



Statement on Conclusion of MC14

WTO Attempts to Save Face With Desperate ‘To Be Continued’ Outcome as U.S. Plays Spoiler on Behalf of Big Tech

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YAOUNDÉ – The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) has [ended](#) in chaos and confusion, with some decisions punted to an unspecified future date in Geneva.

Despite the U.S., EU, and other developed countries dominating the agenda to benefit their largest corporations, and despite the Secretariat’s heavy-handed facilitator-dominated process, and despite [civil society being sidelined](#) from the usual but already insufficient participation, the carefully curated MC14 outcome that seemed all but assured has failed to cross the finish line. The Trump Administration, unable to bully countries into a long enough tax holiday for Big Tech (via the moratorium on customs duties on e-transmissions), has [blocked](#) agreement on other issues under discussion.

This has the benefit of foiling some of the harmful proposals on the table, like the “reform” package that was poised to dismantle the WTO’s last remaining shreds of multilateral, consensus-based decision-making. In particular, the precedent-setting agreement misleadingly called Investment Facilitation for Development failed to get enough support.

While this avoids the worst case scenario, it still is not cause for celebration. It continues the WTO’s longstanding failure to address developing countries’ urgent proposals to stop WTO rules from restricting development and other policy space.

Nearly 50 members and allies of the Our World Is Not For Sale Network (OWINFS) from around the world attended MC14 with the hope of influencing negotiations to secure an outcome that supports development, food security, and sustainability. **See below quotes from civil society representatives in attendance at MC14 on topics including:**

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E-COMMERCE AND DIGITAL TRADE

- “The ending chaos of MC14 shows how much the Secretariat is aligned with the US to protect big tech interests. They don’t want to listen to developing countries on their demands for policy space and digital industrialization. They are willing to follow in the footsteps of the infamous WTO failure in Seattle just to comply with US interests. It is outrageous. Global south countries should try to push for a digital developmental agenda that serves their interest in the next round of negotiations.”
 - **Sofia Scasserra, Associated Researcher, Transnational Institute**
- “Ending the Ecom Moratorium is a historic step, in understanding and accepting that like in industrial society digital industrialization also needs protective border measures. This is an historic opportunity for developing countries to do away with this unfair practice of giving a blank cheque to never ever levy border taxes on the digital economy, which is the future. As discussions move to Geneva, developing countries should take a simple and straightforward stand: “tell us clearly what this moratorium is meant to cover and what not, and we will tell you whether we support it or not.”
 - **Parminder Jeet Singh, Coordinator, Just Net Coalition, Global/India**
- “This 14th WTO Ministerial Conference served once again to highlight the organization's impasses and its inability to address its existential crisis. It can no longer simply discuss “business as usual,” but it is also failing to make progress on issues related to WTO reform itself.”
 - **Adhemar Mineiro, REBRIP Advisor and Coordinator of the Industry Working Group, Brazilian Network for People's Integration (REBRIP)**
- “At the WTO MC14 in Yaounde, Cameroon, there was a push to extend the e-commerce moratorium, or even more the U.S pushing for a permanent e-commerce moratorium. This isn’t just about digital trade – it’s an attempt to lock in global inequality. Developing countries are being forced to open their markets without the space to collect duties or build their digital industries, while the Big-Tech, especially from developed countries like the United States, continues to reap profits without a fair fiscal contribution. Furthermore, digital corporate interests are being pushed to become permanent, while TRIPS Non-Violation Complaints (NVCs) crucial to the public health of developing countries, remain temporary and continue to be negotiated. This is not a compromise; it is institutionalized inequality. We urge countries in the global south, including Indonesia and others, to firmly reject this permanent moratorium in order to defend digital sovereignty and national policy space.”
 - **Rahmat Maulana Sidik, Executive Director, Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia**

PROCESS, POWER DYNAMICS, AND WTO “REFORM”

- “MC14 has ended not with a deal but with a walkout. The United States could not secure a long enough tax holiday for Big Tech, so it blocked agreement on everything else. The EU and other Northern governments spent the week lining up behind Washington, abandoning any pretense that this ministerial was about development, food security, or a fair multilateral system. Developing countries came to Yaoundé with

legitimate demands that have been on the table for decades. They leave empty-handed. Again. The WTO's crisis is not an accident. It is the predictable result of a system designed to serve corporate interests, now failing even to do that."

