

19 July, 2014

WARNING: Trade deals threaten health care and the environment

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) and the Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network Ltd (AFTINET) have called on the Federal Government to heed warnings over secret global trade deals, in particular, negotiations around the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

As G20 Trade Ministers met in Sydney, ahead of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brisbane in November, representatives of the NSWNMA and AFTINET took to the streets on Saturday to highlight their concerns.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said it was clear the TPP agreement was not primarily about trade in goods and such an agreement could threaten the provision of essential public services in Australia, including public health.

"Our government has been negotiating a trade deal amongst the 12 Pacific Rim countries for several years, but it is becoming more apparent that the TPP negotiations are less about free trade and more about setting the agenda for multi-national corporations," Mr Holmes said.

"It is bad enough these negotiations are happening behind closed doors with no community input but what is more alarming is the agenda of global corporations who want changes to our domestic laws to suit their own interests, regardless of the impact it may have on the health of Australians."

AFTINET Convener, Dr Patricia Ranald, said that limited public information and leaked documents confirmed an agenda was being driven by the United States trade negotiators to benefit global corporations. The underlying agenda had the potential to result in:

- higher prices for medicines, by attacking Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;
- less Australian content on TV;
- limited workers' rights;
- restricted environmental laws; and
- the ability to sue Australian governments if domestic laws impede corporate investments.

"The Australian Government should resist US demands for changes to Australian laws on access to medicines, Australian media content and other issues which suit the interests of US corporations, but would prevent governments from legislating to protect the public interest," Dr Ranald said.

"US corporations also want special rights for foreign investors to sue governments in international tribunals if domestic laws or policies can be claimed to 'harm' their investment. In contrast to these extra rights for corporations, there is no agreement about including enforceable workers' rights and environmental standards in the agreement."

During an interactive street theatre performance at Circular Quay, the NSWNMA and AFTINET called on community members to lobby federal Minister for Trade and Investment, Andrew Robb, and urge him to oppose the corporate agenda of the TPP and to release the text for public and Parliamentary debate before any decision to sign it.

The unions and community groups indicated they would continue efforts to put pressure on the Federal Government to promote fair trade over the TPP negotiations, in the lead up to the G20 Leaders' Summit later in the year.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 550 324

Dr Patricia Randal, AFTINET Convener 0419 695 841

Gia Hayne, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317