

Global call on Governments to Reject the WTO Declaration on “Women’s Economic Empowerment”

12 December 2017

We, women’s rights organisations and allies, call on state parties to the World Trade Organisation to refrain from adopting the proposed “Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”. We appreciate that governments are increasingly recognising the gendered impact of international trade and trade rules imposed through the WTO and preferential trade agreements. However, this declaration fails to address the adverse impact of WTO rules and instead appears to be designed to mask the failures of the WTO and its role in deepening inequality and exploitation.

The declaration takes a very narrow approach to assessing the gendered impacts of trade. Even if the benefits the WTO bestows on the richest 1% of the world’s population were evenly split between men and women, the majority of the world’s women would not benefit. Increasing access to credit and cross border trade for a few women will not benefit women’s human rights overall. The declaration is a ‘pink herring’, an attempt to obscure the harm WTO provisions have on women while ensuring the WTO can bring in ‘new issues’, likely to deepen inequality.

The removal of tariffs and import limits alone have been detrimental to women’s rights. Tariff reductions reduce government revenue essential for public investments in health, education, energy, water, transport and social protection. Reduced public expenditure impacts most heavily on the economically poor and particularly poorer women. Governments are increasingly replacing that revenue with regressive taxes, such as Goods and Services Taxes which have discriminatory effects. The influx of subsidised food and inputs displaces local production and the WTO has forced governments to remove valuable policy instruments that allow them to regulate the flow of imported goods in order to support local production and to provide local, pro-poor subsidies.

It is now clear, that the neoliberal project involving austerity, privatisation, deregulation of finance, markets and corporations, and trade and investment liberalisation has had a devastating and discriminatory impact on women. Neoliberalism is sexist and is simply incapable of supporting gender-equitable and just sustainable development, no matter how it is spun.

The proposal for the WTO to deal with ‘new issues’ threatens women’s human rights even further. Those ‘new issues’, include harmful services provisions that deepen corporate power and the inclusion of e-commerce that will limit regulation of the world’s largest, tax avoiding corporations. If governments are genuinely interested in advancing women’s human rights through just trade arrangements, they would allow for pro-poor public stockholding of food, allow any domestic regulations a state deems necessary to advance women’s human rights and the public interest, ensure that states can fully utilise intellectual property flexibilities to provide access to medicines, seeds, technologies that advance women’s human rights and refrain from entering into any bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements that further restrict the capacity to use domestic regulations in the interests of the public in any way they deem necessary

We do not seek a retreat to combative nationalism in the name of trade protectionism. We support multilateralism. However, multilateralism must be based on solidarity, democracy and human rights, rather than the interests of unaccountable multinational corporations or wealthy states.

ENDORISING ORGANISATIONS

1. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
2. Project Survival Pacific - Fiji
3. RITES Forum - India
4. Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA), for Equality - Fiji
5. Pacific Partnerships on Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Development (PPGCCSD) - Pacific SIDS
6. Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative (GERI) - Nigeria
7. Feminist League - Kazakhstan
8. Society For Rural Education and Development - India
9. Tamil Nadu Women’s Forum - India
10. Alliance of Concerned Teachers - Philippines

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11. Indian Social Action Forum - India
12. Echoes of Women in Africa (ECOWA) - Nigeria
13. Nijera Kori - Bangladesh
14. African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)
15. Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), International
16. Adéquations - France
17. Trade Collective
18. South African Women in Dialogue
19. Women for Women’s Human Rights - New Ways, Turkey
20. Women’s Coalition - Turkey
21. PWESCR International (Programme on Women’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
22. JANPAHAL - India
23. Feminist Learning Partnerships - India
24. We Women Lanka- Sri Lanka
25. Akina Mama wa Afrika - Uganda
26. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
27. Centre d’appui aux initiatives locales de développement et d’Assistance aux personnes vulnérables (CIDEP) - BURUNDI
28. CPDE Feminist Group (CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness)
29. European Network of Migrant Women (ENOMW)
30. Free the Marginalised Women Advocates (FREMWA) - Ghana
31. Alliance of CSOs in Clean Energy Access (ACCESS) Global Coalition
32. ActionAid International
33. Roots for Equity - Pakistan
34. African Women’s Rights Collective
35. Association Nigérienne des Scouts de l’Environnement (ANSEN) - Niger
36. Alliance de Lutte contre la Faim et la Malnutrition du Niger (ACFM Niger)
37. Centre for Research and Advocacy - India
38. Insan Foundation - Pakistan
39. National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NIDWAN)
40. Sathi ALI for Partnerships India
41. Afrihealth Optonet Association [CSOs Network]
42. Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN)
43. Dr. Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFFOUND)
44. Coordinadora de la Mujer - Bolivia
45. Centre for 21st Century Issues (C21st) Nigeria
46. Women Fund Tanzania
47. Centre for Human Rights and Development - Mongolia
48. Development Observer - Mongolia
49. People’s Coalition for Food Sovereignty - Mongolia
50. WIDE+ (Women In Development Europe plus) Network
51. Centro de Estudios e Investigación sobre Mujeres (CEIM) - Spain
52. Citizen News Service (CNS)
53. National Forum of Women with Disabilities - Nepal
54. Haurralde Foundation
55. Fundacion para Estudio e INvestigacion de la Mujer (FEIM) - Argentina
56. South African Women in Dialogue
57. GDMR-Grupo Para o Desenvolvimento da Mulher e Rapariga
58. Haus of Kameleon - Fiji/Pacific
59. Fundación Mexicana para la Planeación Familiar AC MEXFAM
60. TIYE International - The Netherlands
61. ANANDI - India
62. Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)
63. StandUp Movement Lanka (SUML) - Sri Lanka
64. Organisation des Femmes Autochtones pour la Lutte contre la Violence (OFALV) Rwanda
65. Alliance des Peuples Autochtones et Locales d’Afrique centrale (APALAC coalition) Pays-Bas.
66. Keturah Cecilia Babb - Individual

