

PRESS RELEASE

4 September 2009, New Delhi

India Betrays Farmers and Workers by Endorsing WTO December Texts; Mini-Ministerial Results in More US Demands

The much hyped Delhi mini-ministerial ended today with most developing country delegates saying that it was business as usual with negotiations going back to Geneva and Chairs of the Negotiating Committees of the Doha Round. However, Indian Commerce Minister Sharma summarized the meeting by saying that both the G20 and the G33, “were of the view that the texts of December 2008 must form the basis of future work.”

Late last year the chairs of the Agriculture and NAMA working groups had issued revised draft texts to be used as the basis of further negotiations. The texts were criticized by many developing countries as imbalanced and that differences amongst the membership were not adequately reflected. This flies in the face of India’s rhetoric that the Delhi conclave was about development concerns.

“Minister Sharma promised us in a meeting with farmer leaders on September 1 that he would not undermine the interests of farmers in India at the WTO. Then he turns around and endorses an agriculture text that allows us to protect only 5% of our agriculture products from any customs duty cuts. Furthermore it has ineffective safeguard mechanisms that will not save our farmers from chronically subsidized products coming from the USA and EU. This is a clear betrayal of the 65 crore farming community that is already devastated by India’s agrarian crisis”. said Yudhvir Singh from the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). We will intensify our mobilizations at the local, state and national level until Minister Sharma and the Prime Minister live up to their promises of protecting farmers livelihoods.

The BKU organized a massive rally of 51,000 farmers who courted arrest in the Capital on September 3, the day the meetings began.

The three day affair was mainly a talk shop about process that resulted in yet another scheduled senior level meeting in Geneva on September 14. It also clearly revealed US’s agenda of even greater market access than is currently being offered in the December texts. The US for instance wants clear market access on specific crops such as corn, rice, cotton and soya--the crops heavily subsidized and dumped onto world markets. The latter three are a source of livelihood for millions of farmers and agriculture workers.

Ashim Roy, General Secretary of NTUI who led hundreds of workers from across from the country said that, “It is most disappointing to see India gloat over its feeble initiative to avoid being a scapegoat in the global arena at the expense of industrial workers and fisherfolk and undermining national autonomy. The December NAMA texts will leave as little as 1% of water between our applied and bound rates at the WTO. This is a real shame that India cares more about validation from the US and the G7 rather than the future of its own manufacturing and fisheries and defending the developing world.”

“The Indonesian trade minister as leader of the G33 will have a rude awakening back home in the months ahead as she has also endorsed the December texts. These ministers need to realize that it is not about numbers that the commerce industry compromises on but about life and death for farmers and workers who cannot compete with transnational agribusiness.” Said Henry Saraghi from the Indonesian Peasants Union and La Via Campesina.

Contact: Yudhvir Singh (BKU) 09868146405; Gautam Mody (NTUI) 09868145370; Henri Saraghi, (La Via Campesina) hspetani@gmail.com; Afsar Jafri (Focus on the Global South) 09833070803.