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Monday, 27 June 2011

To the people of Vanuatu and their honourable representatives

Re: Vanuatu - WTO Accession

We are writing in support of Vanuatu civil society, churches, women's groups, chamber of commerce and others who are opposing Vanuatu's accession to the WTO.

AFTINET supports the principle of multilateral trade agreements made through the WTO, but there are still a number of shortcomings such as an increasing reduction of policy space for governments, negative impacts on consumers, access to services and the failure to progress the Doha development round.

Accession to the WTO may limit the Vanuatu Government's ability to create policy for emerging problems such as climate change or respond to an urgent crisis such as the recent Global Financial crisis. It may also mean that the government will not be able to properly support emerging new industries, introduce new public interest policies including those needed for emerging health, environment and other concerns. This situation is poised to get worse with proposals from the US, EU and other developed nations to further curtail the policy options of developing nations. This was recently noted by a joint international civil society letter to the WTO, representing the views of millions of people around the globe:

"Launched in 2001 as a 'Development Round', the current negotiations now preclude any possibility of benefiting the majority of the world's people, particularly those living in impoverished developing countries. Instead, many of the proposals on the table will radically foreclose domestic policy options for developing countries. Developing country proposals that attempt to regain some of that policy space are consistently rejected by the major powers, particularly the U.S. and EU. Rather than building a multilateral trading system that guarantees human rights, promotes sustainable economic growth and ensures access to decent employment while protecting our shared environment, the current negotiations are set to dramatically curtail this vital agenda."

The most important component for decision making to undertake accession to the WTO is to follow democratic principles and ensure that the voice of the people is part of the decision making process. AFTINET has always advocated that governments listen to their people when considering trade agreements of any type. We call upon the Vanuatu parliamentary representatives to listen to the calls of their people and civil society and not proceed with accession to the WTO at this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Purse', written in a cursive style.

Harvey Purse
Trade Justice Campaigner
AFTINET