

**Over 200 Organizations From 67 Countries Say:
“Fundamentally Transform the WTO: The WTO’s Own Policies Have Caused Its
Existential Crisis, Which the COVID-19 Crisis Only Amplified”**

April 28, 2021

Dear Heads of State:

In nations around the world, the regime of hyper-globalized trade, investment and supply chains that the World Trade Organization (WTO) has championed and implemented during its 25 years of existence is on the verge of collapse. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how the WTO model exacerbates insecurity, inequality and instability. Legitimate global commercial rules should facilitate the improvement of the livelihoods, health and wellbeing of all people around the world and the long-term survival of the planet. The WTO system has not met these goals: It was never fit for purpose and certainly is not now.

This reckoning comes at a time when the WTO faces an existential crisis because, not only has it failed to make people’s lives better, but in many countries it has done significant damage by empowering pharmaceutical, agribusiness, financial and other corporate interests in high-income countries to dominate economies to the detriment of workers in both high- and low-income countries. Its negotiating and enforcement functions are paralysed, and the divisions were spotlighted by the former WTO Director-General’s early departure.

We, the undersigned labour, environmental, consumer and other organizations, call for the transformation of the WTO into a completely new framework for international trade that is fit for the 21st century – which means it puts people and the planet first.

This demand is not new. As we predicted back in 1995, the WTO has functioned to establish rules for the world economy that mainly benefit large transnational corporations at the expense of national and local economies, workers, farmers and indigenous peoples, our health and safety, and the environment. Without a labour protection floor, a race to the bottom has repressed wage growth and increased precarious work. The climate, biodiversity, and poverty crises have been ignored, the needed solutions constrained by “trade” rules. So has the documented rise in inequality within and between nations, as governments have been stripped of essential tools to pursue the wellbeing of their peoples and address the negative impacts of hyper-globalization.

Now, the deeply integrated, brittle supply chains created by WTO rules over the past several decades have undermined numerous countries’ fights against the global COVID-19 pandemic. Around the world, countries cannot make or obtain masks, test kits, ventilators, medicines and other necessary equipment. That is because decades of WTO rules have prioritized large corporations’ demands to concentrate global production to maximize their profits and banned countries’ use of policy tools to ensure local production capacity and diversity of import suppliers. WTO intellectual property rules that are designed to maximize pharmaceutical corporations’ profits instead of public health have driven up prices for medicines that are essential to combat COVID-19 in scores of countries and could become a barrier to equitable and universal access to vaccine and treatment supplies.

The WTO itself is fracturing. The former Director-General abruptly departed. The WTO’s dispute settlement system, whose tribunals have often ruled that governments must change legitimate public policies meant to promote public health, encourage development, protect the environment and fight climate crisis, or face potentially crippling trade sanctions, was derailed at the end of 2019. The body’s negotiating function has been on the ropes since the first failed attempt to launch a new round at the 1999 Seattle WTO Ministerial meeting.

Developing country consensus demands were ignored, but attempts by rich countries to bully through an agenda opposed by most nations also failed. Then a so-called Doha “Development” Round was launched in 2001, invoking the need for unity in the face of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Developing countries were promised that their need to use trade for development would be central, but in the intervening 19 years, the same WTO expansion agenda that most countries have always opposed has been prioritized and the development agenda sidelined.

In light of the WTO’s dysfunction, rich and powerful states have resorted to plurilateral negotiations of new rules that prioritize corporate rights and profits. Those rules are facing stiff opposition whether promoted at the WTO or elsewhere, and their failures provide further evidence of a paradigm that has no legitimacy. The Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) collapsed altogether; the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) could not win a U.S. congressional majority for the year after it was signed and the U.S. stayed out of that pact; and India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), just to name a few examples.

Instead of learning from these mistakes, or acknowledging the chasm between promised positive WTO outcomes and reality, powerful interests at the WTO are doubling down to push more of the same. In what would seem like a parody of the parable that when one only sees nails, the answer is always a hammer, the WTO answer for COVID-19 is to maintain and expand the same failed liberalization policies, including an entirely counterproductive, new tariff-zeroing pact for COVID-19-related goods. Right through the pandemic, negotiations have continued on limiting domestic regulation of the service sector, even as the concentration of services firms is posing a major impediment to timely and cost-effective procurement and distribution of essential goods. Negotiations to limit regulation and vetting of foreign investors continue, despite a clear need for production of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medicines to be diversified. Negotiations that would give Big Tech more control over peoples’ data and the digital economy that WTO member countries explicitly rejected are continuing at a time when most people and governments are clamouring for serious checks on Big Tech and their unaccountable control of data.

