

What's happening about APEC in Sydney?

APEC lacks democratic involvement and has always resisted formal engagement with civil society groups. However a broad coalition of community groups is organising a public forum and conference in Sydney under the banner of 'Asia Pacific People for Environment and Community (APPEC) – putting people into APEC'.

These events will be peaceful presentations of alternative ideas to the APEC vision.

Public forum

University of Technology, Guthrie Theatre, Design Building (Building 6), Harris St entrance (near the ABC building and near the overhead footbridge)
5:00pm arrival for a 6:00pm start.
Friday 31st August.

Featuring:

Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and President of the Global Unions' International Trade Union Confederation.

Yuri Munsayac, (Phillipines), Asia Pacific for Human Development.

Don Henry, Executive Director, Australian Conservation Foundation.

For more details about these events contact AFTINET on 02 9212 7242 or campaign@aftinet.org.au. Also visit the AFTINET website and follow the links to the APEC events

www.aftinet.org.au

Researched and written by Dr Pat Randal and Michele Freeman, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network. Design Michael Moebus, 2007.

Yes, I would like to register my interest for the Asia Pacific People for Environment and Community – Putting People into APEC:

- Public Forum, Friday the 31st of August, University of Technology
- Community Conference, Saturday the 1st of September, University of Technology
- (entry by donation for both events on the day)

Name / Organisation: _____

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Please send me updates about these events Via email Via post

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Asia Pacific People for Environment and Community is:

Aid Watch, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Australian Council for International Development, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Services Union, Caritas Australia, Community and Public Sector Union - State Public Services Federation, Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union, Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Friends of the Earth Australia, Global Trade Watch, Grail Global Justice Network, Greenpeace, Jubilee Australia, NSW Teachers Federation, Presentation Sisters (Wagga), Search Foundation, Sisters of Charity, The Commons Institute, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, Unions NSW

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with any enquiries



Put People into APEC



What is APEC?

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders meet in Sydney in September 2007. There are 21 heads of government of Pacific Rim economies coming for the meeting.

Despite media reports, APEC does not just mean traffic chaos, security threats and silly shirts.

APEC actually stands for achieving a complete free trade objective in the Asia Pacific region, and also discusses issues like security and terrorism, without serious consideration of human rights or the environment. It will be the most significant meeting Australia has ever hosted.

APEC member economies are: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, the United States of America and Vietnam.

APEC was established in 1989, and in 1994 APEC adopted the Bogor Goals of achieving "free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific for industrialised economies by 2010, and for developing economies by 2020" (APEC, "Leaders' Declaration", 1994, APEC Secretariat, Singapore).

What's on the APEC agenda?

Trade liberalisation

The APEC goal of 'zero trade and investment barriers' does not only mean removing tariffs (taxes on imports), but also often means removing regulations and policies that protect people and the environment. In a free trade context, these regulations are called 'barriers to trade' – mere obstacles that should be removed in the name of economic growth and profit.

Free trade objectives are often achieved by removing government regulation of essential services, like water and education – and instead opening them up to privatisation; removing all tariff protection for vulnerable workers and farmers, especially in rural and developing areas (despite the fact the rich countries used these same protections to get their industries established, and still do!); putting the rights of corporations above the rights of people and the environment; ignoring commitments to International Labour Organisation conventions on labour rights or to UN International Environmental Standards.

Unlike the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which has similar objectives, APEC's agreements are voluntary and non binding. However, the APEC goal of zero trade and investment barriers is far more extreme than the objectives of the WTO. APEC is a promoter of an ambitious neo liberal ideology.

While APEC supports multilateral initiatives like the WTO, many of its member countries are now engaged in bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations. In 1990 there were 16

FTAs operating internationally, by 2004 approximately 178 had been signed, 72 of which involved APEC member countries. (C Dent 'New Free Trade Agreements in the Asia Pacific', Palgrave 2006).

FTAs are far more damaging because they aim to remove all trade and investment barriers at a faster pace than in multilateral negotiations. The 'faster, quicker, harder' nature of FTAs means the agreements are often 'WTO plus'. FTAs usually involve extremely uneven bargaining relationships, favouring powerful countries and disadvantaging weaker ones.

The 21 member countries of APEC have enormous differences in levels of economic development and social structures.

There has been ongoing debate in APEC between governments like the USA and Australia, wanting more rapid and binding commitments to trade liberalisation, and the developing East Asian governments led by Malaysia, wanting a slower and more consensual process, with recognition of the specific problems faced by developing countries.

Trade agreements are increasingly becoming an instrument for geopolitical power in the region, and India's strong desire to join APEC could increase these tensions.

