

AFTINET Bulletin No. 36, 9 April 2002

If you would like to contribute to the Bulletin, please contact pranald@piac.asn.au

Our website is www.aftinet.org.au

Contents

1. Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry on Bilateral Trade Agreements and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER): Submissions due April 12!
2. Call by environment organisations for WTO Rules to respect Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)
3. Philippines and Africa sceptical on WTO
4. World Farmers' Day, 17 April: Statement by Via Campesina, international movement of small farmers
5. Coming Events
 - a) AFTINET Publication Launch Wed 24 April, 12.30 pm, Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney.
 - b) Treasury Seminars on the implementation of OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises for Australia Sydney 17 April, Melbourne, 18 April.
 - c) AID/WATCH Fundraising Job

-----++-----

1. Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry on Bilateral Trade Agreements and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) : Submissions due April 12!

The day before the Easter break the JSCOT called for submissions on 13 proposed international treaties which had been tabled in Parliament. They include an Agreement between Australia and Uruguay on Promotion and Protection of Investments, an Agreement with Egypt on the Promotion and Protection of Investment, and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER).

The text of the Treaties can be found at www.aph.gov.au//house/committee/JSCT/12March2002.htm

This is an abuse of the consultation process. Please send the following short letter to the Committee to register your protest and to make some brief points about the agreements.

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House, Canberra
Email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to register a strong objection to the limited time for submissions on 13 proposed international treaties including an Agreement with Uruguay on Promotion and Protection of Investments, an Agreement with Egypt on the Promotion and Protection of Investment and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER).

The two bilateral investment treaties contain investor-state complaints mechanisms which allow corporations to challenge government legislation and to sue governments for damages. We object to these provisions as an undermining of democratic governance and an expansion of legal powers for corporations which can already exercise huge economic influence on governments.

The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) is an agreement which provides the framework for future free trade agreements which would include the removal of all trade and investment barriers between Australia and New Zealand and the much smaller and vulnerable economies of the Pacific Islands. It is proposed that Australia ratify the PACER Agreement at the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2002. Non-government organisations in the Pacific Islands have noted that PACER has not been widely debated by the public or by parliaments in the region and have raised the following questions:

- ◆ the impact of a free trade agreements on traditional communal ownership of land and on the ability to regulate use of natural resources such as minerals and timber
- ◆ the impact of free trade in government procurement on the ability of governments to encourage local development through purchasing products from local firms
- ◆ the impact of liberalisation of food imports on food security and health. Studies of countries such as Fiji and Tonga have shown that cheap food imports have undercut local food products, driven local farmers out of business and have led to higher consumption of fatty and high-carbohydrate foods with consequent health impacts

We ask that the committee consider these questions carefully and if necessary extend the time for the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

2. Call by environment organisations for WTO Rules to respect Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)

The following statement was issued on April 3 by Friends of the Earth International, Greenpeace International, WWF International, Third World Network, Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), Sierra Club:

UN member governments have an opportunity in Johannesburg to make a clear statement concerning the relationship between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and

WTO trade rules, in order to reaffirm the authority and autonomy of MEAs and to ensure that MEAs are not subordinated to or undermined by the WTO.

At the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference in Qatar, WTO Members decided to launch negotiations on the relationship between MEAs and trade rules because there has been some uncertainty about the relationship between certain MEA provisions and WTO trade rules. Today, around 20 MEAs have trade related provisions. It is known that due to the rapid development of WTO rules with strong enforcement measures, the implementation of some MEA trade provisions have suffered from a "chilling" effect, with some members arguing that some MEA trade provisions would not be compatible with WTO rules.

Negotiations will come to first results at the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Mexico in 2003. At stake here is the very question of global governance, where the MEAs represent a rare and strategically important space in today's international governance architecture to protect people and the planet. They must be defended and strengthened as a countervailing force to WTO rules.

During the preparatory process for, as well as at, the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg, the World Summit on Sustainable Development should reaffirm the authority and autonomy of MEAs and clarify that the objectives, principles, and provisions of MEAs must not be subordinated to WTO rules.

Friends of the Earth International, Greenpeace International, WWF International, Third World Network, Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), Sierra Club.

3. Philippines and Africa sceptical on WTO

Philippine Trade Secretary Manuel Roxas on 15 March said the country was considering withdrawing from the WTO over what he claims is the trade body's discrimination between its developed and developing country Members. The Trade Secretary cited the recent decision by the US to impose tariffs of up to 30 percent on imported steel and the EU's preference to import tuna from Africa and the Caribbean over the Philippines. Earlier, on 13 March, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo voiced her support for calls for the country to reconsider its membership in the Cairns Group, a coalition of 18 agricultural exporting countries. Some members of Arroyo's cabinet, particularly Trade Secretary Manuel Roxas, have urged the withdrawal from Cairns due to the group's failure to back the country's bid to access the European tuna market.