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67. Equality Bahamas
68. Pacific Womens' Indigenous Networks
69. Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)
70. Pacific Women's Watch - New Zealand
71. YWCA of Solomon Islands
72. Participatory Research Action Network (PRAN) - Bangladesh
73. IT for Change - India
74. EMPOWER - India
75. Women Against Rape Inc.
76. Gramya Resource Centre for Women
77. Rainbow Pride Foundation Fiji (RPF)
78. Equidad de Género, Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia - Mexico
79. IMA Research Foundation - Bangladesh
80. Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam (Women Workers Union) - India
81. Independent Democratic of Informal Economic Association (IDEA) - Cambodia
82. Fiji Trades Union Congress - Fiji
83. Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR) - Philippines
84. KABAR BUMI (Migrant Workers Families Association) - Indonesia
85. Reacción Climática - Bolivia
86. Aksi! for gender, social and ecological justice - Indonesia
87. Indonesian Migrant Workers - Hong Kong
88. Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK)
89. Centre for Community Economics & Development Consultant Society (CECODECON) - India
90. Public Advocacy Initiative for Rights & Values in India (PAIRVI) - India
91. Mahila Dakshata Samiti/Women2030 - India
92. National Alliance for Women (NAWO) - India
93. NGO Federation of Nepal - Nepal
94. Nepal SDGs Forum - Nepal
95. Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) - Bangladesh
96. International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) Asia Pacific
97. Federation of Women Farmers Rights -Tamil Nadu (makkam) - India
98. Rural Women's Liberation Movement -Tamil Nadu - India
99. Women's Coalition For Change-Tamil Nadu - India
100. Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement - India
101. Govind Kelkar - Individual
102. Dristi Nepal (Rights to Existence) - Nepal
103. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) - Thailand
104. Maati, Uttarakhand- India
105. National Alliance of Women Human Right Defenders - Nepal
106. Agricultural Missions - USA
107. Servicios Ecumenicos para la Reconciliacion y Reconstruccion (SERR) - USA
108. ENLACES por la Sustentabilidad - El Salvador
109. Solidaritas Perempuan - Indonesia
110. Women Forum for Women - Nepal
111. Naga Indigenous Women Network (NIWN)
112. Women Rising - India
113. Asociacion Ciudadana por los Derechos Humanos - Argentina
114. DEWA Project (Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement)
115. Women for Peace and Gender Equality Initiative (WOPEGEE) - Nigeria
116. Peoples Development Community (PDC) - Bangladesh
117. AwazCDS - Pakistan
118. LDC Watch
119. IBON International
120. WAVE (Women in Adult & Vocational Education Inc.) - Australia
121. Society for Appraisal and Women Empowerment (SAWERA) - Pakistan
122. Youth Association for Development - Pakistan
123. Human Rights Focus Pakistan
124. Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) - Bangladesh

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125. AWAJ Foundation - Bangladesh
126. Rural Reconstruction Nepal
127. Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID)
128. Indigenous Women’s Network of Thailand (IWNT)
129. PROGRESS (Palangkaraya Ecological and Human Rights Studies) - Indonesia
130. Nething - India
131. Worker’s Information Center (WIC) - Cambodia
132. Women Network for Unity (WNU) - Cambodia
133. Social Action for Change (SAC) - Cambodia
134. The BPO Industry Employees Network (BIEN) - Philippines
135. Unified Employees of Alorica - Philippines
136. Cambodian Food and Service Workers’ Federation (CFSWF) - Cambodia
137. Associatiion pour le Développement Global des Batwa au Rwanda (ADBR) - Rwanda
138. Women’s Centre - Sri Lanka
139. Journalists for Human Rights - Macedonia
140. Mothers & Daughters of Lanka - Sri Lanka
141. Women Workers for Justice Group
142. Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)
143. African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF)
144. Institute for Gender Studies, Unisa - South Africa
145. West African Young Women Leaders Network (ROAJELF) - Senegal
146. Le Conseil Senegalais des Femmes (COSEF)
147. Health Poverty Action - UK
148. Asia Dalit Rights Forum
149. National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights - India
150. Young Associates for Integral Development (JADI) - Democratic Republic of Congo
151. Adivasi Women's Network - India
152. India HIV/AIDS Alliance
153. Koperazzjoni Internazzjonali (Kopin) - Malta
154. Instituto del Tercer Mundo of Montevideo - Uruguay
155. Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
156. Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies - Jordan
157. Trade Justice Movement - United Kingdom
158. Ruth Kruger (individual) - South Africa
159. International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
160. Right to Food campaign, India
161. Fundación Vía Libre, Argentina
162. National Network for Education Reform (NNER) - Myanmar
163. Public Services International (PSI)