

SIGN ON STATEMENT: 20 years of the WTO is enough! Junk WTO!

It has been two decades since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which created a multilateral trading system encompassing trade in goods, services, agriculture, and intellectual property.

While a trade organization like the WTO supposedly provides members access to each other's markets on equal terms, developed countries' interests have dominated the GATT and the WTO from the start. The WTO's trade policy framework has thus led to more inequality and long-term problems for developing states.

Through the relaxation of restriction on foreign investments under the WTO's trade liberalization scheme, developed countries and their big companies continue to exploit land, workers and other resources from developing countries for their own gain. This has intensified inequality between and within countries. In 2014, the UN Development Programme reported that 85 of the richest people in the world have wealth equivalent to the wealth of 3.5 billion of the poorest people in the world. In 2010, 25 major American corporations surpassed the 2010 gross domestic product (GDP) of entire countries. An example is Wal-Mart whose 2010 revenue amounted to \$421.89 billion, which is larger than Norway's GDP (\$414.46 billion) and 157 smaller countries. This clearly shows that half of the world's wealth is owned by the richest one percent.

The dismantling of trade barriers that cover basic services in health care, education, environment, sanitation, water and other social services allowed transnational corporations (TNCs) of rich countries to acquire companies and privatize public services within developing nations. Unbridled competition has also resulted to lowering of labor standards and easing of environmental regulations to attract investments, leading to more human rights violations in the workplace, massive land grabbing and environmental degradation.

Since colonization, neoliberal policies intensified the sufferings of indigenous peoples. This shall worsen as the WTO imposes more agreements and policies that shall further encroach, destroy and plunder indigenous lands and territories through unsustainable projects such as mono-cultural chemically intensive plantations, extractive industries like mining and oil drilling, and dams and other environmentally destructive "renewable" energy projects. Those who resist suffer from militarization and State terrorism, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, assassination, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, criminalization of community resistance, harassment and vilification as "terrorists."

The WTO's enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) hindered developing countries' access to medicines and medical technology because of the high cost of paying for patent licenses. In the Sub-Saharan African region, an estimated 24.7 million HIV patients cannot access patented anti-retroviral medicines because of prohibitive costs. The WTO also allowed American transnational agribusiness corporation Monsanto to draft a policy under its IPR agreement to place patents on all life forms, from microorganisms to plants. This provided Monsanto an advantage over developing country members of the WTO to control their seeds. TNCs are also attacking indigenous knowledge by patenting plant varieties discovered and cultivated by indigenous peoples for food, medicine and rituals.

In the agriculture sector, the failure of the WTO to reduce the subsidies of developed countries to their farmers has affected the livelihood of cotton farmers in Africa because of the overproduction of cotton in the world market. The cheap price of cotton exported by African farmers led to a decline in production by almost 50% in 12 main African cotton producers between 2005 and 2009.

The expansion of poultry imports from developed countries led to massive rural job loss in Africa. From 1994 to 2003, 110,000 rural jobs were lost each year in Cameroon. In Ivory Coast, an estimated 1,500 poultry producers ceased production between 2001 and 2003, leaving 15,000 people jobless. In Senegal, 70% of the poultry industry was wiped out because of the poultry expansion of the European Union (EU).

The removal of trade barriers also paved the way for massive importation of food and agricultural products that destroyed the Philippine's path to self-sufficiency and food security. According to the peasant movement Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, an estimated 2.85 million metric tons of rice was imported by the Philippine government in 2014, leaving a huge drop in farm gate prices of locally produced rice.

The WTO's policies continue to support corporate control in food systems and trade by altering food safety and price regulations, intellectual property protection and agriculture subsidies. It has also trapped developing countries into exporting cheap raw materials and allowing imported food and agricultural products to their local markets leaving domestic production to decline. Almost 800 million people worldwide continue to suffer from hunger because of corporate control on food.

As if 20 years of the WTO's stranglehold is not bad enough, the US, EU, Japan and other developed countries want the upcoming 10th Ministerial Conference (MC10) this 15-18 December 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya to commence negotiations on "new issues" – which are really old proposals that these countries have long been seeking to impose as new rules on trade and investments binding on all countries. These would further strengthen the ability of TNCs to operate within and across borders and dictate the prices of goods and services making them unaffordable to the common people. They would also rob developing countries of their remaining policy tools that are necessary for promoting sustainable development and realizing people's rights.

Over the years, people's organizations have seen the WTO as an instrument that exploits developing nations. Twenty years of its existence has already forced radical changes in the laws of sovereign states and threatened the lives and livelihood of peoples around the world. Any expansion of its power will lead to more losses of our democratic rights. We urge the public to be vigilant and not be misled by rhetoric on the benefits of neoliberal trade and the WTO.