Two weeks later a capacity-building seminar organised by the US Agency for International Development Senegalese speakers criticised the WTO for marginalizing developing countries while serving developed country interests. At another regional seminar on the new WTO negotiations in Zambia, George Lipimile, executive director of the country's Competition Commission, said that most developing countries are sceptical of a proposed new multilateral agreement on competition. He said the policy is being pushed by developed countries led by the European Union that wish to secure a free hand for their companies in the developing world, possibly to the detriment of poor countries.

Summarised from Radio Australia News, 15 March 2002, Lusaka Post, 27 March , UN Wire, 29 March 2002

4. World Farmers' Day, April 17: Statement by Via Campesina, international movement of small farmers

Via Campesina will organise public events in the Americas, Europe and the Asia Pacific on April 17 in support of the following statement:

The Vía Campesina believes that without full respect for the lives and the liberty of our farmers as well as the protection of natural resources against the take-over by private companies no true progress is possible.

Access to and control over land, seed, water, credit and other productive resources have to be guaranteed for all farmers, both men and women, in order to enable them to produce sufficient and adequate food in a sustainable and socially just way, respecting the available natural resources.

This includes the defense of community rights on genetic resources and a ban on Patents and other Intellectual Property Rights on living organisms, a ban on the use of GMOs in agriculture and food production, the implementation of genuine agrarian reform programs, equitable markets with just prices, an end to food "dumping" and respect for the principles of food sovereignty.

Via Campesina has the following concrete demands to be realised in 2002:

- 1) A total ban on "Terminator Technologies" (the production of sterile seeds) and other Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs) that control the traits in plants and animals,
- 2) A full investigation led by FAO of the transgenetic contamination of international gene banks and the genetic contamination of Centres of Diversity and concrete measures to avoid this contamination,
- 3) Concrete steps towards a total abolition of patents on living organisms on the national and international levels. The FAO must forbid the application for patents on any genetic resources or their parts and components and the FAO Summit must call upon national governments to ban patents on genetic resources.

We expect these concrete commitments to be agreed internationally at the 6th Conference of parties in The Hague in April, at the FAO World Food Summit Rome in June and at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August/September 2002.

- 4) Many farm leaders and members of farm organizations (men and women) are suffering repression or are serving time in prison, others have been assassinated only because they

defended their economic and social, legitimate rights. Via Campesina demands this 17th of April the immediate release of farmers that are in prison, stop to repression and the punishment of the authors of the crimes against men, women and children of the rural areas.

5. Coming Events

a) AFTINET Publication Launch Wed April 24, 12.30 pm, Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney.

The Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) invites you to the launch of its new publication: *The MAI Resurrected? What the New Round of World Trade Organisation Negotiations could mean for Australia* by Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy Officer, Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC)

When: Wednesday 24 April at 12.30 pm.

Where: Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney.

The Australian government is taking part in negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and on proposed new WTO agreements on investment, competition policy and government procurement. These proposals resurrect many of the negative features of the discredited draft Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which collapsed in 1998 after it was exposed by community debate.

The publications explains the WTO process, how we can hold our government accountable and campaign against these outcomes, and for a trade framework which respects human rights and the environment.

Speakers include :

- ◆ The Rev Dr Ann Wansbrough, Uniting Church Minister
- ◆ Julius Roe, National President, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
- ◆ Dr Meredith Burgmann, President, Legislative Council of NSW
- ◆ Senator John Cherry, Australian Democrats Spokesperson on Trade
- ◆ Senator elect Kerry Nettle, Greens NSW

For more information and to RSVP contact Sarah Mitchell at smitchell@piac.asn.au.

Thanks to the Uniting Church for funding assistance with the publication and to the Mercy Foundation for campaign funding.

b) Treasury Seminars on the implementation of OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises for Australia Sydney April 17, Melbourne, April 18 .

These are voluntary guidelines for corporations on human rights, labour rights and the environment.

Sydney April 17, 9.30 am

Axiss Australia
Angel Place Building
Level 28, 123 Pitt Street
SYDNEY Fundraising Job

Melbourne, April 18, 9.30 pm

Takeovers Panel
Level 47, 80 Collins Street
MELBOURNE

c) AID/WATCH Fundraising Job

AID/WATCH is a Sydney-based not-for-profit organisation, which monitors the environmental and social effects of Australia's aid program, and international bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

AID/WATCH seeks a Fundraising & Communications Officer for a permanent part-time (3 days/week) role. This challenging position is exciting because success in this role directly strengthens AID/WATCH's capacity to prevent the exploitation of aid and low-income communities and their environments.

You are required to establish, implement and develop core fundraising strategies to support the organisation's operational costs. Direct marketing experience in relation to mail appeals, regular giving and bequests is essential. You will have a proven track record in this, as well as in building supporter relationships, understanding of fundraising database management, and strong customer service background. It is desirable to have bequests, telefundraising or market research experience.

You will be able to work effectively on your own and within a small team, as well as foster team spirit. You are passionate, well organised, an effective communicator, and a down-to-earth individual who wants to achieve positive social and environmental change.

For further information on AID/WATCH or to obtain a full job description please contact Melita Grant at AID/WATCH on 02 9387 5210 or email aidwatch@mpx.com.au. Alternatively, please visit www.aidwatch.org.au.

Applications due : 5pm, Wed 17th April 2002