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**Media Release**

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**Australian and US groups share criticisms of Australia-US Free Trade Agreement**

Unions, health and environment groups working with their counterparts in the US will release statements and letters today criticising the proposed Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (USFTA). This is the first day of the December round of USFTA negotiations in Washington.

The organisations include the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the AFL-CIO, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Sierra Club (US), and the Public Health Association of Australia. The Australian groups were among sixty-one organisations which expressed their concerns about the agreement in a statement released on November 24.

"The ACTU and the AFL-CIO have declared that increased trade can benefit workers only if it is governed by rules that protect workers' rights, the environment, and the right of governments to safeguard the public interest," said Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions

"These negotiations could have a huge impact on affordable access to medicines. "US negotiators will try to force changes to Australia's pharmaceutical patents laws, and that will have a significant impact on the cost of medicines in Australia," said Dr. Peter Sainsbury, President of the Public Health Association of Australia.

Don Henry, Executive Director, Australian Conservation Foundation, said: "The proposed FTA is bad news for our environment. It will allow the big American companies to challenge our environmental laws and seek compensation when those laws are strengthened. We're trading our beautiful environment for a few quick bucks."

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