We call on the public to support people's organizations and pro-poor advocates pushing for a pro-people trade system that promotes environmental sustainability, genuine economic cooperation, and the right to development. We urge each nation to adopt economic policies and programs that assert their sovereignty over their agriculture and food systems. National and international trade systems should promote policies that will be able to dismantle international cartels and capitalist monopolies that manipulate the prices of commodities in the international market.

As long as the WTO runs world trade, corporate elites and their governments will continue to abuse the people and resources of developing countries. We should not allow this to persist.

20 years of corporate plunder is enough! 20 years of manipulation is enough! 20 years of inequality is enough! 20 years of the WTO is enough!

Now is the time for genuine system change and fair economic cooperation that promotes development for all! Join the fight against WTO! Junk the WTO!

If you endorse this statement, please send your organization's name and country to Mark Pascual <mpascual@iboninternational.org>

Initiators:

1. AlliansiGerakanReformaAgraria (AGRA) – Indonesia
2. All Nepal Peasant's Federation (ANPFa) -Nepal
3. AMGL (AlyansangMagbubukidsaGitnangLuson) – Philippines
4. AMIHAN (National Federation of Peasant Women) – Philippines
5. Andhra Pradesh VyavasayVruthidarula Union (APVVU) – India
6. ADLO-KMU, Philippines
7. Anakbayan-USA
8. ANGLO-KMU, Philippines
9. APIT-TAKO – Philippines
10. APWSL, Korea
11. Association for the Rights of Children in South East Asia (ARCSEA)
12. Auckland-PhilippinesSolidarity– New Zealand
13. Asian Peasant Coalition (APC)
14. Asia Monitor Research Center (ACRM)
15. Asia-Pacific Research Network (APRN)
16. Association for Research and Cooperation in Support of Endogenous Development (ARCADE), Senegal
17. BAYAN- Central Visayas
18. BAYAN-USA
19. BIGUF, Bangladesh
20. Campaign for Peace & Democracy (Manipur)
21. Centre for Phil. Concerns Montreal (CPC) – Canada
22. Centre for Research and Advocacy-Manipur (CRAM) – India
23. Children's Rehabilitation Center – Philippines
24. Communication Workers Union, Australia
25. ConfédérationNationale des Travailleurs du Sénégal (CNTS), Sénégal, West Africa
26. COURAGE, Philippines
27. Defend Jobs Philippines
28. EILER, Philippines
29. Femmes de diverses origins, Canada
30. FASV, Guatemala
31. FGIE, Ecuador
32. FPR, Mexico
33. Global People Surge (GPS)
34. HUSTISYA, Philippines
35. IBON International
36. Indian Federation of Toiling Peasants (IFTOP) – India

37. Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL)
38. International Association of People's Lawyers
39. Gabriela-USA
40. GATWU, India
41. KADAMAY-National Capital Region, Philippines
42. KALIKASAN (Peoples Network for the Environment) – Philippines
43. KASAMA-TK (KatipunangSamahangMagbubukidngTimogKatagalugan) – Philippines
44. KMK, Philippines
45. KilusangMagbubukidng Pilipinas (KMP) – Philippines
46. Kilusang Mayo Uno, Philippines
47. KMP-NMR – Philippines
48. Migrante Australia
49. Migrante Canada
50. NAFCON-USA
51. NAFLU-KMU, Philippines
52. National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) – Philippines
53. National Network of Agrarian Reform Advocates (NNARA-Youth) – Philippines
54. NTUI, India
55. NYCHRP, USA
56. PAMALAKAYA (Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakayang Pilipinas) – Philippines
57. PAMANGGAS – Philippines
58. Parents Alternative on Early Childhood Care and Development (PAI) – Philippines
59. Peoples Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS)
60. Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PAN AP) – Malaysia
61. Pesticide Action Network (PAN)-Philippines
62. Philippines Australia Union Link, Australia
63. Philippines- Australia Solidarity Association – Australia
64. Philippine Network of Food Security Programmes (PNFSP)-Philippines
65. PILAR, Hong Kong
66. PISTON, Philippines
67. Reality of Aid – Asia Pacific
68. Red Guards Los Angeles, USA
69. Red Sparks Union, Canada
70. Roots for Equity – Pakistan
71. SAGUPA-SB – Philippines
72. Salinlahi Alliance for Children's Concerns – Philippines
73. Serve the People Association –Taiwan
74. Seruni, Indonesia
75. Sinagbayan – Philippines
76. Stop Exploitation – Philippines
77. Sugar Workers Solidarity Network (SWSN) – Philippines
78. Society for Rural Education (SRED) – India
79. Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF) – India
80. Tenaganita (Women's Force) – Malaysia
81. UISTA-FACT-FSM – France
82. UnyonngManggagawasaAgrikultura (UMA) – Philippines
83. UPRA, Venezuela