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 Australian Fair Trade
 & Investment Network Ltd

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Hosted and supported by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd.

AFTINET Bulletin 126, 5 April 2006

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1. REMINDER: AFTINET seminar 'One year on: Pulling back the curtain on the US FTA' Friday 7 April

AFTINET is holding a one day seminar with leading Australian academics, policy workers and campaigners on the emerging impacts of the US FTA and the continuing campaign. The aim of the seminar is to share information and research on the emerging social and environmental impacts of the US FTA and to provide a forum to discuss the future campaigning opportunities.

When: 9:00am - 5:00pm Friday 7 April
Where: Level 11, PSA House, 160 Clarence St, Sydney
Cost: \$66 full price / organisation; \$27.50 concession / low wage / student (GST incl, includes lunch and morning / afternoon tea)

Speakers include: Andrew Searles, researcher from the Australian National University on access to medicines; Professor Linda Hancock from Deakin University on the US FTA's impact on community services; Alister Kentish from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union on the impacts in the manufacturing industry; Sarah Waladan from Australian Libraries Copyright Committee; Lynn Gailey from the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance on the impact on Australia's film and television industry,

and; John Hepburn from Greenpeace on the labeling of genetically engineered food.

Contact Jemma Bailey on 8898 6500 or jbailey@piac.asn.au to register or for more information.

We will circulate the outcomes of this seminar to all members.

2. Enter the G6 - Australia leads the way in exclusive WTO meetings

Following the face-saving deal in Hong Kong, the WTO has set an accelerated agenda to conclude the negotiations in the current Doha Round. **The next important date is a 30 April deadline for the general negotiations on cutting tariffs on farm and manufactured goods.**

Australia is playing a key role in pushing a conclusion to the current Doha Round through a new group of countries called the G6 – consisting of Australia, the US, the European Union, Japan, India and Brazil. The G6 wants to see agreement reached for liberalisation across agriculture, essential services and goods by the end of this year. On the current trajectory of negotiations, any deal is likely to threaten access to essential services, undermine rural livelihoods and lead to a race-to-the-bottom on workers rights and environmental standards.

The G6 has been holding exclusive invite-only meetings to set the agenda of the negotiations. Most recently, there was a Mini-Ministerial meeting held in London from 10 – 11 March with only these 6 governments invited. These forums exclude the majority of the WTO's membership. It is a deliberate strategy to bypass larger Ministerial Meetings, where decisions are more transparent as all member governments are present as well as media and civil society.

The Doha Round negotiations are at a critical stage and, once again, it appears that member governments do not have an equal access to the negotiating table.

In March, AFTINET member organisations joined with other community groups around the world to call on Australia and the other G6 countries to stop meeting in undemocratic exclusive meetings and to make negotiations transparent. This letter is reproduced below.

Thanks to all AFTINET member organisations who supported this letter!

Dear Honorable Ministers,

Using Undemocratic, invitation-only non-Ministerials to push Doha Round

We are writing because of deep concern about procedural issues relating to the calling of exclusive meetings of the WTO, such as the recent Senior Officials meetings in Geneva during 7 – 9 March, and the Mini-Ministerial meeting in London during 10 – 11 March.

We understand that representatives of only 6 WTO members (the United States, the European Commission, Japan, Australia, India, and Brazil) were invited to participate in this most recent the Mini-Ministerial, and just these countries as well as Canada, Norway, Malaysia, Egypt, and Kenya were invited to the Senior Officials meeting.

Worse, we have learned about the current discussions concerning a possible spring Geneva Ministerial-level meeting that would be constructed to force decisions opposed by many WTO signatory countries by simply excluding Ministers from the vast majority of WTO member nations. We understand that included, besides Ministers from the United States, European Union, Australia and other developed countries, will be only Ministers from developing countries who either comprise the predictable short list of ideological 'coalition of the willing' developing countries or who have identified mercantilist gains for their large economies. The only other invitees will be a few additional individual ministers who are to be selected for the near-impossible task of representing against this rigged colossus the interests of *entire large blocs* of the other 100-plus WTO signatory countries – the Africa Group, the Least Developed Countries, and the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group.

The countries who would be excluded from such an extremely anti-democratic process would happen to form the majority of the WTO's member countries. These are countries who, thanks to endless bullying and threats and previous anti-democratic processes used to issue the July 2004 Framework Agreement and utilised at the Hong Kong Ministerial, now face a Doha Round agenda that if implemented would harm the majority of their inhabitants. This analysis is supported by the recent World Bank studies on the likely Doha Round outcomes which demonstrate that scores of developing countries would be net losses under the likely Doha Round outcome with extremely limited gains to a few.

The Doha Round negotiations are in a critical phase with deadlines pressing on modalities that will determine the fates of the very countries that would be excluded from the decision-making process.

