

Letter to WTO Members: Postpone the 12th Ministerial - TRIPS Waiver Now!

November 23, 2021

Dear WTO Members:

Our world is mired in multiple crises. The worst global pandemic in a century has exposed deep ruptures between the Global North and South, rich and poor, privileged and vulnerable. Vaccination rates in low-income countries average 7% while rich countries are giving booster shots to almost fully vaccinated populations. Almost two years into the pandemic, there is no sign of these gaps closing.

The climate crisis is accelerating environmental and human devastation around the world. These catastrophes occur on top of chronic indebtedness - greatly exacerbated in developing countries due to the external shock of Covid-19 - instability, and systemic inequalities of poorer countries, waged and unemployed workers, women, indigenous peoples and vulnerable communities.

The WTO is also in crisis. It has utterly failed to resolve the vaccine apartheid that is a direct result of the monopolies that its Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) confers on multinational pharmaceutical companies that have benefitted from massive public subsidies.

The COVID-19 TRIPS waiver can be agreed by the WTO's General Council in Geneva, which has already approved numerous other waivers. Yet, the proposal is not yet agreed a year after it was tabled. The shameful refusal of a handful of powerful governments to grant a TRIPS waiver for Covid-19 related intellectual property rights confirms the WTO's systemic priority of profits over people.

Despite the uncontested magnitude of this crisis, the WTO Director-General and General Council chair are proceeding towards holding the twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12) in Geneva in person from 30 November to 3 December this year.

The Director-General took this decision despite a significant number of Ministers and their lead officials not being able to travel safely to Geneva for the MC12. Some may be unable to travel at all, because ongoing COVID-related travel disruptions mean that there are no commercial flights in and out of their countries or accessible transit points. Many are from countries that are basically unvaccinated. The vaccines utilised in some countries are not recognised for internal meetings in Switzerland. Requirements set by transit countries, and the costs and inconvenience of quarantine when returning home, will add to the problems of practicality and affordability for many Ministers. The obvious inequities will favour those with Swiss-recognised vaccinations, ease of travel, proximity and Geneva-based delegations – that is rich countries from the Global North.

The WTO claims to be a consensus based organisation. The decision to hold a Ministerial when some Ministers are unable to attend will ensure that any decisions taken in this context will lack any pretence of legitimacy.

Moreover, the WTO Secretariat has failed to present a plan that will ensure the physical safety and effective participation of those who do attend in person. Requirements for repeated testing during the course of the ministerial, limits on numbers of people who can enter buildings and negotiating rooms, and inevitable logistical log-jams will likely make the conference unworkable. Further, there is the risk that an infected person might have to pay for a Swiss hospital stay, or force their delegation into quarantine or even the entire venue into lockdown.

The alternatives of a hybrid or virtual ministerial conference are equally untenable. Ministers and their senior officials who are unable to attend will be at an inherent disadvantage. If they cannot be in the room, they cannot participate as equals in deliberations on matters of fundamental importance to them, such as fisheries, agriculture, or the TRIPS waiver. In other meetings, unreliable connectivity (which is unfortunately a fact of life in many developing countries) and variable time zones have led to ministers simply presenting plenary statements to their own region.

Thus, the institution whose rules enforce vaccine apartheid is, unbelievably, attempting to have a meeting under conditions of vaccine apartheid, without having first resolved that apartheid by agreeing to the TRIPS waiver. To proceed under these circumstances will further erode the WTO’s legitimacy, and undermine the credibility of the new Director-General, at a time when the Organization’s credibility is already at an all time low.

The determination to proceed with the MC12 continues the long-standing efforts of rich and powerful WTO Members to control the WTO’s agenda and decisions and to marginalise the governments of the Global South and the world’s peoples. There are several other [important and unresolved matters on the WTO’s agenda](#) today, such as the urgent need to remove WTO barriers to food sovereignty and development by concluding a permanent solution to public stockholding, and the development agenda. But these issues are being pushed aside by rich countries demanding an agenda that will consolidate their power and their corporations’ profits, and their influence in the domestic policymaking of nation states. This agenda includes proposed “plurilateral” agreements on Domestic Regulation, Investment Facilitation, and Digital Trade, which are not even legal under the WTO’s mandate, would erode democracy and further exacerbate the multiple crises facing the world today. These demands have no place in any global agenda, and especially not in the midst of a global pandemic.

We therefore call on the Director-General, the chair of the General Council, and ultimately the WTO Membership itself to postpone the MC12. We call instead for all Members and the Secretariat, to place all efforts on coming to urgent agreement on the TRIPS waiver to remove the barriers of intellectual property rules for products to prevent, treat or contain COVID-19.

