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To  
Roberto Azevedo  
Director-General,  
World Trade Organization  
Geneva, Switzerland

### **Call to Halt Fisheries Subsidies Negotiations in the Middle of the COVID 19 Crisis**

In the context of the ongoing pandemic of COVID 19 that is ravaging the world at present, this call comes to you from fishers groups, supported by farmers, workers, and Civil Society Organisations around the world to immediately halt the ongoing fisheries subsidies negotiations at the WTO.

Countries are busy attending to the unprecedented health calamity posed by COVID19, which represents a phenomenal challenge not only to our health but to the current & future economic, social, and political stability across our countries. Most countries are busy deploying their financial and human resources to fighting this monumental battle.

In the middle of this, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is continuing to negotiate an outcome on fisheries subsidies in the most non-transparent, non-inclusive and ad-hoc manner. The aim to meet the SDG14.6 target this year is laudable; however these are exceptional times. Since Geneva is under a lock-down, face-to-face negotiations are on hold. Meanwhile, the Chair, Ambassador Santiago Wills of Colombia, is tabling texts at his own discretion, and the lack of adequate consultations is introducing undue bias in the text written by the Chair with the support of the WTO Secretariat, which remains under the heavy influence of some advanced countries.

The Chair has tabled a text on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March on Overfishing and Overcapacity, while placing Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), a key demand from a number of developing countries and LDCs, under a placeholder. The Chair ignored important proposals by India, the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and the Least Developed Country (LDC) Group on special and differential treatment (SDT), in drafting this text. This is clearly in contravention of the full mandate of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.6, which includes SDT while asking for disciplines on fisheries subsidies for IUU fishing and to control Overfishing and Overcapacity.

Apparently, because of strenuous objections by several developing countries, the Chair organized a “virtual consultation” on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March to discuss proposals by India and LDC Group on SDT for both IUU and Overfishing & Overcapacity. But this had to be canceled as many developing countries simply do not have the infrastructure and option to effectively join, especially given the situation in their countries. The Chair then invited responses through email by the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, which is also difficult for many Member States, especially from developing countries where human resources including in the trade ministry, are now redirected to fighting the pandemic. Delegates may also not be able to communicate well with their capitals and decision-makers under this situation, given the expansive lock-downs in most countries. Needless to say, after receiving responses from Member States and then from the proponents by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, the Chair (with the support of the secretariat) will come up with another personal text.

This process will presumably continue in this manner and may end in a General Council Meeting in June-July in Geneva to conclude the negotiations. This process, which is pushed by some developed countries, will put the whole outcome in jeopardy.

This rush to conclude the negotiations in spite of the inability to hold direct discussions, when the Nur-Sultan June Ministerial Conference has been indefinitely postponed and all our countries and their people are battling the immense challenge of COVID 19, is baffling. Moreover, since the next Ministerial is most likely to be postponed to the middle or end of 2021<sup>1</sup> there is simply no rationale for continuing with the negotiations in such a haphazard and hasty manner.

Negotiations of multilateral negotiations on an important issue such as fisheries subsidies, which is a critical livelihood issue for millions especially in developing countries, cannot be conducted in this manner. More so, when the development concerns of the majority of WTO's developing and least developed country members are clearly not being taken on board. A biased and undemocratic process being conducted through emails with unwarranted haste will inevitably lead to a biased and unfair outcome and will further damage not only the development mandate of the WTO but its reputation as an institution for years to come.

*We therefore call on the WTO and the Chair to immediately halt the fisheries negotiations and ask Member States to discontinue participating in this process until it can be pursued in a transparent, inclusive and rational manner, which is not possible unless normalcy is restored across the globe. Our countries would be much better served if delegates focused on domestic and global needs in fighting the COVID19 battle. In fact the WTO can actually help, for example, by easing intellectual property rules imposed through the WTO's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and easing access to treatment for COVID19 affected patients. And we can have at least a glimmer of hope left for a fair and rational outcome on fisheries subsidies that respects the full mandate of SDG 14.6, and in particular, Special & Differential Treatment, in the future.*