This failure can no longer be ignored. The original global trade body – the International Trade Organization that was envisioned in the Havana Charter of 1948 in response to the horrors and chaos of World War II – focused on full employment, limiting corporate concentration, fair competition, protections for workers and standards to ensure currency and other related policies did not distort trade. That very different vision for a rules-based global trading system – updated to recognise the climate crisis, systemic inequality, and the unaccountable power of Big Tech – remains attainable, but only if countries agree that global trade rules are supposed to work for people around the world, not the world’s largest corporations.

The choice is not between the status quo or no trade. That is a straw man hawked by those who want nothing to change. Change is happening. The question is what multilateral framework can be inclusive, promote real sustainability, human rights and prosperity for all, and deliver the benefits of expanded trade to most people, while also providing our elected representatives the policy space to promote the public interest. One example is the [Geneva principles for a global Green New Deal](#).

We call on governments to grasp this opportunity for transformational change.

Regional and International Organizations

1	ActionAid International
2	Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN)
3	Alternative Information & Development Centre (AIDC)
4	Americas Program/MX
5	Amigos de la Tierra América Latina y el Caribe ATALC
6	Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
7	Association des femmes Educatrices pour la promotion des droits HUMAINS
8	Caribbean Policy Development Center (CPDC)
9	Center for International Environmental Law
10	Centre du Commerce International Pour le Développement (CECIDE)
11	Compassion in World Farming
12	Council of Africa - Conseil de l'Afrique
13	CRASH (Coalition for Research and Action for Social Justice and Human Dignity)
14	DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)
15	Education Intrnational
16	Foodwatch international
17	Friends of the Earth International
18	Greenpeace
19	Gret
20	IndustriALL Global Union
21	International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)
22	ITUC
23	IUF/UITA/IUL
24	Observatorio de la riqueza padre Pedro Arrupe
25	Ong MEC
26	Ong-Lutte Contre la Migration Clandestine
27	Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG)
28	PIANGO
29	Public Services International (PSI)
30	Réseau Foi & Justice Afrique Europe antenne France
31	SOL (Alternatives agroécologiques et solidaires)
32	Stop TiSA - Genève
33	Tchad Agir Pour l'Environnement (TCHAPE)
34	The United Methodist Church - General Board of Chu
35	Third Word Network-Africa (TWN-Africa)
36	Trade Collective
37	UNICOM
38	Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll)

National Organizations

39	Amigos de la Tierra Argentina	Argentina
40	CTA Autónoma	Argentina
41	Instituto del Mundo del Trabajo	Australia
42	ActionAid Australia	Australia
43	Australian Arts Trust / Music Trust	Australia
44	Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)	Australia
45	Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network	Australia
46	Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace	Australia
47	Community and Public Sector Union (SPSF)	Australia
48	GeneEthics	Australia
49	New South Wales Retired Teachers' Association	Australia
50	NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association	Australia
51	NSW Teachers Federation	Australia
52	Public Health Association of Australia	Australia
53	SEARCH Foundation	Australia
54	South Coast Labour Council	Australia
55	Sutherland Shire Environment Centre	Australia
56	Anders Handeln Austria	Austria
57	Arbeiterkammer Österreich	Austria
58	Austrian Trade Union Federation	Austria
59	PRO-GE	Austria
60	Bahrain Transparency Society	Bahrain
61	Bangladesh Krishok Federation	Bangladesh
62	COAST Trust	Bangladesh
63	11.11.11, Belgium	Belgium
64	A CONTRE-COURANT	Belgium
65	ACV Puls	Belgium
66	Centre national de coopération au développement (CNCD-11.11.11)	Belgium
67	CNE	Belgium
68	Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens	Belgium
69	Mouvement DEMAIN	Belgium
70	Fundación InternetBolivia.org	Bolivia
71	Gestos (soropositividade, comunicação, gênero)	Brazil
72	Jubileu Sul Brasil	Brazil
73	RESOCIDE	Burkina Faso
74	Syndicat autonome des infirmiers infirmières du Burkina (SAIB)	Burkina Faso
75	Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes du Cameroun (CSAC)	Cameroon
76	SYNATEEC	Cameroon
77	Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Canada
78	Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)	Canada

