



9 September 2024

Dear Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala:

We write as members of the “Our World Is Not For Sale” (OWINFS) network, a loose grouping of 193 organizations and social movements worldwide working for a fairer global trading system. We have extensive expertise on trade-related matters and a long history of critical engagement with the World Trade Organization, including ministerial conferences and the WTO Public Forum. We are requesting a meeting with you this week to discuss the following three issues.

1. The Public Forum was created in response to challenges from civil society that their concerns were not being taken seriously and there was no effective space to raise and debate these. For a number of years, we have made major efforts and incurred considerable expense to participate in the Public Forum. Progressively, that space has been narrowed to the extent that over half of the sessions this year are plenaries run by the WTO itself. By contrast, the parallel sessions involve multiple panels that will be competing for audience. These concerns have been raised previously but the programme has deteriorated further. By the WTO’s own accounting, civil society was permitted to organize only 25% of sessions.
2. A second development has eroded hard-fought openness in the public sharing of negotiating texts. We secured a commitment to providing Doha round negotiating texts for public review. Yet now we face a series of plurilateral negotiations conducted in secret, with the results presented as a *fait accompli*. If these are being facilitated by the WTO, they need to be treated with the same level of disclosure as the Doha negotiations.
3. At the 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi we wrote to you expressing serious concerns about our ability to effectively participate in this process. We never received a satisfactory response from you to our concerns. As a result, we remain deeply concerned about a repeat of that behaviour by the hosts at the MC14 and lack of clear protocols agreed in advance, including with input from civil society groups that have a history of participation.

Unlike other United Nations organisations, the WTO has long fallen short in its openness to civil society, including those who take more critical positions. We are therefore requesting the opportunity for several of our representatives to discuss these matters with you in person while in Geneva during this week.

We look forward to your positive response to this request to facilitate a constructive discussion on how to address these concerns.

Signed,

Sofia Scassera,
Senior Advisor, Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS)
on behalf of our members
www.ourworldisnotforsale.net