



Abandon the Damaging WTO Model - Address the Crises!

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The WTO's crisis of legitimacy is evident in that despite deepening food, financial, economic and climate crises—to which the WTO has contributed significantly—its deregulation and liberalisation agenda remains much the same as in 2001.

There is a bizarre disconnect between what governments are saying at home, what populations are demanding, and the statements that governments have issued during the 7th Ministerial Meeting here in Geneva. While in official statements many developing countries have demanded that development be at the centre of the negotiations, the reality is that what is on the table would result in further job losses, increased food and financial insecurity, and de-regulation of services. What is required is not only immediate abandonment of the Doha Round, but also, a replacement of the damaging WTO model.

Hanim Lutfiyah from Third World Network, Indonesia stated that “Agriculture and food are human rights and not to be considered as a trade commodity; they are the foundations of the livelihoods and sustainability of millions of people around the world and they should be out of the WTO. We hope that the results and conclusion of the WTO ministerial conference would reflect the aspiration of the majority poor and peasant interests”.

Afsar Jafri from Focus on the Global South, India added that “The Indian social movements will not accept a position of the Indian government on agriculture that will jeopardize more employment and farmers’ livelihoods, food sovereignty, and weaken safeguards in case of import surges”.

Alexandra Strickner from ATTAC Austria/Seattle to Brussels network stressed that “the current global crises (finance, climate, food, energy) is a consequence of an economic model promoted by failed institutions of which the WTO is a key one. Despite this, the European governments continue to do business as usual by promoting further trade expansion, via the WTO, and EU FTAs. Resistance against these policies has grown in Europe with an increasing number of social movements and civil society groups calling for a new economic model, which puts social and climate justice, equity, and democracy at its heart”.

Ambassador Nathan Irumba, from the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information (SEATINI) said “the neoliberal policies implemented in our countries over the past decades reinforced by the rules of the WTO have impacted negatively on our economies and lives and are also responsible for the ongoing global financial and economic crisis. If completed on the current terms, the Doha round will aggravate the problems of our economies, as it will take away the very policy instruments needed to address the current crisis and prevent similar crises in the future. African countries must therefore stand up for their interests”.

Graciela Rodriguez, International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) said “the progressive liberalization of trade and investment that the neoliberal model has promoted in the last decades, has not promoted the development as promised, but instead, has been the determining cause of the current global crisis. It is the same liberalization and deregulation that has worsened the international division of labour, based on the promotion of the model of the exportation of natural resources, raw materials and energy from the countries of the South. This same international trade model has been expanding, in search of cheap labour; taking advantage of gender inequality to lower global salaries in the last decades.”

Ted Murphy from Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) asked; “On what basis will the round be completed? It cannot be completed regardless the outcomes! A comprehensive assessment should take place, but more than that, we need a coordinated global strategy to promote regular employment and to put decent employment back at the center of our policies”.

Tony Ehrenreich from Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) highlighted that: “At the moment, there is a major lack of flexibilities for South Africa in the NAMA negotiations. That is why our government will not sign on a deal that will not allow for any policy space”.

Ruben Cortina from the International Department of the General Confederation of workers (CGT) from Argentina stated that “the WTO does not know where to go. The global crisis has not been taken in account in analyzing the future of trade. It seems that nothing has happened since 2008. Well, they better be aware that 60 million jobs have been lost during 2009 and 2010. And we keep on talking about free trade in the middle of the biggest job crisis of the last 70 years”.

Kenneth Quartey from the Ghana National Association of Poultry Farmers stated that “the amount of tons of poultry in Ghanaian markets has increased from 30,000 tons in 2003 to 230,000 tons by 2009. Not only is it a question of import surges, but also it is an issue of severe effect on our ability to get capital. If the Doha Round concludes and our domestic policy space is further closed; we see little space for agriculture in Ghana and in Africa, where 60% of the population relies on agriculture for its income. If the Doha round concludes, we just simply do not know what to do next.”

Jaime Tadeo from National Rice Farmers’ Council, Philippines said that “the Philippines’ agriculture has been deeply damaged by the negative impact of free trade policies and the failure of our government to defend it. We are being slaughtered by the gross unfairness of the international trading market”.

Elisangela Araujo, General Coordinator, Federation of Family Farm Workers (FETRAF) from Brazil stated that "In recent years, in Brazil, there have been significant advances made internally in terms of meeting family farmers’ demands. Yet, on the level of international trade, it is clear that the government is seeking to satisfy the offensive interests of export-oriented trade agriculture. The conclusion of the Doha Round will be detrimental to the protection of family farmers and their diversified production and would represent an enormous potential loss for family farmers in Brazil”.

Myriam Vander Stichele, Senior Researcher, Center for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO), said: “While many WTO members and international fora are putting financial regulation in place, the WTO has failed to review its financial services negotiations, which continue to liberalise and deregulate. The WTO has clearly shown during this conference that it is unable to learn the lessons of the financial crisis and is now sitting with a toxic asset called the Financial Services Agreement (concluded in 1997).

Dr. Thomas Braunschweig from Erklärung von Bern - The Berne Declaration stated: “The call of Swiss Minister of Economy Doris Leuthard to take up the Singapore issues in a post-Doha round is a blow in the face of developing countries who strongly refused to negotiate on these issues back in 2003”.

