services and Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights have been steered away from review and repair, towards further ravage and ruin. Governments are being bamboozled and blackmailed to accept a new round of WTO-expanding negotiations at the Fourth Ministerial Meeting to be held in Qatar on 9 to 13 November.

Seductively nicknamed the "development round", the real agenda for a new round is to expand the scope of corporate access and privileges under the WTO regime to investment, government procurement, competition policy, and more. Such further benefits to transnational corporations will further put at risk national and local economies; workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, women and other social groups; health and safety, the environment, and animal welfare. All this is taking place in the context of increasing global instability, the collapse of national economies, growing inequity both between and within nations and increasing environmental and social degradation, as a result of the acceleration of the process of corporate globalization.

The time has come to acknowledge the crises of the international trading system and its main administering institution, the WTO. It is time to stop the new round

and turn trade around to serve the interest of all. We need to replace this old, unfair and oppressive trade system with a new, socially just and sustainable trading framework for the 21st Century. We need to protect cultural, biological, economic and social diversity; introduce progressive policies to prioritize local economies and trade; secure internationally recognized economic, cultural, social and labor rights; and reclaim the sovereignty of peoples and national and subnational democratic decision making processes. In order to do this, we need new rules based on the principles of democratic control of resources, ecological sustainability, equity, cooperation and precaution.

In light of the above, we make the following demands of our governments:

No WTO Expansion

We reiterate our opposition to continued attempts to launch a new round or expand the WTO by bringing in new issues such as investment, competition, government procurement, biotechnology or by accelerated tariff liberalization. Expanding the WTO into issues such as investment and competition policy or requiring all countries to adhere to WTO government procurement rules (starting with an initial phase of transparency rules), would threaten national self determination and the survival of small and medium sized local firms and farms, remove support for local economies, and cause immeasurable social and environmental damage. We also reject the new tactics of the European Union in particular to sneak in investment and competition negotiations by introducing them as plurilateral agreements. There must be a moratorium on further trade liberalization initiatives at the WTO. Instead, the issues of inequity (implementation issues) for developing countries must be urgently addressed. These should not be linked up in the context of further liberalization negotiations.

WTO Hands Off: Protect Basic Social Rights and environmental sustainability

It is inappropriate and unacceptable for social rights and basic needs to be constrained or over-ridden by WTO rules. Protections critical to human or planetary welfare, such as food and water, basic social services, education, health and safety, environmental sustainability and animal well being must not be undercut by commercial agreements. Inappropriate encroachment by trade rules in such areas has already resulted in citizen campaigns on genetically modified organisms, old growth forests, domestically prohibited goods and predatory tobacco marketing.

Gut GATS: Protect Basic Social Services and public protections

Areas such as health, education, energy distribution, water, and other basic human services must not be subject to international free trade rules. In addition, the GATS must not limit the ability of governments and people to regulate in order to protect the environment, health, safety and other public interests. In the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the principle of "progressive liberalization" and the implications of foreign investment in service

sectors has already led to severe problems such as deregulation of essential services.

Stop Corporate Patent Protectionism - Seeds & Medicine are Human Needs, not Commodities:

All intellectual property policies must allow governments to limit patent protection in order to protect public health and safety, especially patents on life-saving medicines and life forms. The patenting of life forms including micro organisms must be prohibited in all national and international regimes. Current intellectual property rules in trade pacts, such as the WTO TRIPs agreement, obstruct consumer access to essential medicines and other goods, lead to private appropriation of life forms and traditional knowledge, undermine biodiversity, and keep poorer countries from increasing their levels of social and economic welfare. There is no basis for inclusion of such intellectual property claims in a trade agreement.

No Patents on Life

The patenting of life forms and other intellectual property rights over biological resources must be prohibited in all national and international regimes. Genetic diversity is not a category of private property and biopiracy or theft of traditional knowledge must be stopped.