- **Fernando Hernandez, Head of Trade and Investment Policy, Both ENDS**
- "The WTO reform agenda of the US and EU should be called out for what it really is: a coup to make their undemocratic methods of bullying and coercion a legal feature of the global trade system. For years, developed countries have stalled progress at the WTO, ignoring the demands of poor and vulnerable communities in the South for food security and access to affordable life-saving medicines. Now, developed countries are posturing as saviors of a multilateral system whose crisis they have helped create in the first place, pushing for new issues that only benefit their big corporations and rules that will forfeit any chance for the South for sovereign development. For people's movements and their communities, WTO cannot be reformed. Let this crisis be an opportunity for us to advance the struggle for radical transformation of the global trade system."
 - **Ivan Enrile, IBON International, Philippines**
- "The WTO Ministerial in Yaounde didn't provide sufficient space for CSOs/Trade unions to effectively participate as observers and as critical stakeholders to ensure that our constituencies' perspectives contribute to shaping the outcomes. Instead, market based interests continue to dominate the WTO discourse while dismissing issues such as decent work and gender as non-trade issues even though they are central to the broader sustainable development agenda."
 - **Faith Lumonya, Tax, trade, and Digitalization Coordinator for Africa and Arab Countries, Public Services International**
- "As usual in international negotiations, power dynamics remain a big issue as the bigger countries continue in one way or the other to impose their way of seeing things to the extent of blocking negotiations if they can't have what they want. LDCs are always bound to consensus which I believe is a smart move when it comes to negotiations, but at one moment, they have to be able to block negotiations too if they don't get what they're demanding. The slogan stating that the WTO reform should be member-driven, open, transparent, inclusive and should address the interest of all member states should not just remain in speeches but have to be what guides major processes and decision makings within the WTO."
 - **Mopo Kayi Hermann, Program Coordinator, AAFEBEN, Cameroon**
- "What I have witnessed this week is no way to set the rules governing global trade. This heavy-handed, facilitator-dominated process gave few options other than a carefully curated outcome in which developed countries and the Secretariat played a disproportionate role. Additionally, the Secretariat failed to keep its promise to preserve the ability for civil society to peacefully demonstrate, as we had at every WTO ministerial prior to the extremely repressive MC13 in Abu Dhabi. For this ministerial to end with no outcome thanks to a Donald Trump temper tantrum on behalf of Big Tech, just shows how broken this institution is. The U.S. delegation's laser focus this week on the e-commerce moratorium fits right into the Trump administration's "might makes

right” approach to trade and efforts to stop other countries from regulating the U.S.-based Big Tech companies operating within their jurisdictions.”

- **Melanie Foley, Global Trade Watch Deputy Director, Public Citizen, USA**
- "At the WTO's MC14 in Yaounde, we saw very clearly that the 'reform' agenda pushed by the United States is not an effort to strengthen the multilateral trading system, but rather an attempt to adapt global rules to its own national interests. When fundamental principles like Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) and Most-Favored Nation (MFN) are questioned, what is at stake is not merely the technicalities of the rules, but the foundations of fairness in the global trading system. Efforts to limit S&DT through unilateral criteria will systematically eliminate the policy space of developing countries, including Indonesia, and force unbalanced liberalization. Meanwhile, weakening the MFN principle paves the way for discriminatory practices and power-based trade politics, where powerful countries freely determine rules and partners, while developing countries are increasingly marginalized. This is a shift from multilateralism to domination. *Indonesia and the countries of the Global South must reject this reform direction, because what is being defended is not just economic interests, but sovereignty and fairness in the global trading system.*"
 - **Rahmat Maulana Sidik, Executive Director Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia**
- We witness that the multilateralism order is at crossroads between power politics and solidarity-based order. The WTO 14th Ministerial Meeting is a part of bigger agenda where Global North countries are reasserting its power into global order. Interests of people in developing countries, peasants, fishers, women, and indigenous people are continuously sidelined. Therefore, a consolidation against the hegemony of Global North is not a choice but it is imperative. An inclusive and fair multilateral trading system must be built on solidarity and not dictated by capital power.
 - **Salsabila Aziziah, Indonesia CSO Coalition for Economic Justice**
- The WTO appears to be sealing its own collapse by enabling Northern powers to evade the rules, push for bilateral and plurilateral deals, impose unilateral sanctions and tariffs with impunity, and further lock Southern countries into roles as raw material extraction sites. MC14 has reinforced the urgent need to demand genuine systemic change and a trade system that serves the democratic majority, guarantees real economic cooperation and solidarity, enables economic diversification, defends people’s rights and development, ensures food sovereignty, and advances trade and climate justice.
 - **Melanie Feranil, Research and Policy Coordinator, IBON International**

