

# Civil society participation at MC14 was sidelined by the secretariat

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Our World Is Not For Sale (OWINFS) Network participated in the WTO MC14 with member organisations and allies from all regions representing millions of farmers, fisherfolk, and workers around the world. The role of OWINFS at the WTO Ministerials is to make the voices of civil society heard in the halls of power.

OWINFS and other civil society networks have held peaceful demonstrations at past ministerials, including [banners](#), [mic check actions](#), [street theater protests](#), and a [die-in](#) over COVID-19 TRIPS waiver opposition.

Yet, the night before the MC14 was to start (25th March), we were told by the WTO secretariat that we should not do any actions or hold any banners, even silently, on the opening day due to host government instructions. This applied throughout the venue (inside, outside,) and on the driveways from the gate to the building, etc. On the opening day (26th March) we were told the host government had prohibited all forms of actions and protests for the whole duration of the Ministerial.

This problematic treatment of civil society was most serious in MC13 in Abu Dhabi where [OWINFS members were detained](#), actions banned, and even distributing written materials was prohibited.

With the banning of civil society actions in Yaounde, this has developed into a worrying trend where the WTO secretariat does not manage to arrange clear and predictable frameworks for civil society participation and free speech, which should be part of an international event such as the WTO ministerials.

In October 2025 OWINFS sent a [letter to the WTO Director General](#) that civil society participation in the ministerials needs to be secured and the host agreement needs to reflect that. In the meetings we had with the WTO secretariat we were told that the host government was informed of CSO activities and had no objections to this.

For this reason it is paramount now that the WTO secretariat and the member countries of the WTO establish a host agreement that mentions civil society activities and that these are part of the ministerials and permitted by host governments.