Dave Tucker from War on Want in the UK said "The Doha talks are now dead and the WTO is quickly sliding into irrelevance. We need to trade but free trade has failed and we must replace the overriding goals of tariff cuts and commercial gain with socially and environmentally sustainable development."

Lori Wallach from Public Citizen USA: "Listening to government statements at this WTO ministerial, it is clear that the WTO is seen as a cause of the current financial, food and climate crises rather than a cure and requires significant change, but that also no country wants to be blamed for ending the Doha Round and demanding a new WTO review and repair agenda. As a result, there has been this schizophrenic theme of countries safeguarding themselves against attack over saying the obvious, that this agenda is dead, by mouthing the expected call for rapid conclusion of the Doha Round but doing so on the basis of pro-development, pro-reform terms that are not on the Doha Round table."

Deborah James, Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) Director of International Programs, said today from Geneva, Switzerland at the 7th Ministerial meeting of the WTO: “As countries around the world work to stimulate economic recovery, re-regulate their financial sectors, and advance new global climate commitments, governments must be free of WTO rules that limit domestic policy space. This requires not only a suspension of the efforts to expand WTO through the Doha Round, but rolling back of various existing WTO policies that have actually contributed to the global economic and financial crises”.

Stuart Trew, Council of Canadians said: “The social crisis that will result from unchecked climate change and job losses demands radical new thinking on how, what and how much we trade. Unfortunately, that kind of real ‘taking stock’ exercise was nowhere to be seen in Geneva, and is likely impossible at the WTOÈ.

Ronnie Hall, Global Forest Coalition, said: "The WTO must take its blinkers off. The current trade liberalization process is driving climate change, promoting the continued extraction of fossil fuel extraction and the expansion of industrialised agriculture, at the expense of the world's climate-regulating forests. Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities, and the world's biodiversity, are suffering from the continued destruction of forests, the spiralling impacts of climate change, and even the market-oriented solutions to climate change that are being put in place. Fair and effective responses to climate change must be the world's number one priority now”.

Roberto Sensi M.A.I.S Italy said: “Doha round is died and WTO is in recovery room. Each country has to chose whether trying to save the round or trying to save itself from the economic crisis impacts. We don't need more free trade but policy space to give to countries the chances to face the current situation. Is the time for more cooperation than competition and WTO is not able to do it”

Michelle Pressend from the Africa Trade Network: “Stop the Doha Round: Concentrate on correcting the inequities of the existing rules! ”

Julian Oram, from the World Development Movement: “The WTO’s single-minded approach to liberalising trade at all costs has failed to keep up with the times. Not only has it hardened the resolve of developing countries not to be bullied into further damaging concessions, but has also spooked rich countries still reeling from a global financial crisis spawned by unregulated markets. Today’s speeches may be filled with rhetoric of free trade’s potential to lift the global economy out of recession, but the slow death of the Doha round betrays their lack of conviction.”

Susan George, renowned writer and President of the Board of the Transnational Institute, TNI, said: "10 years after Seattle, the WTO is revealed as an emperor with no clothes. The WTO has contributed in no small way to today's myriad of crises. It is time for the WTO to go. We need a new system that puts real development and climate centre, rather than the market expansion needs of huge transnational corporations".

Johannes Lauterbach / ATTAC Germany: "As was to expected, governments stuck their head in the sand and prevented the WTO from a necessary reality check about its devastating role in the global crisis. Governments in the WTO are hostages of their own system - it is obviously impossible for over 140 government officials to come together in this framework and talk about real solutions for real problems. For us as civil society activists it was important to be here to witness and expose the failure of the system, but also to discuss our alternatives for a future beyond the WTO."

According to Yudhvir Singh from La Via Campesina, “We, farmers from La Via Campesina, want the WTO out of food and agriculture. We believe that operationalising peoples' food sovereignty is crucial to address the food, economic and climate crises in a sustained manner. The WTO is an illegitimate institution that does not represent the interests of farmers and their communities. We have resisted the WTO since its inception 15 years ago, and we will continue that resistance. We will also hold our government responsible for the positions they take here in Geneva and in future negotiations.

Shalmali Guttal from Focus on the Global South asserted that “statements by Asian countries that the conclusion of the Doha Round will help address the triple crises of food, finance and climate are blatantly false and do not represent the voice of farmers, workers, indigenous communities and ordinary people who bear the brunt of these crises. The WTO is illegitimate and anti-development, and should be shut down immediately.”

Ronnie Hall, OWINFS Trade and Climate Change Working Group "In less than a week, governments will meet in Copenhagen in a last ditch effort to try and agree how to tackle climate change before it is too late to control it. How can it be possible then, that *this* week, officials from the very same governments are here in Geneva, promoting an institution and an economic model, that are completely out of touch with the fact that the world is in climate crisis? The World Trade Organization and its rules and priorities are not part of the solution, as it claims, but part of the problem. The WTO is contributing to climate change, stopping governments taking action on climate change at home, preventing effective intergovernmental collaboration, and limiting countries' and communities' ability to adapt to a changing climate."-

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**** The OWINFS network is a loose grouping of organizations, activists and social movements worldwide fighting the current model of corporate globalization embodied in global trading system. OWINFS is committed to a sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable multilateral trading system.*