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At WTO “Public” Forum, Critics Sidelined in Favor of Neoliberal Echo Chamber

GENEVA – Civil society voices at the WTO Public Forum have been all but silenced, despite the event being sold as a space for debate and discussion.

The programme and selection of participants has been tightly controlled by the WTO Secretariat. Concerns expressed in a [July communication](#) to Director-General Ngozi have gone unheeded, evidenced by the table below, which shows the WTO itself dominates the programme, organising over half the time slots in plenary and leaving outside voices to jockey for attention in the remaining time slots. Those crowded time slots – packed with up to 12 simultaneous sessions – also include additional WTO-organised panels. And many sessions are dominated by [corporate-funded “think tanks”](#) and massive industry interests based in the Global North, including the Chamber of Commerce, BusinessEurope, and Philip Morris, along with the World Bank, World Economic Forum, OECD and others, leaving very little space left for public interest organizations.

Allocation of Time Slots

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Time Slot 1	10 competing sessions	WTO	12 competing sessions	10 competing sessions
Time Slot 2	WTO	WTO	WTO	WTO
Time Slot 3	WTO	WTO	WTO	WTO
Time Slot 4	11 competing sessions	11 competing sessions	12 competing sessions	11 competing sessions
Time Slot 5	11 competing sessions	WTO	WTO	7 competing sessions
Time Slot 6	WTO	11 competing sessions	9 competing sessions	8 competing sessions
Time Slot 7	WTO			WTO

*According to the WTO website as of 5 September 2024.

Once at the Public Forum in Geneva, OWINFS, on behalf of its 193 NGO members, [requested a meeting](#) with Director-General Ngozi to discuss this shrinking space for critical voices – and to seek reassurances that the Secretariat will take concrete actions to ensure that the [suppression of speech](#) that occurred at the Ministerial in Abu Dhabi will not be replicated at the next Ministerial in Cameroon. There has been no response to this request.

OWINFS members in attendance have voiced their dissatisfaction with this process by distributing a [flyer on the WTO "Propaganda" Forum](#) and spread the word to Member States delegations

The design of this event may also be a breach of the WTO's rules requiring the Secretariat be neutral. This program created by the Secretariat as well as public comments made by the Secretariat indicate they have breached their legal obligation to be impartial.