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Media release

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End secrecy in US Trans-Pacific free trade negotiations say unions and community groups

The ninth round of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) between the US, Australia, and seven other countries starts in Lima, Peru, on October 19. Over 25 Australian community groups, including the ACTU and 7 national unions, the Catholic Social Justice Council and Uniting World, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Public Health Association and pensioner groups are calling on governments to release draft text of the proposed agreement, and to release a document which reportedly restricts access to negotiating documents for four years after the conclusion of the negotiations.

“These negotiations raise many of the issues that were bitterly debated in the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement in 2004,” said Harvey Purse, Campaigner for the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) said today.

“US pharmaceutical companies want more changes to intellectual property rights and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme so they can charge higher prices for medicines. Agribusiness companies want to abolish GE food labelling, Media and services companies want to weaken Australian content rules in media and in government purchasing. These are health, social and cultural policies that should be decided through democratic parliamentary processes, not secretly signed away in trade negotiations,” explained Mr Purse.

“The essence of democracy is the right of the people to know what governments are doing and to debate policies and laws through parliamentary processes. Instead, these negotiations are conducted in secret”, said Mr Purse.

“It is also unacceptable that a document about the terms of secrecy in the negotiations should itself remain secret, and we call for the release of this document” he said.

“Eight rounds of TPPA negotiations have taken place in secret and draft texts are now being discussed. We reject the argument that greater transparency would undermine negotiations. Precedents for releasing texts in the trade negotiations include the 153-member World Trade Organization (WTO), and the recently completed Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA),” he said.

“We urge the Australian Government to support the release of the document about secrecy in the negotiations, and to support the release of the draft texts for public and parliamentary debate before it is signed,” he said.

The full statement and list of signatories are attached.

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