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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Cabinet China FTA decision hasty and ignores workers' rights**

“The Cabinet has rushed to approve the first steps for negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with China, without proper community or parliamentary debate on the impacts on workers' rights in Australia or China,” Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy Officer, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, said today. Dr Ranald is also Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network of 90 community organisations (AFTINET).

“As reported in the **Sydney Morning Herald**, Cabinet has decided that Australia will grant China market economy status and proceed with negotiations if China agrees to put all trade items on the table. But there has been no publication of the Feasibility Study conducted by both governments about the impacts of a Free Trade Agreement in Australia and China. This is contrary to previous commitments that the Study would be released for community scrutiny before any decision to commence negotiations,” explained Dr Ranald. “This ‘decisions first, evidence later’ approach is unacceptable in a democracy. We call on the government to release the Study.”

“PIAC and AFTINET have serious concerns about the lack of workers' rights in China,” added Dr Ranald. “Transnational companies subcontract work to local firms in China's Special Export Processing Zones and accept the lowest bids. Workers often have to work 12-16 hours a day, seven days a week to complete contracts without proper payment. Studies show that real wages have actually fallen, health and safety is often appalling and workers do not have effective rights to bargain for improved conditions. Free Trade Agreements without workers' rights mean a global race to the bottom on labour standards.”

“We will continue to raise these issues if negotiations proceed,” said Dr Ranald. “There is a current inquiry by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee into Australia's relationship with China, including the China FTA,. This may be the only opportunity for proper consideration of these issues, and we urge the government to respond to community concerns about human rights”.

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