



::For immediate release::

Non-State Actor Dialogue Fails 'meaningful' test at PACER-Plus talks

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Non Government Organisations have criticised the recent Non-State Actor (NSA) meeting in Brisbane last Monday on regional trade negotiations, as failing to live up to the Pacific Islands Forum's own call for 'meaningful' consultation.

“This weeks NSA consultation on regional trade saw only one non government organisation in attendance, undermining even the Forum's call for a meaningful consultation. The lack of funding available for key groups and no discussion of substantive issues has resulted in a consultation that has lacked critical input from around the region,” said Adam Wolfenden, Campaigner for Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)

During the NSA, Dr Edwini Kessie, incoming Chief Trade Advisor, committed the Office of Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) to strengthening consultations and engagement with NSAs and announced a workshop for NSAs in the final quarter of 2012. The OCTA is the independent body tasked with providing support for the Pacific Island Countries in trade negotiations.

“Having the OCTA host is a welcome step but the key issues still need to be resolved, namely adequate funding for effective participation and real discussion about the substantive issues at regional consultations as well as adequate funding and capacity for national consultations,” said Mr Wolfenden.

Pacific Island business was well represented with the regional body the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisations (PIPSO), several Business Councils and Chambers of Commerce present, (although largely absent were small and medium enterprises mainly owned by Pacific islanders). These private sector organisations expressed concerns over the consultations and the inability of the diverse voices of non-state actors to be present.

The Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) said that it's time for Australia to provide the money necessary for the Pacific to hear from NGOs.

“Whilst we appreciate and welcome Australia's provision of some funding for the NSA dialogue, this consultation is an example of a job half-done. Australia has always acknowledged the constraints in the region including limited funding for consultations and the involvement of NSAs. However the funding provided by Australia and New Zealand is inadequate. So we've now had a consultation that is not representative of the wide spectrum of views in the Pacific, and failed to include any critical voices,” explained Harvey Purse, Trade Justice Campaigner of AFTINET.

“It can hardly be seen as improving the lives of Pacific peoples when the non government sector, with their diverse expertise and views, have less representation at these key consultations than multi-national corporate interests such as big tobacco (BAT), alcohol (Heineken) and finance (ANZ),” said Mr Purse.

Negotiations on the regional trade agreement known as PACER-Plus are underway in Brisbane this week.

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