***Endorsed by:***

### **Global and Regional Groups**

1. 350 Pacific
2. African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network, Africa (AWFISHNET)
3. Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
4. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
5. Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and development (APMDD)
6. Fahamu Africa
7. FIAN International
8. FishNet Alliance, Africa
9. Focus on the Global South
10. IBON International
11. Melanesian Indigenous Land Defense Alliance (MILDA)
12. Pacific Conference on Churches (PCC)
13. Pacific Island Association of Non Governmental Organisations (PIANGO)
14. Pacific Network on Globalisation
15. Pan-African NGO Consortium on Agriculture (PANGOC)
16. People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS)
17. Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific

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<sup>1</sup> <https://insidetrade.com/daily-news/wto-eyes-mid-or-late-2021-rescheduled-ministerial>

18. REDSAN-CPLP (Civil society Network for Food Security and Nutrition in the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries)
19. Social Watch
20. Society for International Development (SID)
21. The Faith and Justice Network (FJN) of the Mano River Basin Countries
22. The Gaia Foundation
23. The Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI), Uganda
24. Third World Network
25. Third World Network Africa
26. West African Institute for Trade, agriculture and Development (WAITAD).
27. World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF)
28. World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)
29. Young Solwara, Pacific

### ***National Groups***

1. 11.11.11, Belgium
2. ACTUAR - Association for Cooperation and Development, Portugal
3. AITEC, France
4. Aliansi Nelayan Sulawesi Utara ( North Sulawesi Fishermen Alliance), Indonesia
5. Aliansi Nelayan Tradisional Sulawesi Utara (Antra) -- ( North Sulawesi Traditional Fishermen Alliance (Antra), Indonesia
6. All Goa Responsible Fishers Association, India
7. All Loktak Lake Fishermen Union of Manipur, India
8. Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA), India
9. Amis de la Terre France (Friends of the Earth France)
10. Anders Handeln Austria
11. Anne's Christian Community Health School and Nursing Services
12. Anti FTA Committee, India
13. Anti-Jindal & Anti-Posco Movement, India
14. APVVU or National Agricultural Workers Forum (NAWF), India
15. Attac, France
16. Auckland Peace Action, New Zealand
17. Bangladesh Fish Workers' Alliance (BFWA)
18. Bangladesh Krishok federation
19. Bargi Bandh Visthapit Matsya Utpadan Evam Vipnan Sahakari Sangh, Madhya Pradesh, India
20. Beyond Borders, Malaysia
21. Bina Desa Sadajiwa, Indonesia
22. Biowatch South Africa, South Africa
23. Bismark Ramu Group (BRG), Papua New Guinea

24. Both ENDS, Netherlands
25. Centro Internazionale Crocevia, Italy
26. COAST Trust, Bangladesh
27. Collectif Pêche & Développement, France
28. Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS)
29. Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), Malaysia
30. Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, West Bengal, India
31. Democratic Traditional Fishers and Workers Forum, Andhra Pradesh, India
32. DISHA, India
33. Environmental Management and Economic Development Organization, Tanzania
34. Federasi Serikat Nelayan Nusantara (FSNN) - Archipelago Fishers Union Federation, Indonesia
35. Femmes Environnement Nature Entrepreneuriat Vert (FENEV), Democratic Republic of Congo
36. FIAN Indonesia, Indonesia
37. Fian, Portugal
38. FIELD Indonesia (Daun Bendera Nusantara), Indonesia
39. Food Sovereignty Alliance, India
40. Food Sovereignty Ghana
41. Formasi Negara (fishermen's forum in Galesong), Indonesia
42. Forum Benih Lokal Berdaulat, Indonesia
43. Forum for Trade Justice, India
44. Forum Masyarakat Adat Pesisir (Coastal Indigenous Peoples Forum), Indonesia
45. Forum Nelayan Jawa Tengah (Central Java Fishermen Forum), Indonesia
46. Forum Nelayan Jepara (Jepara Fishermen Forum), Indonesia
47. Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung (The German NGO Forum on Environment and Development)
48. Fundación Étnica Integral (FEI), Dominican Republic
49. Global Environment Centre (GEC), Malaysia
50. Global Justice Now, UK
51. Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Nigeria
52. IDRIS Association, Malaysia
53. Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia
54. Indonesian Human Right Committee for Social Justice (IHCS) - Indonesia
55. Indonesian Peasant Alliance - Aliansi Petani Indonesia, Indonesia
56. Initiative for Health and Equity in Society, India
57. Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Uruguay
58. IT for Change, India
59. Jal Shramik Sangha, Bihar, India
60. Jharkhand Machuara Samuday Samity, India
61. Kenya Small Scale Farmers Forum (KSSFF)
62. Kesatuan Nelayan Tradisional Indonesia (KNTI), Indonesia
63. Kesatuan Perjuangan Rakyat (KPR), Indonesia

