



## Media Advisory: CSO Quotes on WTO Negotiations

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**(Abu Dhabi) Civil society organizations, present at the WTO's MC13, have the following quotes about the current negotiations happening at the WTO.** Civil society, representing communities affected by decisions made at the WTO, is being repressed at the WTO's MC13, as demonstrations, banners, and even leafletting have been banned. Yesterday **"NGOs call for free speech to be restored at WTO Ministerial in UAE."**

[https://ourworldisnotforsale.net/2024-02-26\\_R\\_free\\_speech](https://ourworldisnotforsale.net/2024-02-26_R_free_speech)

More than 50 civil society representatives are in person at MC13 working with the global Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) network including farmers, fisherfolk, development advocates, environmentalists, and public interest organizations, coming from 21 countries: Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Spain, Switzerland, Uganda, the United States, and Zimbabwe. A directory of contact information of civil society experts present in Abu Dhabi for the WTO's MC13 is *available, but redacted in this online version*.

### **Africa Kiiza, African Trade Network, Uganda**

"The ultimate test of a success of the MC 13 will be whether it's outcomes act as a catalyst for accelerating structural transformation, and industrial development in African countries to enable them address inequality and exclusion."

### **Parminder Jeet Singh, Just Net Coalition, India**

"The moratorium on levying custom duties on digitized products, called the E-Com Moratorium, must be discontinued immediately by WTO MC 13 because countries need an absolute right to tax digital economy at the borders – products, services and everything in-between. This is especially so because in a digital economy the distinction between products and services is increasingly thin, and everything increasingly has significant digital services element in it. Very soon, digital flows will be the greatest part of value flows across border. Countries need to preserve the right to tax these value flows at the border, in order to earn revenues, but even more importantly to protect, shape and develop their domestic economy, and digital industrialization, as per the best national interest."

### **Deborah James, Director of International Programs at Center for Economic and Policy Research and Facilitator of Our World Is Not for Sale global network, USA**

"At MC13, we call on WTO members to deliver on developing countries' demands for flexibility from onerous WTO rules: a permanent solution for public stockholding for food security; allow countries to tax Big Tech (let the moratorium expire); and the development agenda. This MC13 should not be held hostage to a pro-corporate agenda of expanding

WTO disciplines against public domestic regulation of services and investment through Joint Statement Initiatives which are illegal under multilateral rules.”

“Despite the WTO’s efforts to silence our voices, affected communities need to be heard in the halls of negotiations. It is the WTO’s responsibility to guarantee that affected communities and CSO experts maintain the rights of free speech within the WTO space, whichever country is the host organization of the Ministerial Conference. We hold the WTO responsible for this escalation of repression against the voices of civil society and demand that our rights are restored.”

**Victor Menotti, Demand Climate Justice, Slovakia**

“WTO must move beyond its ideological rigidity of one-way trade liberalization if it is to address today’s converging climate and other crises it helped to create by thirty years of free trade group-think...International cooperation needs to allow national and local communities more policy space to deal with WTO’s mess while supporting their efforts towards just transitions to sustainable development.”

**Fikerman Saragih, KIARA fisherfolk organization, Indonesia**

“In Indonesia there are 2.4 million fisherfolk and 3.9 women involved in the sector. The proposed subsidy prohibitions will be risk breaking Indonesian laws and regulations, which clearly state that small-scale fishers are entitled to subsidies from the Government including for fuel subsidies, fisheries insurance, life insurance, fishing risk guarantees and realizing fish prices that benefit fishers. This proposed agreement will harm fisherfolk.”

**Ranja Sengupta, Senior Researcher with Third World Network, India,**

“Mandated issues such as a permanent solution, special safeguards against import surges and cotton subsidies given by the west continue to languish and need a solution in MC13.”  
“Developing countries need policy space through PSH, SSM, and disciplines on cotton subsidies to develop their agriculture sector, not be forced to fully liberalise in the name of food security solutions.”

**Kinda Mohamadieh, Senior Researcher & Legal Advisor with Third World Network, Lebanon**

“Reforming the WTO cannot be decoupled from its ability to deliver for development. The draft ministerial declaration is currently empty from anything substantive in this regard. Reaffirming the longstanding mandate to strengthen special and differential treatment and the request by the African group and other developing countries on policy space for industrial policy have been relayed to an annex that might be completely dropped. If so, there is no value in this declaration for developing countries.”

**Diego Lopez, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**

“We need an updating of WTO rules to prioritise social justice and respect for labour standards.”

**Jane Kelsey, Professor Emeritus, Auckland University, New Zealand**

“The old power brokers thought the rules they designed in 1995 would leave them in control of the WTO. Now they are unable to get their way they are ignoring the rules and resorting to “reform by doing”. That’s the subtext behind vague phrases in the draft ministerial declaration. It’s all about regaining control. Most beachhead for “reform by doing” is negotiations by breakaway subgroups in what are called Joint Statement initiatives. They are unmandated, outside the authorised WTO bodies

and therefore unlawful. Now they are using intense political pressure, devious tactics and abuses of process to bypass opposition and get them in through the back door.”

A summary of What's at Stake at the WTO's 13th Ministerial, including links to letters and analysis from many of the organizations, can be seen [here](#).

OWINFS is a network of organizations and social movements worldwide fighting the current model of corporate globalization embodied in the global trading system of the WTO. OWINFS is committed to a sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable multilateral trading system. [www.ourworldisnotforsale.net](http://www.ourworldisnotforsale.net) #