

# Developing Countries Should Walk Out Of WTO Ministerial - Time To Start Process Of Dismantling The WTO

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**On the penultimate day of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) currently taking place in Geneva, leaders from trade unions, farmers organisations and civil society called upon developing country negotiators to reject compromise outcomes at the WTO MC 12 and instead reclaim policy space lost during the Uruguay Round by taking strategic steps to dismantle the WTO.**

They were speaking at an online press conference titled “WTO@27: End of the Road” convened by [Focus on the Global South](#) to take stock of the current negotiations and look at the way ahead for global trade policy. Speakers from the Philippines, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Australia shared their insights on the negotiating texts currently being tabled at the MC12, assessed the WTOs records especially its role during the pandemic, and articulated the way forward for a genuine democratic multilateralism that puts economic, social and environmental justice at the forefront.

Panelists included Professor Walden Bello from Focus on the Global South, Kate Lappin from [Public Services International](#), Farooq Tariq from [Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee](#) and [La Via Campesina](#), Sagari Ramdas from Kudali Learning Centre and Food Sovereignty Alliance, Pablo Rosales from [PANGISDA-Pilipinas](#), and Dr. Lauren Paremoer from the [People’s Health Movement](#) (PHM). Shalmali Guttal, Executive Director of Focus on the Global South, moderated the press conference.

In her opening remarks, **Shalmali Guttal** pointed to the crisis of legitimacy that the WTO is facing: *“The WTO has failed to facilitate timely, appropriate responses to food and health crises—which are most stark during the COVID pandemic on the issue of IPRs on testing, treatment and vaccines. There has not been a single positive outcome for developing countries from the WTO. The last MC held in Buenos Aires had no outcome because of this. Now in Geneva, they want to avoid a repeat of that fiasco and so there is a strong push for compromises at the MC12.”*

*‘WTO declarations with some nice language does not mean there is actual consensus on contentious issues. Using the current crisis of the WTO, developing countries must move from defensive to offensive positions and reclaim the policy space lost in the Uruguay Round,’* said **Walden Bello**.

**Kate Lappin** argued that as the world continues to face vaccine apartheid, we need to ensure that the WTO has no role whatsoever in global health policy including on access to vaccines and treatment. Lappin also noted that at the MC12, developed countries are pushing through very anti-democratic rules around domestic regulations in the services sector that will constrain legitimate sovereign policy making spaces of governments.

**Farooq Tariq** spoke on the impact of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) on rural farming communities in the global south. He said that AoAs free trade, pro corporate farming model has

brought food riots, poverty, hunger and misery to millions of farmers in the global south. *"They are trying to control everything,"* said Tariq. *"WTO agreements limit peasants' ability to grow seeds. Industrial agriculture exploits cheap migrant labor, particularly of women & girls"*. Tariq asserted that the way forward for agriculture was the La Via Campesina proposal for a new international framework based on food sovereignty.

**Sagari Ramdas** spoke about how three decades of neoliberal pro corporate WTO policies in agriculture have enabled the reproduction of old patterns of colonial exploitation. She also highlighted the Indian Government's duplicitous position on the WTO. *"On the one hand at Geneva, they are defending farmers and the right to public stockholding. But back home in Delhi they are embracing neoliberal policies that cut subsidies and impoverish small farmers. India's embrace of a pro corporate model of farming has decimated cooperatives and led to dispossession and displacement of millions of small-scale food producers - especially women from indigenous and marginalised backgrounds that represent a vast majority of India's agricultural workforce,"* said Ramdas.

**Pablo Rosales** pointed out how the Philippine government failed to improve the conditions of small-scale fisherfolk even as it promised to do so by joining the WTO in 1995. The fisherfolk remain as one of the poorest sections of society due to greater liberalisation and deregulation of fisheries. *'Our experience over the past two decades has led us to demand that fisheries should be out of the WTO',* asserted Rosales.

**Lauren Paremour** from PHM said that the current TRIPS text being negotiated in Geneva is not the waiver proposal submitted by South Africa and India, but a far more limited text drafted by the WTO Secretariat that makes it more cumbersome to apply flexibilities during COVID19 than otherwise. *"The best option for developing countries on the current TRIPS text at the MC12 is to reject it and walk away. No outcome is better than a bad one."*

Panelists at the press conference were of the opinion that there should be no compromise by developing countries at the MC 12. While the short term goal would be to block any bad outcomes at MC 12 and resist any further encroachment by the WTO in new arenas such as the digital economy and e-commerce, the long term strategic goal for social movements across the world should be for dismantling the WTO. **Walden Bello** concluded that, instead of the WTO, developing countries should be looking at various UN fora and mechanisms, and multilateral agreements built on as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights to promote economic development, cooperation, sustainable development and well-being.

The press conference can be watched in its entirety at Focus on the Global South Facebook page on the link here.

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