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MEDIA RELEASE

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Brunei Sharia Law scandal and failed bilateral meetings haunt secret Trans-Pacific talks in Ottawa

“As trade officials begin yet another round of secret Trans-Pacific (TPP) trade talks in Ottawa on July 3, the United Nations and human rights groups ask why Australia and other countries continue to negotiate with [Brunei as it introduces harsh Sharia laws](#) which violate human rights,” Dr Patricia Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) said today.

“The first phase of the new Brunei law imposes fines and jail terms for offences like pregnancy outside of marriage. Future phases will punish crimes such as alcohol consumption or theft with whipping and amputations, and the final phase will impose the death penalty, including by stoning, for adultery and sodomy. Australia should not be negotiating preferential trade access with governments which violate human rights,” said Dr Ranald.

“This is yet another obstacle in TPP talks between The US, Japan, Australia and nine other Pacific Rim countries which have dragged into their fifth year. There is still no agreement to US demands for changes to domestic laws on access to [medicines](#), [copyright](#), [food labelling](#) and other issues which suit the interests of US corporations, but would prevent governments from regulating in the public interest. 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,” said Dr Ranald.

“The two major players, the US and Japan, have still not agreed about the traditional trade issues of increased access to each other’s agricultural and vehicle markets, and have not made any market access offers to other governments. A procession of recent leaders’ visits to Washington, including Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Chile have failed to resolve these deadlocks,” explained Dr Ranald.

“US community opposition to the TPP has prevented the Congress from even introducing the ‘fast track’ legislation which would remove the constitutional power of Congress to amend any TPP deal. The US cannot deliver on any deal until this legislation is passed. Neither major party wants the TPP to become an issue in the November Congressional elections. The new deadline appears to be the APEC Leaders’ meeting in November,” said Dr Ranald.

“Canadian civil society groups say the Ottawa talks, only announced last week, mark [a new low point for transparency](#) in the TPP negotiations. It is increasingly clear that the TPP is not in Australia’s interest. We call on the Abbott Government to reject unacceptable proposals and to release the text of the TPP for full public and parliamentary debate before any decision to endorse it is made by Cabinet”.

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