



Level 3, Suite 3B, 110 Kippax St  
Surry Hills, NSW, 2010  
Phone: 02 9212 7242  
Fax: 02 9211 1407  
Email: [campaign@aftinet.org.au](mailto:campaign@aftinet.org.au)  
ACN 097 603 131  
ABN 83 659 681 462  
[www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Global Day of Action to Stop Free Trade Agreements**

Michele Freeman, Trade Campaigner with the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), said today:

**The first round of negotiations for an Australia – Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) begin next week, the latest result of the Australian Government’s aggressive pursuit of an expanding FTA agenda.**

These negotiations will happen just days after fair trade groups from around the world hold today’s Global Day of Action to stop Free Trade Agreements. As a ‘spaghetti bowl’ of unfair bilateral trade deals spread around the globe, fair trade campaigners continue to call for much needed trade justice.

The Howard government is currently pursuing a plethora of bilateral agreements with Japan, China, Chile, South Korea, ASEAN-New Zealand, Malaysia, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Mexico.

This trend of expanding FTAs is alarming, as the agreements are negotiated without public consultation, and fail to protect human rights, worker rights or the environment.

In the China FTA negotiations, both the Australian and the Chinese government are refusing to make commitments to labour standards as defined by the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations (UN), or environmental standards defined by the UN. This is despite well documented labour and human rights abuses, and severe environmental pollution problems in China.

With the US FTA, as with many FTA negotiations, the social and environmental impacts were ignored and the economic benefits were over estimated. Since coming into force Australia’s trade deficit with the US had increased and our social, health and quarantine polices have been threatened.

FTA negotiations also often take place without adequate public consultation. The Feasibility Study results for the Japan FTA were released on the same day as the decision to go ahead with the negotiations was made, allowing no time for public scrutiny of the results.

It is clear that the relentless pursuit of bilateral trade agreements will only result in unequal agreements that will not deliver benefits to the majority of people.

AFTINET believes that Australia should not retreat into bilateral agreements, but instead rethink multilateral trade rules and develop proposals for a more inclusive, democratic global trade system that delivers real economic development, and allows governments to retain their right to regulate in the public interest.

Contact Michele Freeman on 02 9212 7242, or email [campaign@aftinet.org.au](mailto:campaign@aftinet.org.au)