Endorsers:

International and regional networks:

1	ACP Civil Society Forum	ACP Civil Society Forum is the platform for ACP Civil Society Organizations in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific for involvement in ACP EU WTO and all international trade and development cooperation.
2	African Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa)	The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) is a pan-African trade union organisation. ITUC-Africa has 17 million declared members and 101 affiliated trade union centres in 51 African countries.
3	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)	APWLD is the leading network of feminist organizations and individual activists in Asia Pacific. APWLD’s 252 members represent groups of diverse women from 27 countries in Asia Pacific. Over the past 34 years, APWLD has actively worked towards advancing women’s human rights and Development Justice.
4	Citizen News Service (CNS)	CNS provides communication, policy and advocacy support on issues around development justice worldwide. They are based in India and Thailand.

5	Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)	Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) is a research and campaign group working to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making.
6	DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)	DAWN is a feminist network based in the Global South working to promote gender equality and women's human rights within a just and sustainable economic, political, ecological and social system.
7	East African Trade Union Confederation (EATUC)	EATUC is instrumental in ensuring that the East African Community involves workers in all issues concerning regional integration, establish tripartism as an important mechanism of consultation and dialogue, promote the ratification of international labour standards by the partner states, promote the integration of youth and women in all spheres of socio-economic development, promote the decent work agenda, harmonization of labour laws and policies in East Africa and promote the concept of free movement of factors of production in the region.
8	Education International	Education International is the Global Union Federation that brings together organisations of teachers and other education employees from across the world. Through its 383 member organisations, they represent more than 32 million teachers and education support personnel in 178 countries and territories.
9	Focus on the Global South	Focus on the Global South is an activist think tank in Asia providing analysis & building alternatives for just social, economic & political change.
10	Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)	FoEI is the world's largest grassroots environmental network, uniting 73 national member groups and some 5,000 local activist groups on every continent. With over 2 million members and supporters around the world, FoEI campaign on today's most urgent environmental and social issues.
11	Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC)	ATALC is the network of 14 organizations in the region that also form part of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI). We work for system change from the perspective of environmental, social, economic and gender justice.
12	Global Alliance for Tax Justice (GATJ)	The Global Alliance for Tax Justice (GATJ) is a global coalition in the tax justice movement. GATJ campaigns for progressive and redistributive taxation systems nationally, and for a transparent, inclusive and representative global tax governance internationally, which ensures the right of developing countries to tax part of multinational corporations' global profits generated in their economies.
13	Institute for Economic Research on Innovation (IERI)	The Institute for Economic Research on Innovation (IERI) does policy research in the political economy of knowledge to promote sustainable economic growth, social development and political democracy.
14	International Grail Justice and Trade Network	The Grail is an international spiritual, cultural and social movement of women - celebrating its centenary this year. Founded in the Netherlands in 1921, it is now active in over 20 countries in all six continents. The Grail works for the development of women's talents and capacities and their contribution to the transformation of the world in peace, justice and love.

15	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tourism, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)	The IUF is an international federation of trade unions composed of 421 affiliated trade unions in 128 countries representing over 10 million workers.
16	International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific	International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific is a feminist organisation that acts to disrupt structures, systems and institutions that violate women's human rights.
17	International-Lawyers.Org (INTLawyers)	INTLawyers provides trainings and presentations, produces publications, brings cases on behalf of individuals and peoples, advises governments, participates in domestic and international political and legal processes, and engages in global fora as a voice for global justice.
18	Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)	PANG is a Pacific Islands regional network promoting self-determination and economic justice in the Pacific.
19	Pan African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (PAALAE)	PAALAE has been fighting for education for all, democracy and solidarity since 2000, and is based out of Dakar, Senegal.
20	Public Services International (PSI)	PSI represents 30 million workers in 170 countries to promote quality public services in every part of the world.
21	Salud y Fármacos	Salud y Fármacos is an international non-profit organization that promotes access and the appropriate use of pharmaceuticals among the Spanish-speaking population.
22	Social Watch	Social Watch is a network of civil society organizations that keep their governments accountable for their international commitments to eradicate poverty and achieve gender equality
23	Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)	The UAEM is a global network of university students who believe that universities have an opportunity and a responsibility to improve global access to public health and life-saving medicines.

