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MEDIA RELEASE

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Public Interest says China FTA and Australian workplace changes undermine basic rights

“A Free Trade Agreement with China without specific protections for labour rights will further erode basic labour rights in both China and Australia. These rights are already under threat in Australia from proposed government changes to workplace relations legislation” Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy Officer at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre said today.

Dr Ranald, Convenor of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network of 90 community organizations, will present evidence to the **Senate Foreign affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Inquiry into Australia’s relationship with China to held in Sydney on June 29 from 9 am at the Commonwealth Offices, level 8, 70 Phillips St, Sydney.**

“Trade agreements should be based on respect for human rights, labour rights and the environment, but both the Australian and Chinese Governments are ignoring these issues in a rush to reach a deal,” said Dr Ranald.

“China’s labour laws are not enforced and workers lack effective rights to improve their conditions. Transnational companies subcontract work to firms in China and accept the lowest bids. Workers often have to work 12-16 hours a day, seven days a week to complete contracts without proper payment. Studies show that real wages have actually fallen, health and safety is often appalling and environmental pollution is rife. Investment is moving from other developing countries as well as countries like Australia to China. Free Trade Agreements without workers’ rights or environmental protections mean a global race to the bottom on basic workers’ rights.”

“Changes to Australian industrial law to reduce workers’ rights and for lower minimum wages will mean that Australia joins this race to the bottom rather than ensuring that workers and communities can increase their living standards.”

The submission written by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre for the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network can be found at www.aftinet.org.au

Contact Dr Patricia Ranald Public Interest Advocacy Centre on 0419 695 841