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## Civil Society Coalition Calls on WTO Members to Reject “Reform” Agenda at Yaoundé Ministerial

*OWINFS-led network says proposed changes would weaken multilateral rules and marginalise developing countries*

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YAOUNDÉ / GENEVA — Civil society organisations from across the world call on World Trade Organization (WTO) members to reject a ‘reform’ agenda that would fundamentally undermine the organisation's development mandate, ahead of the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) opening in Yaoundé, Cameroon on 26 March 2026.

The organisations, coordinated by the global network Our World Is Not For Sale (OWINFS), published a [joint statement](#) that warns that the reform agenda now on the table would eliminate the WTO's non-discrimination principle, legitimise illegal US bilateral trade deals struck under threat of tariffs, and entrench a governance model that allows powerful economies to dictate terms to the rest of the world through club-based plurilateral agreements.

"What is unfolding at MC14 is not reform — it is capture," said Jane Nalunga, Executive Director of SEATINI, a think tank covering Southern and Eastern African trade issues. "We are witnessing the United States and the European Union using the language of ‘relevance’ to systematically strip developing countries of the policy space and flexibilities they have negotiated and bargained for. This process risks normalizing coercion as a negotiating tool, while shifting agenda-setting power even further toward the interests of the world’s most powerful countries and largest corporations. If this is what ‘success’ in Yaoundé looks like, then it is a success for entrenched power, not for the billions of people this institution was meant to serve and has too often failed."

The statement identifies several specific concerns.

On governance, the coalition argues that a facilitator-led negotiating process has concentrated discussions in small, non-inclusive formats, departing from the member-driven principles agreed at the 12th Ministerial Conference in 2022. This is counter to a WTO Member-led intergovernmental process that is transparent and inclusive.

On substance, the proposed rules on subsidies and State-Owned Enterprises are described as potentially foreclosing the industrial policy options that developing countries need to achieve structural economic transformation.

The statement also calls out what it describes as a deliberate inversion of history: the narrative that the US has been a victim of the WTO system, when in reality major industrial powers have long enjoyed the freedom to maintain agricultural subsidies, domestic protection and trade

remedy tools unavailable to poorer members. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney recently confessed, the existing multilateral rule book has been fundamentally biased from its inception.

The coalition also raises concerns about US and other developed countries' attempts to make permanent the extension of the WTO's e-commerce moratorium, which prevents members from applying customs duties to electronic transmissions. Development economists have argued that allowing the moratorium to expire would restore fiscal space — a position that has gained significant traction in recent years but remains contested among major trading powers.

OWINFS is not calling for preservation of the status quo. The coalition has consistently argued for genuine transformation: strengthening Special and Differential Treatment for developing countries; delivering a permanent solution on public stockholding for food security; allowing the e-commerce moratorium to expire so developing countries recover fiscal sovereignty; and fundamentally reforming intellectual property rules to ensure access to medicines, vaccines and climate technologies as public goods.

"The question at Yaoundé is not whether the WTO needs to change — it clearly does," said Chee Yoke Ling, Executive Director of Third World Network. "The question is whether the changes on offer actually address the institution's failures, or whether they entrench them under new rules. On that test, the current proposals do not pass."

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#### **ABOUT OWINFS**

Our World Is Not For Sale (OWINFS) is a global network of organisations and activists working for reform of the multilateral trading system to serve people and the planet. The network includes over 200 organisations worldwide. [www.ourworldisnotforsale.net](http://www.ourworldisnotforsale.net)

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