Food is a Basic Human Right: Stop the Agriculture Agreement Fraud and Calamity

The Agreement on Agriculture is fraudulent because the subsidies going to export oriented industrial farming have not been reduced (but instead gone up), whereas the small farmers are suffering from import liberalization wiping out their livelihoods and incomes. To avoid further calamities to millions of small farmers, action must be taken immediately to drastically reduce or remove support for export oriented agriculture and to reverse import liberalization. Measures taken to promote and protect genuine food sovereignty and security as well as to promote small farmers practicing sustainable agriculture must be exempted from international trade rules. The trading system must not undermine the livelihood of peasants, small farmers, artisanal fishers and indigenous peoples. The basic human right to food can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed, meaning the right of peoples to define their own food and agricultural policies as well as the right to produce their basic foods in a manner respecting cultural and productive diversity.

No Investment Liberalization

The WTO Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMS) Agreement must be eliminated. All countries and especially third world countries must have the right to use policy options (such as local content policy) to increase the capacity of their own productive sectors, especially small and medium enterprises. Obviously, the TRIMS review must not be used to extend the investment issue in

WTO. We therefore reiterate our strongest opposition to attempts to start negotiations on investment rules, or an investment framework or an investment agreement of whatever kind in the WTO. The proposals for a GATS-type approach, or an initial transparency agreement on investment, or a plurilateral agreement, are only changes in tactics aimed at drawing in countries or groups that have refused to support a more extreme investment agreement. The objective of giving unprecedented rights to foreign investors remains the same, and we reject all these seemingly watered-down approaches which have the same ultimate goal as the discredited MAI.

Fair Trade: Special and Differential Treatment

Special and differential rights for third world countries must be recognized, expanded, and operationalized in the world trading system. This is to take into account the weak position of third world countries in the international trading system. Without the enforcement of special and differential rights, there can be no possibility of third world countries benefiting from world trade.

Prioritize Social Rights and the Environment

"Free trade" puts corporate profits before people and the environment. We need fair trade. Fundamental human and workers' rights must be respected, promoted and realized, as must the environment, health, education, indigenous peoples' rights, development, safety, food security, and animal welfare. For example the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Convention on Biodiversity and its Biosafety Protocol and the UN Declaration on Human Rights must be actively realized. The WTO must not undermine such genuine international social and environmental agreements. The importance of promoting, respecting and realizing fundamental worker rights and other human rights by all relevant means includes action at the appropriate international institutions.

Democratize Decision-Making

People must have the right to self-determination and the right to know and decide on international commercial commitments. Among other things, this requires that decision-making processes in negotiations and enforcement at international commercial bodies be democratic, transparent and inclusive. The WTO operates in a secretive, exclusionary manner that shuts out WTO Members and the public. It is dominated by a few powerful governments acting on behalf of their corporate elite. Dispute the System The WTO dispute settlement system is unacceptable in so far as it enforces an illegitimate system of unfair rules and operates with undemocratic procedures and also usurps the rulemaking and legislative role of nations and local governments.

A socially just international trade system will also require change outside the WTO.

A socially just international trade system must take prior account of the rights and welfare of the workers and farmers who produce and provide the commodities and services. All governments and all international agencies must address the attacks by multinational corporations and governments on basic workers rights; the reversal of the gains of workers' struggles; the undermining of job security; and the race-to-the-bottom in wages. Workers rights must be strengthened world wide. Also, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the regional development banks must write off 100% of the debts owed to them by poor countries so the countries can reallocate these funds and use for example for poverty eradication and development. The use of structural adjustment conditionality to force trade liberalization in third world countries and elsewhere must be stopped. Governments must negotiate, through the UN system or other appropriate bodies, with full democratic participation, a binding agreement to ensure that corporate conduct is socially and environmentally responsible and democratically accountable.

Conclusions and Consequences

We are committed to a sustainable, socially just and democratically accountable trade system. Thus, as a first step, we demand that our governments implement the changes listed in this document in order to roll back the power and authority of the WTO and turn trade around. We commit ourselves to mobilize people within our countries to fight for these demands and to defy the unjust policies of the WTO. We will also support other people and countries who do so with international solidarity campaigns. We pledge to carry the Spirit of Seattle around the world and ensure that no new WTO round is launched in Qatar.

Signatories:

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