AGRICULTURE

- “Agriculture is vital for Africa and we were shocked that the US insisted on erasing the entire history of agricultural negotiations under the WTO by obliterating past ministerial mandates while on the soil of Africa. This is even more shocking as the draft declaration had already been tweaked to accommodate US interests such as “new approaches”. We are very concerned to note that the proposals by a majority of developing countries and LDCs that contained important demands on key mandated

issues, have again been brushed under the carpet. We celebrate that MC14 did not yield to US pressure and agree on an anti-development declaration on agriculture. The draft text was signaling a major shift in the agricultural trade work of the WTO. Instead of catering to the needs of developing countries and LDCs through trade policy flexibilities, it was moving the agenda towards an aggressive liberalisation, based on a completely amorphous new framework, having forgotten old commitments. Now the earlier mandates are protected and the WTO must deliver on them by MC15.”

- **Ranja Sengupta, Senior Researcher and Coordinator of the Trade Programme of Third World Network (TWN)**
- “With MC14 ending in an indefinite postponement, the agricultural negotiations have once again come to nothing, as has been the case since 2015. Developed and agro-exporting countries (Cairns group) refuse to honor the commitments they made in the past to support food security in developing countries. Worse still, they now want to wipe out the past mandates and move toward “new approaches,” which are increasingly harmful to farmers and countries in the Global South. They couldn’t care less if multilateralism goes down the drain, because their ambitions are solely driven by the interests of the agribusiness sector. In so doing, they are ruining what little credibility the WTO and the multilateral system still have. Fortunately, alternatives to the agricultural trade system are taking shape to envision a future outside the WTO; probably all that remains is to pin our hopes on these alternatives to foresee a future where farmers earn a decent living and where the transition to sustainable food systems is set in motion.”
 - **Jonas Jaccard, Policy Officer, Humundi, Belgium**
- “There is an Alice in Wonderland quality to WTO Ministerial conferences. People speak without meaning what they say and negotiations circle without end. No wonder the public has lost interest. Yet the rules matter. The urgent business that needs adaptive responses and better, smarter rules – sectors like agriculture that affect the wellbeing of the whole planet and the livelihoods of several billion people – are sidelined until the last minute. The United States government digs in its heels with pre-emptive demands for rules that protect corporate interests with extraordinary patent rights and tax avoidance. The resulting lack of trust is breaking multilateralism, and the public interest everywhere is paying the price.”
 - **Sophia Murphy, Executive Director, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), USA**
- “I am speaking to you from a farmers’ organization in India with 5 million Members. We have been cheated again by the WTO in Yaounde. A permanent solution on public stockholding is our lifeline but again it has been denied to us. Nor do we have the special safeguard mechanism. We are very angry that the US has pushed for its neoliberal “new approach” agenda and does not want to deliver on past mandates. Brazil, in spite of being a developing country, along with the Cairns Group plans to unleash an aggressive liberalisation agenda, and is misusing “sustainability” and “food security” to buy it. This is a direct attack on our markets, our subsidies, our livelihoods. We are happy that there is no damaging outcome on agriculture from MC14 and we will continue to fight for our rights and oppose these neo-liberal powers.”
 - **K V Biju, Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, India**

- “Africa and other LDCs cannot be asked to open their markets while their farmers compete against heavily subsidized systems. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without fairness and justice in global trade rules.”
 - **Ekane Nkwelle, Green Development Advocates (GDA), Cameroon**

FISHERIES

- “MC14 and the WTO continues a failure to hold to account those large vessels most responsible for overfishing. While the talks continue, they remain gatekept from us, and as expected, our voices and concerns continue to be excluded and ignored. This outcome only reinforces our position that fisheries have no place in the WTO and should instead be returned to the UN FAO’s Committee on Fisheries (COFI), where we at least have some space to engage.”
 - **Terence Repelente, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and PAMALAKAYA, Philippines**
- “The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers calls on governments, NGOs and CSOs to adopt a fair and level playing field for the provision of subsidies to small-scale fisher peoples to support a sustainable and beneficial market niche in the Global South.”
 - **Alieu Sowe, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the Gambia**
- “Following MC14, there is an urgent need to ensure that the focus on future talks is on targeting those most historically responsible for overfishing and overcapacity. Failure to do so will undermine the mandate given by leaders, weaken sustainable development and jeopardise small-scale fishers.”
 - **Adam Wolfenden, Deputy Coordinator, Pacific Network on Globalisation**
- “MC14 notably lacked representation from small-scale fishers and fisher organizations representing millions of people. While the fisheries sector is undergoing rapid transformation, adapting to these changes remains a significant challenge. Advanced requirements such as traceability and digitalization cannot be effectively implemented without comprehensive, practical training for those on the ground. To address these shifts, a collaborative approach is essential one that integrates the efforts of fishers, exporters, and the government. Furthermore, fisheries subsidies must be reviewed periodically in consultation with fisher organizations. These subsidies should be exempted by any WTO disciplines so that they may be maintained based on actual needs, recognizing fishing as a unique, water-based livelihood remaining among the world’s most dangerous occupations.”
 - **Vincent Jain, Federation of Indian Fisher Organisations (FIFO), India**

