

Call for Asian Movements to Renew the Spirit of Hong Kong and Re-Energize the Resistance to the WTO-Doha Round

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In December 2005 during its 6th Ministerial Meeting, we gathered in Hong Kong as part of one global movement against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its agenda of corporate globalisation.

We, representing networks and movements of farmers, fishers, workers, women, migrants, and trade activists from across Asia seized the moment presented by the ministerial meeting in Hong Kong to mobilize in unprecedented numbers to express our collective rejection of the Doha Round.

The protest actions in Hong Kong, which culminated with the historic Wan Chai march of December 17, 2005 that saw thousands of protestors push back barricades near the Hong Kong Convention Center before being violently dispersed by anti-riot police, became another powerful and enduring symbol of the ever-growing global justice movement. And in Hong Kong, we, from Asian movements were at the frontlines.

Since then we have mobilized across Asia at the national and local levels, putting pressure on our country negotiators to reject the Doha round and to resist the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) agenda to further open up markets and consolidate the dominance and control of rich and developed countries and the big corporations over international trade and investment.

In the wake of multiple crises on food, climate, and the worst global economic crisis in decades, we amplified the call for alternatives to the discredited neo-liberal paradigm that has bred further poverty and inequality across the region. Asian movements have been in the forefront in advancing for food sovereignty, alternative regional arrangements, reclaiming public services and transparent and democratic trade and investment policies.

“Doha is part of the problem and not the solution” became our common call against efforts by global institutions such as the WTO, IMF-WB, ADB, and our very own national governments to push for more economic openness to combat the threat of protectionism, a bogey they resurrected in the wake of the economic crisis.

Fuelled by the fear of a return to protectionism and renewed interest in concluding the stalled multilateral trade talks as a solution to the crisis, the WTO led by Director General Pascal Lamy will convene its 7th Ministerial Meeting from November 30-December 2, 2009 in Geneva.

The latest push for Doha is animated by a new more aggressive approach to proceed with bilateral discussions on scheduling of commitments ahead of negotiations over the highly contentious issue of modalities.

We are alarmed at the way developing country trade negotiators have embraced this new process and accepted the flawed, imbalanced and problematic December 2008 texts-the same texts

previously rejected by them - as the basis of further negotiations.

In agriculture, the limited demand for flexibilities in defense of the livelihoods of small food producers under the Special Products and Special Safeguard Mechanisms (SP/SSM) for developing countries has been further watered-down to the point of making these provisions ineffective and useless. The livelihoods of a majority of people in Asia are still dependent on agriculture, thus protecting peasants' and farmers' is crucial. This goal will not be guaranteed under the WTO negotiations, we therefore reiterate our call for the WTO to get out of agriculture.

In the NAMA negotiations, we have seen so clearly how ambition has trumped flexibilities. We have seen how the industrialized countries have successfully pushed a highly ambitious formula for reduction of industrial and fisheries tariffs whilst undermining the demand for flexibilities. NAMA has been reduced to a numbers game where developing countries would have to reduce tariffs by over 60 % with limited recourse for exemptions and flexibilities. An agreement on NAMA would mean de-industrialization, erosion of policy space, huge revenue losses and job losses and insecurity for many countries in the region.

The imbalance in Doha is further manifested in the services negotiations. The US and the EU, whose corporations dominate global trade in services, have consistently been trying to muscle in their agenda for a more liberalized services regime which threatens developing countries right to regulate these investments, and particularly, they are trying to reinforce this position under the pretext of the financial crisis. A deal on services would put even essential public services, like health and education, at the mercy of market predators and at the expense of the welfare and wellbeing of the poor in developing countries.

The Ministerial meeting in Geneva represents the most significant push for the conclusion of the Doha round since the Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in 2005.

It is no coincidence that the Geneva Ministerial is scheduled a week before the UNFCCC Climate talks and there are already sinister attempts in the WTO to show it has "solutions" to the climate crisis through the liberalization of environmental goods and services. We will work with climate justice networks to push for an equitable, just and effective outcome at the Copenhagen talks and campaign against the WTO's attempt to be part of the solution to the climate crisis.

We therefore call on movements across Asia to unite and renew the spirit of the Hong Kong Resistance and re-energize the campaigns and mobilize at the local, national and regional levels against the WTO-Doha Round.

We call on social movements to mobilize from November 28- December 2, 2009 as our common days of action against the WTO-Doha Round.

We need to muster our collective strength as Asian movements to push back the free trade agenda in our countries and in our region and coordinate efforts across the globe to effectively derail the WTO-Doha Round.

Signed:

Alliance of Progressive Labor, Philippines
AMA, Philippines (Coalition of Agricultural Workers)
ATTAC Japan
BKU, India (Bhartiya Kissan Union)
Center for Migrant Advocacy, Philippines
Daulat Institute, Indonesia

Focus on the Global South
Freedom from Debt Coalition
FTA Watch Thailand
Gerak Lawan, Indonesia
Global Network Asia
Globalization Monitor, Hong Kong
Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU)
Institute for Global Justice
Jubilee South-Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development
Kilusang Mangingisda (Fisherfolk Movement-Philippines)
Korean Peasants League (KPL)
Korean Women Peasants' Association
KPD, Philippines (Movement for National Democracy)
KRRS, India
La Via Campesina
Migrant Forum in Asia
Monitoring Sustainability of Globalization (MSN), Malaysia
No to WTO Grassroots Campaign, Japan
PANGISDA (Progressive Alliance of Fisherfolk)
Serikat Petani Indonesia (Indonesian Peasants Union)
Sintesa Foundation, Indonesia
Stop the New Round Coalition-Philippines