Public letter urging the European Commission to take on board the voices of women in its policy debate 'Trade for Her'.

To: European Trade Commissioner Malmström, with cc to members of the INTA and FEMM Committee of the European Parliament

19 September 2019, Brussels, Belgium

Dear Commissioner Malmström,

We are writing to you concerning the conference organised by DG Trade on 30 September: "**Trade for Her: Empowering Women through International Trade**". We welcome the growing acknowledgement that the impacts of international trade are not gender neutral. This conference could be an important milestone, before the term of this Commission ends, to listen to the voice of women affected by international trade and identify structural changes required to make international trade work for all women. However, the current programme of this event provides most space to actors benefiting from or supporting the current EU trade policy, without including any speaker from a feminist network or association. ***We urge you to make space for feminist views, acknowledging that women are not a homogeneous group.***

The conference aims to discuss how to achieve greater involvement of women in international trade, in the EU and beyond. We question the assumption behind this objective. First, women are already deeply embedded in international trade, but are involved in unequal terms. Therefore, a key point that the conference ought to prioritise is how to ensure trade is gender just. This means that trade agreements must guarantee that the rights of all women working in or providing services and/or goods to global value chains are upheld. While EU trade policy may have benefitted some women entrepreneurs, it has yet to take into consideration the needs and realities of most women in the Global South that provide huge contributions to their economies through unpaid work in addition to all the other forms of labour and services they provide. These women have often been negatively impacted by trade and investment deals and yet have not been meaningfully consulted or had negative impacts redressed.

The same can be said for women in Europe. Targeting female entrepreneurs as the focus for inclusion in trade policy does not amount to the integration of gender equality objectives as set out in the Treaty on European Union (TEU). In the introduction to the conference, the Commission claims that an estimated 14 million jobs are created for women through trade policy. This means that around half a percentage of women in the EU directly gain their income through trade. We would like to know what the EU will do to assess the impact of its policy on the nearly 100 % that are not included in this analysis.

Women are not a homogeneous group and focusing on women entrepreneurs within approaches to trade by no means makes trade gender responsive. While trade negotiations invite companies at moments to give contributions into its process, groups of women, women's rights organisations and other relevant civil society movements should not be left out.

Second, embedding women in international trade is not necessarily a recipe for improved livelihoods and well-being – much less for achieving gender equality. In the food and agriculture sector, for instance, local, national and regional trade may be a much better option for women small-scale farmers in Africa, as recently stressed by the Africa Rural task force report. Economic development and diversification based on export strategies appear more difficult today than in the past. And the

resource-intensity of the current global growth regime, heavily reliant on fossil fuels and other non-renewable natural resources is a major driver of climate change and is not sustainable. National dynamics and fast-growing domestic markets offer huge opportunities in meeting Africa's own needs in the food and agriculture sector. Those tensions between expanding markets for European companies and improving opportunities for women farmers are not even considered in the conference's programme.

The study to be published for the conference maps the effects of international trade on job creation in export sectors in Europe, and wage differentials between men and women in these sectors. The effects on economic sectors impacted by increasing external competition are not included, the effect of liberalization on women's working conditions are missing, and the effect on women's access to essential public services and on unpaid care and domestic work is a huge oversight.

We urge you to invite representatives of women's rights and feminist groups from both Europe and the Global South as speakers in the event. We believe that if the EU is serious about involving women in international trade on better terms, women's expertise and lived experiences should be included in the policy debates. We also urge you to invite a member of the European Parliament and representatives of national parliaments to speak. Finally, while the business community has multiple speaking slots in the event, trade unions have none at all. We therefore urge you to find a just balance between speakers from the business community and those from civil society.

We hope you will be able to ensure this conference reflects a diversity of voices and opens spaces for various perspectives to be heard and debated. For EU trade policy to be legitimate and contribute to delivering the EU's model and democratic values, it must be shaped by multiple stakeholders, and not just by the champions and beneficiaries of the current international trade regime.

Yours Sincerely,

ActionAid International
Association for Promotion Sustainable Development (India)
Both ENDS
CNCD-11.11.11
Fingo (Finland)
GADIP (Sweden)
Humanitaire Plus (Togo)
Make Mothers Matter EU Delegation
Marzia Fontana, author of the study 'Gender Equality in Trade Agreements', commissioned by the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament (2016)
National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia (NACCSOL)
NOAH – Friends of the Earth Denmark
Soroptimist International
UK Women's Budget Group
Volkshilfe Solidarität in Austria
WIDE+ (Europe)
WIDE in Austria – Network for Women´s Rights and Feminist Perspectives in Development
WO=MEN, the Dutch Gender Platform

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