INVESTMENT FACILITATION “FOR DEVELOPMENT”

- “At the end of MC14, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, it is a sigh of relief that there was no agreement among member states to incorporate Investment Facilitation Agreement

into the WTO rulebook. That proposed Agreement, beyond the fancy title, is a mask for foreign investors to control African economies that are still so much dependent on raw materials and other developing countries' economies as well. It further undermines multilateralism and reintroduces fragmentation under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that Marrakesh Agreement aimed to end and will set the precedent for similar agreements.”

- **Sylvester Bagooro, Senior Programme Officer, Third World Network-Africa**
- “The outcome on the investment facilitation plurilateral is a resounding defeat for those who tried to hijack WTO rules and processes to push their agendas and create a precedent that would be “the beginning of the end” for multilateralism, and developing countries' ability to ever advance their agenda in the WTO.”
 - **Professor Emerita Jane Kelsey, University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand**

INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

- “MC14 has sidelined Africa's development agenda. Africa's longstanding call to address the entrenched asymmetries and imbalances in the WTO rules remain unaddressed with far reaching implications on Africa's aspirations for structural transformation.”
 - **Jane Nalunga, Executive Director, SEATINI**

GENDER

- “For the better part of 15 years, the WTO refused to acknowledge that trade had any gender-differentiated impacts whatsoever. Finally, 10 years ago, after much pressure from practitioners and organizations, including the Gender and Trade Coalition, it made this acknowledgement. However, the discourse on gender and trade we see being disseminated and supported by them today is highly problematic. They treat gender inequality as something to be “solved” by one-off fixes, and fail to acknowledge that these “fixes” cannot solve problems unleashed by unfair WTO agreements. Gender and trade are inherently linked, and gender impacts of trade policies cannot appropriately be evaluated in a vacuum, artificially separated from development and structural concerns. To help women, particularly in the Global South, integrate fairly into the global economic order, they must be involved as equals in all areas of trade, including design and implementation of trade policy. It would be far more useful for women if the WTO can reach fair, equitable, and development-oriented outcomes in all its areas of work and institute the necessary safeguards, rather than put women in a separate box.”
 - **Erica Levenson, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Regions Refocus / Gender and Trade Coalition**
- “When the DG proclaims, “We are no longer just talking, we are delivering” at the high-level women and trade event ahead WTO MC14, let us ask: Delivering for whom? The WTO's “progress” on gender is a lie. “Enhancing women's access to trade” isn't empowerment — it's inclusive neoliberalism. It turns mothers, farm workers, and artisans into market inputs — not fair. Real gender justice isn't about inclusion in a

broken system. It's about tearing down the system that profits from women's invisibility and poverty. Until then, "women and trade" is just pink-washing — glossy, empty, and complicit."

- **Arie Kurniawaty, Puanifesto Colletive–Indonesia**

CLIMATE CHANGE

- "The Global North's rule over WTO ran into a quagmire in Cameroon due to their lack of listening and failure to be flexible on Global South demands for a fairer future. Even as the global order that WTO created crumbles around it, trade ministers once again failed to address let alone acknowledge the multiple global crises WTO rules have intensified, particularly economic inequality and planetary ecocide. Their stale statement on climate notably snubbed civil society by once again calling for more engagement with only the very corporations that created today's conditions."
 - **Victor Menotti, Coordinator, Demand Climate Justice (DCJ)**

- Although the issue of climate change was by no means the focus of discussions at the 14th Ministerial Meeting, the proposals to reform WTO undermine basic principles of developing countries and LDCs in the multilateral system. Questioning principles such as their development status or S&DT could have serious impacts for those countries in different multilateral forums, such as the UNFCCC - especially when it comes to climate finance.
 - **Priscilla Papagiannis, Coordinator Climate WG, Brazilian Network's for People Integration (REBRIP).**

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