



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Will Australia and New Zealand really allow sovereignty to Pacific Countries on Trade Decisions**

The Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting final communique contained commitments on many of the issues currently under negotiation in PACER-Plus. The Australian Fair Trade Campaign (AFTINET) and Australia's aid watchdog, AID/WATCH, today call upon both the New Zealand and Australian governments to take this opportunity to reflect and move PACER-Plus away from being a Regional Free Trade Agreement to being a genuine development-based agreement.

AFTINET and AID/WATCH welcome the clear indication that Australia and New Zealand, in noting without objection the Pacific Leaders Meeting outcomes, has accepted the right of the Forum Island Countries to have sovereign control over decisions about the Office of the Chief Trade Advisor and its role.

The Pacific Leaders agreed "that Forum Island Countries have the sovereign right to determine from where they receive advice on trade matters, and that any decision on the scope of the activities of the OCTA is a matter solely for the determination of Forum Island Countries."

AFTINET Trade Justice Campaigner Harvey Purse said, "The Forum Island Countries have made their position clear. Australia and New Zealand should accept the rights of the Forum Island Countries for self-determination and sovereignty on trade and economic matters, particularly the OCTA."

Comments last week by the outgoing Chief Trade Adviser have outlined how the most recent draft funding agreement offered to the OCTA by Australia undermines the sovereignty of the Forum Island Countries to choose where they get their trade advice.

AID/WATCH sees this week's outcomes as a clear way forward for resolving the funding issues with the OCTA. "Given the decisions from leaders, AusAID (Australia's aid agency) needs to provide a draft funding agreement that doesn't limit the remit of the OCTA. The directions have been clear and AIDWATCH will continue to monitor AusAID's response," said Matt Hilton, AID/WATCH Chairperson.

AFTINET and AID/WATCH also welcome the commitment from the Leaders to raise the level of dialogue with civil society to put it on an equal playing field with business. New Zealand Prime Minister John Key confirmed this in a media conference on release of the communiqué.

Mr Purse stated, "We look forward to civil society participation at the next Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting in the Cook Islands in 12 months. We hope Australia and New Zealand assist with funding to ensure full participation from civil society groups from all forum member states".

*For more information:*

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