National Organizations:

24	World of Work Institute (IMT)	Argentina
25	Free Path Foundation	Argentina
26	Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD)	Afghanistan
27	Australian Arts Trust	Australia
28	Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network	Australia
29	Community and Public Sector Union, State Public Services Federation (CPSU SPSF)	Australia
30	Data Stream Pty Limited	Australia
31	Missionary Society of St Columban	Australia
32	SEARCH Foundation	Australia
33	Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA	Australia
34	Anders Handeln	Austria
35	Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (VOICE)	Bangladesh
36	Bangladesh Krishok Federation	Bangladesh
37	EquityBD	Bangladesh
38	Centre tricontinental (CETRI)	Belgium
39	National Employees Center (CNE)	Belgium

40	Social Watch Bénin	Benin
41	Internet Bolivia Foundation	Bolivia
42	Gestures - Seropositivity, Communication and Gender	Brazil
43	Tax Justice Institute	Brazil
44	Canada Fair Trade Network (CFTN)	Canada
45	Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)	Canada
46	Common Frontiers	Canada
47	Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)	Canada
48	Quebec Network on Continental Integration (RQIC)	Canada
49	The Council of Canadians	Canada
50	Trade Justice Prince Edward Island	Canada
51	Association for Research and Social Action (NOMADESC)	Colombia
52	Environment and Society Association	Colombia
53	Observatorio de Victimas	Colombia
54	Association of Public Employees of Antioquia (ADEA)	Colombia
55	Ecumenical Academy	Czech Republic
56	National Confederation of Trade-union Unity (CNUS)	Dominican Republic
57	Salvadoran Center for Appropriate Technology (CESTA)	El Salvador
58	Friends of the Earth France	France
59	Ghana Trade And Livelihood Coalition (GTLC)	Ghana
60	Nature Friends Greece	Greece
61	Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers (CTSP)	Haiti
62	Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA)	Haiti
63	Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)	India
64	Forum for Trade Justice	India
65	Initiative for Health & Equity in Society	India
66	IT for Change	India
67	Sunray Harvesters	India
68	Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ)	Indonesia
69	Latin America Solidarity Centre (LASC)	Ireland
70	Fairwatch	Italy
71	Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)	Japan
72	Kamukunji Paralegal Trust (KAPLET)	Kenya
73	Policy Analysis and Research Institute of Lesotho (PARIL)	Lesotho
74	Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP)	Malaysia
75	Friends of the Earth Malaysia (SAM)	Malaysia
76	Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+)	Malaysia
77	Federation of Democratic Labour Unions	Mauritius
78	Federation of Local Government and Other Labour Unions	Mauritius
79	Mauritius Trade Union Congress (MTUC)	Mauritius

80	Migration and Sustainable Development Alliance	Mauritius
81	Resistance is an Alternative	Mauritius
82	State and Other Employees Federation (SOEF)	Mauritius
83	Mauritius Consumers Association (ACIM)	Mauritius
84	Tacuba Group	Mexico
85	Center for Promotion and Professional Education "Vasco de Quiroga"	Mexico
86	Mexican Action Network Against Free Trade (RMALC)	Mexico
87	Moroccan Euromed Network of NGOs	Morocco
88	GEFONT Nepal	Nepal
89	Union of Public Services in Nepal (UPSIN)	Nepal
90	Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA)	New Zealand
91	FIRST Union	New Zealand
92	It's Our Future	New Zealand
93	Center for the Rights of the Peasantry (CEDECAM)	Nicaragua
94	Nigerien Network of NGOs and Development Associations for the Defense of Human Rights and Democracy (RODADDHD)	Niger
95	Attac Norway	Norway
96	No to the EU	Norway
97	Norwegian Trade Campaign	Norway
98	Spire	Norway
99	Noor Pakistan	Pakistan
100	Ecological Voices Collective (COVEC)	Panama
101	Association of Technology, Education, Development, Research and Communication (TEDIC)	Paraguay
102	Let's Decide! Campaign for Citizen Expression	Paraguay
103	Federation of Water and Sewage Workers (FENTAP)	Peru
104	United Confederation of Workers (CUT)	Peru
105	Gender and Economy Group (GGE)	Peru
106	Peruvian Fair Trade and Ethical Consumption Network	Peru
107	Center for United and Progressive Workers (SENTRO)	Philippines
108	WomanHealth Philippines	Philippines
109	Trade Justice Pilipinas	Philippines
110	Green Zone Foundation	Poland
111	AFRICANDO	Senegal
112	Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	South Africa
113	South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)	South Africa
114	Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO)	South Sudan
115	Universal Union for Solidarity Development	Spain
116	Association for Proper Internet Governance (APIG)	Switzerland
117	Attac Switzerland	Switzerland
118	Public Eye	Switzerland

119	Governance Links	Tanzania
120	Humanitaire Plus	Togo
121	Information Communications Technology for Development (ICT4D)	Uganda
122	Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI)	Uganda
123	Global Justice Now	United Kingdom
124	Trade Justice Movement	United Kingdom
125	UNISON	United Kingdom
126	War on Want	United Kingdom
127	Just Treatment	United Kingdom
128	Milwaukee Fair Trade Coalition	United States
129	Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research	United States
130	Social Watch	Uruguay
131	Social Ecology Network (REDES) - Friends of the Earth Uruguay	Uruguay
132	Classist Tendency Coalition (CTC-VZLA)	Venezuela
133	SCODE	Vietnam