... It is imperative that every member must have equal access to the decision-making process of the Doha Round. The Doha Ministerial Declaration's mandate has been systematically violated during the past several years. **If Ministers or Senior Officials are gathering to discuss key WTO negotiations or decisions, it is in concordance with the guidelines establishing the Doha Round that all Ministers or Senior Officials be invited.**

Honorable ministers, you in the past affirmed your commitments to the mandated democratic process and transparent operation of the WTO. If your past statements are to be more than cynical rhetoric, then the participation in all upcoming high-level meetings must be determined by strong adherence to the established WTO processes and a commitment to consensus decision-making based on full participation of all members nations. Honest, democratic and inclusive process, not the interests of the powerful few or looming timelines, must determine the process of WTO negotiations.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of the above matters.

3. Update on GATS negotiations - water, energy, education and postal services targeted

Following the WTO Ministerial in December, a new process of negotiations was mandated to increase commitments in the WTO trade in services agreement (GATS). This new process is known as 'plurilateral negotiations' and allows groups of countries to join forces and force other countries to negotiate in specific sectors, such as health, water and education. Many AFTINET members and community organisations from around the world opposed this change on the basis that it would force greater commitments in essential services and undermine the existing voluntary nature of GATS. Most countries up until now have chosen not to include essential services in the GATS.

The Australian government has played a key role in both pushing the change to plurilateral negotiations and more recently in drafting plurilateral requests in different sectors.

We understand that plurilateral requests have been made across 20 service sectors. Australia is a co-sponsor of requests in: air transport services; architecture; engineering services; computer services; construction; education; energy; environmental services (including water); financial services; legal services; logistics, and; maritime transport. Australia has received requests to open up in: postal services; services related to agriculture, and; movement of peoples.

In the coming weeks, AFTINET will analyse these requests and their potential social and environmental impact and prepare community education and lobbying materials in these areas. The key areas we will focus on are:

- education
- energy
- environmental services, including water
- financial services
- postal services
- movement of peoples

Please contact us if you or your organisation has a specific interest in any of these sectors.

The Australian government wants to issue a revised offer by 31 July, which means that we must act quickly to raise these issues in our communities and with our politicians.

4. WTO protestors finally acquitted of all changes from December Ministerial!

On 30 March, the last remaining detainee, Mr Yun Yi, from the protests at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in December was acquitted of all charges. Mr Yun was arrested along with over one thousand WTO protestors on 18 December. After 2 days, all protestors were released except for 14 who were held longer on a charge of unlawful assembly. Hong Kong courts eventually dismissed the charges against 13 protesters and Mr Yun was the last to be released.

Thanks again to everyone who supported the WTO protesters! Many people came along to a snap rally in Sydney in January to call for the release of the remaining protesters and many other people wrote to the Hong Kong authorities supporting the right to peaceful protest.

5. Economic sectors split in bid to secure China FTA

ABC News, 30 March 2006

Australia is to break the link between key economic sectors, to start formal negotiations with China on a free trade agreement (FTA). The offers on goods and agriculture will start before work on services and investment.

China and Australia have had four rounds of negotiations on the scope of a bilateral free trade agreement and are slowly moving to the formal stage of exchanging detailed offers and demands.

To get progress, Australia is to break the link between the four main sectors. Officials say that work on goods and agriculture will start first, in the middle of the year. The aim is for negotiations on services and investment to start later in the year.

The shift is a win for China, which originally wanted to do a deal on goods before even talking about services - the strategy it used in free trade talks with South-East Asia. Despite breaking the sector linkages, Australia's Foreign Affairs Department says there will be no carve-outs of sensitive areas and Australia intends to sign one comprehensive deal covering all areas.

6. FTA's - Trading away traditional knowledge

Spanish NGO, GRAIN, have recently produced a discussion paper on the rising trend of 'traditional knowledge' as a patentable good in trade agreements. GRAIN writes: Traditional knowledge has come up in a dozen or so free trade agreements (FTAs) over the last couple of years. In numerous cases, specific provisions on traditional knowledge were signed. The pattern at play is simple. When facing the US, trade negotiators concerned about "biopiracy" try to put limits on when and how researchers and corporations can get patents on biodiversity or traditional knowledge in the United States. When the US is not involved, governments carve out space to define their own legal systems of "rights" to traditional knowledge. In all cases, however, FTAs are framing traditional knowledge as intellectual property – a commodity to be bought and sold on the global market.

The paper can be downloaded at: <http://grain.org/briefings/?id=196>.

7. Wanted: AFTINET volunteer with graphic design or cartooning experience

Do you have experience in graphic design? Ever lose time scrawling funny cartoons? AFTINET is in the process of designing our community education materials for the GATS campaign. We are designing a A3 fold up leaflet and are looking for a couple of volunteers with graphic design or cartooning experience to help in the design and lay out process.

If you're interested, or have a friend who might be, contact Jemma Bailey on 02 8898 6500 or jbailey@piac.asn.au.

8. Campaign to Fund our ABC!

The ABC is at a turning point in its funding. The Cabinet's budget committee is currently deciding the ABC's funding for the next three years. As it stands, the ABC is \$264 million poorer in real terms today than it was 20 years ago. The programs we rely on - from independent news and current and affairs to quality children's content - are under extreme pressure. In a very real sense, the integrity of the ABC is now at stake.

Sign a petition to restore the ABC's funding on the Get Up! Website at: http://getup.org.au/campaign.asp?campaign_id=28.