64. Kia Mau, New Zealand
65. Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan (KIARA), Indonesia
66. Koalisi Rakyat untuk Kedaulatan Pangan (KRKP), Indonesia
67. Komunitas Nelayan Tradisional Muara Angke (Traditional Fishers Community of Muara Angke), Indonesia
68. Kerala Swatantra Matsyathozhilali Federation, or the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation (KSMTF), India
69. Lawyers Collective, India
70. Macchu Malla Samuday Samity, Uttar Pradesh, India
71. Machimar Adhikar Union, Gujarat, India
72. Masifundise (small-scale fisher organisation), South Africa
73. Mouvement Ecologique, FoE Luxembourg
74. National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS)
75. National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal
76. National fishworkers' Forum, India
77. National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (I), India
78. Norwegian Trade Campaign, Norway
79. Odisha Matsyajibi Forum, India
80. Ole Siosiomaga Society, Samoa
81. Pacific Asia Resource Centre (PARC), Japan
82. Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF)
83. Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA),
84. Pan-Africanist International, Belgium
85. Perkumpulan Kediri Bersama Rakyat (KIBAR), Indonesia
86. Persatuan Kebajikan Nelayan-Nelayan Pantai Pulau Pinang (Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association)
87. Persatuan Pendidikan dan Kebajikan Jaringan Nelayan Pantai Malaysia (Malaysia Coastal Fishers Network Education and Welfare Association)
88. Persaudaraan Perempuan Nelayan Indonesia (PPNI) - Fraternity of Indonesian Women Fishers, Indonesia
89. Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+), Malaysia
90. Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, USA
91. Platform Aarde Boer Consument (Platform Earth Farmer Consumer), Netherlands
92. Pleine Mar, France
93. Policy Analysis and Research Institute of Lesotho (PARIL)
94. Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio (RMALC)
95. Rescope Programme, Zambia
96. Resource Institute of Social Education, Pondicherry, India.
97. Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia)
98. Samoa Umbrella for Non-Government Organisations (SUNGO), Samoa
99. Serikat Nelayan Indonesia (SNI), Indonesia
100. Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP), Fiji
101. Solidaritas Perempuan, Indonesia

102. South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa
103. Sunray Harvesters, India
104. Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation, Kerala, India
105. Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity (TABIO)
106. Te Ipukarea Society (TIS), Cook Islands
107. Toxics Watch Alliance (TWA), New Delhi, India
108. Transnational Institute (TNI), Netherlands
109. Treat Every Environment Special Sdn Bhd (TrEES)
110. Tripura Matsyajibi Forum, India
111. Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition
112. Vanuatu Human Trafficking Watch Group
113. Vanuatu Indigenous Land Defense Desk (VILDD)
114. Vanuatu National Farmers Association
115. Vanuatu Young Women For Change
116. Vatu Mauri Consortium, Vanuatu
117. Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI) South Sulawesi , Indonesia
118. War on Want, UK
119. Washington Biotechnology Action Council, USA
120. Wullar Fish Worker Forum, Kashmir, India
121. Yayasan BITRA Indonesia, Indonesia
122. Yayasan Tananua Flores, Indonesia

### ***Individuals***

1. Barry Gills, Professor, Editor in Chief, Globalizations
2. Biswajit Dhar, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
3. Fiu Elisara, Executive Director, Ole Siosiomaga, Samoa
4. Sina Brown Davis (affiliated with the Māori women's group Te Wharepora Hou), New Zealand
5. Uma Shankari, Farmer, AP, India

Cc: Ambassador Santiago Wills, Mission of Colombia  
Ambassadors, All WTO Missions, Geneva