



28 November 2003

Ambassador Carlos Perez del Castillo
Chairman, General Council
World Trade Organization

Dear Ambassador Perez del Castillo,

Given recent news accounts regarding consultations taking place on the Singapore Issues, we write to reiterate our opposition to launching negotiations on any of the four Singapore Issues. Our organisations bring a number of different points of view to these issues, including development, environment, labour, human rights, and gender perspectives. Despite our varied organisational perspectives, we agree that to date, the WTO is the wrong venue for negotiations on investment, competition, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation. We stress that a majority of global civil society and WTO Members opposed the launch of negotiations on the Singapore Issues in Cancun. Nothing has changed since Cancun that warrants an alteration of our views.

The four Singapore issues deal with vitally important issues for national governments and societies around the globe. We are unanimous in our view that the WTO currently does not possess either the objectivity in substance or process, or the mandate for negotiating the Singapore issues. This was clearly evident at the recent 5th Ministerial Conference. The relevant language prepared for the Ministerial Declaration had included nearly all the proposals of the major developed countries, yet it largely ignored the specific and firm proposals of the developing countries.

As December 15 approaches, we are deeply concerned that in your discussions with Members you appear to be advocating an approach that would launch negotiations on two of the Singapore Issues and continue discussions on the others. We question the wisdom of advancing such a proposal. We believe that your effort, as Chairman, should instead be guided by the positions explicitly stated by the majority of WTO Members. Doing that would capitalise on the flexibility demonstrated in the closing moments of the Cancun Ministerial. Also, we would expect you to insist that Members follow the procedure adopted in Doha, which requires that a decision to launch negotiations on any of the Singapore Issues must be preceded by agreed modalities for such talks. Against this background it is better to drop these issues and focus on other areas of the work program.

We, and others, have put forward a number of arguments for excluding the Singapore issues from the Single Undertaking and the WTO agenda. In our view the benefits of new WTO disciplines developed countries currently propose for these four areas, will not contribute to the Millennium Development Goals. The benefits of such disciplines are likely to flow to large multinational corporations and not to small and medium-sized enterprises (that often form the backbone of developing country economies). Nor do we see any significant benefits for citizens in either developing or developed countries. In addition, WTO agreements on

these issues would inhibit governments and societies from developing and implementing novel or creative national approaches to development and social policy, environmental protection, and human rights and gender equity policies. Launching negotiations on these issues would also impose significant negotiating burdens on smaller countries and would thus compromise their ability to defend their interests effectively.

On the supposedly least controversial issue area, trade facilitation, we are of the view that there are better ways to approach that issue, including through aid programs that would help modernise customs procedures.

Unambiguously dropping the four Singapore Issues from the Doha work program and from the WTO negotiating agenda would do more than any other single course of action to help the WTO focus on the core issues in the Doha mandate and allow it to move forward to address the sustainable development priorities that are supposed to form the heart of the Doha mandate.

To achieve this result, we propose the following recommendations:

An effective and impartial chairmanship is crucial for the legitimacy of the organisation. In that context, as the Chairman of the General Council, we urge that you facilitate a solution that responds to the will of the majority of WTO Members.

In addition, we call upon you, as the Chairman of the General Council and the Members of the WTO to undertake the following actions:

- to unambiguously drop the four Singapore Issues from the Doha work program and from the WTO negotiating agenda in the context of the 15 December meeting;
- to refrain from re-convening the relevant working groups and special sessions of the Council for Trade in Goods that formerly addressed the Singapore issues; and
- to refrain from raising the Singapore issues again at any future Ministerial Conference, unless a majority of WTO Members call for such a move.

We would appreciate your willingness to take civil society views into account as you continue your work and we welcome any opportunity to discuss these views with you further.

Sincerely,

Center for International Environmental Law
Focus on the Global South
Gender and Trade Network
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Public Services International
Third World Network
OXFAM International
WWF

cc: Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, WTO Director General
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