

## **Women's Caucus Declaration**

### **Third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization**

**Seattle, Washington, USA  
November 30 – December 3, 1999**

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The Women's Caucus is comprised of women's organizations from the South and North attending the Third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, Washington, USA. We are concerned that the rule-based system created by the WTO has produced increasing levels of inequality in both the North and South. This system privileges corporate interests over community and national interests. Trade liberalization is not gender-neutral and has a different impact on women and men, similar to the different impact it has on developed and developing countries. While some women may gain from opening up of trade, the majority of the world's women and girls are adversely affected by the unequal power relations created at the national, regional and international levels by the new trade regime. We firmly believe that the trade policies should ensure gender equality and equity and people centered sustainable development.

We believe that the WTO undermines major international agreements that women have worked hard to get their governments to commit to including the UN conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and Habitat II. We further believe that all WTO agreements and policies should be bound by international human rights standards including the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women.

The Women's Caucus urges the Members of the WTO to consider the following concerns clustered around the following critical areas of discussion at the Seattle meeting:

#### **Systemic and Implementation Issues**

- Ensure transparency and open participation of all member states in every negotiation process. Green Room by invitation-only meetings clearly violate principles of both transparency and inclusiveness as well as the integrity of the consensus process.
- Ensure that women's and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have equal access to information. Institute dialogue that allows substantial exchange between trade officials and NGOs.
- We recommend a comprehensive gender, social, and environmental assessment of the implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements before undertaking a new round. Such a review should address the negative impacts and correct the deficiencies and imbalances in the agreements. This review and assessment should involve consultations with women's and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Democratize the WTO dispute settlement system to ensure impartiality, equitable access and a final appeal process outside of the WTO. Introduce and implement mechanisms to reduce the costs of dispute settlement for developing countries.
- Ensure gender and regional balance in all WTO decision-making bodies including expert and scientific panels.
- We urge developed countries to uphold the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries. Developed countries must fulfill their commitments in this area, especially for net food-importing countries and least-developed countries.

## **Agriculture**

- A review of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) must include the experience of consumers, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, civil society groups, and research non-government organizations as well as multilateral organizations that have been critical of the existing rules governing agriculture.
- Ensure food security based on self-sufficient, small-scale, diverse agriculture instead of corporate export-oriented, agro-industrial monocultures.
- Ensure that southern and small farmers, particularly women, are not undermined by competitive pressures resulting from the rapid removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers and subsidized agricultural products from northern countries.
- Adopt the Convention on Biodiversity. Ban the patenting of living organisms and protect the knowledge, practices and livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

## **General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)**

- Ensure that public services such as health, education, social welfare, water, energy, among others are affordable and accessible.
- Promote symmetry in the treatment of the international mobility of capital and labor. Liberal entry of multinational service corporations must be matched by market opening measures for labor in developed countries.
- Provide women with capital, skills, training and technology that would allow them to take advantage of opportunities that increased trade in services provides.
- Ensure that trade policy does not overturn domestic regulations on consumer protection, public safety, public health and education, food safety and environmental protection, among others.