79	Common Frontiers	Canada
80	Council of Canadians - Le Conseil des Canadiens	Canada
81	Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec-FIQ	Canada
82	Group of 78	Canada
83	HIV Legal Network	Canada
84	Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale (RQIC)	Canada
85	Trade Justice Network	Canada
86	Trade Justice Prince Edward Island	Canada
87	Observatorio de victimas	Colombia
88	Sintracuavalle	Colombia
89	ARDPC	Cote d'Ivoire
90	Plateforme Nationale des organisations professionnelles du secteur public de Côte d'Ivoire	Cote d'Ivoire
91	Ekumenická akademie (Ecumenical Academy)	Czech Republic
92	Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo SJ" (CSMM)	Ecuador
93	FEDAEPS	Ecuador
94	Jubileo 2000 Red Ecuador	Ecuador
95	CESTA Amigos de la Tierra El Salvador	El Salvador
96	Ethiopian Society for Consumer Protection - ETHIOSCOP	Ethiopia
97	ActionAid France	France
98	Bio consom'acteurs	France
99	Comité Français pour la Solidarité Internationale (CFSI)	France
100	Femme pour l'éducation la santé et l'environnement	France
101	GÉNÉRATIONS FUTURES	France
102	Fédération Libre des Agents des Collectivités Locales du Gabon (FAL)	Gabon
103	Kirchliche Arbeitsstelle Südliches Afrika (KASA)-Germany	Germany
104	Consumer Association the Quality of Life-EKPIZO	Greece
105	PAPDA	Haïti
106	ATTAC Hungary Association	Hungary
107	All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP)	India
108	IT For Change	India
109	Indonesia for Global Justice	Indonesia
110	Galway One World Centre	Ireland
111	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL)	Italy
112	Fairwatch	Italy
113	Jamaica Association of Local Government Officers	Jamaica
114	Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions	Jamaica
115	Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)	Japan
116	Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU)	Korea
117	Policy Analysis and Research Institute of Lesotho	Lesotho
118	National Health Workers' Union of Liberia (NAHWUL)	Liberia

119	EMPOWER Malaysia (Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor)	Malaysia
120	Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+)	Malaysia
121	Federation des syndicats du secteur public /ISP	Mali
123	Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (MICNGOS), PIANGO, FELA, FLMMA	Marshall Islands
124	3 CM	Mauritania
125	ACORD MAURITANIE	Mauritania
126	Association des Retraités (ARGEND)	Mauritania
127	Association Mauritanienne pour le bien etre de la femme et de l'enfant	Mauritania
128	Center for Alternative Research and Studies (CARES)	Mauritius
129	Federation of Democratic Labour Unions (FDLU)	Mauritius
130	Federation of Local Govt and Other Labour Unions (FLGOLU)	Mauritius
131	Mauritius Trade Union Congress	Mauritius
132	Migration and Sustainable Development Alliance (MSDA)	Mauritius
133	State Employees Federation	Mauritius
134	Bia'lii, Asesoría e Investigación, A.C	Mexico
135	Nauru Island Association of NGOs	Nauru
136	GEFONT	Nepal
137	FNV National Trade Union	Netherlands
138	Handel Anders! coalitie	Netherlands
139	Platform Aarde Boer Consument	Netherlands
140	StoereVrouwen	Netherlands
141	TTIP, CETA and agriculture coalition	Netherlands
142	WILPF NL	Netherlands
143	FIRST Union	New Zealand
144	It's Our Future NZ	New Zealand
145	New Zealand Alternative	New Zealand
146	Red Nicaragüense de Comercio Comunitario RENICC	Nicaragua
147	Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice, ANEEJ	Nigeria
148	Attac Norway	Norway
149	Handelskampanjen	Norway
150	Spire	Norway
151	NOOR PAKISTAN	Pakistan
152	Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT)	Pakistan
153	Roots for Equity	Pakistan
154	FENASEP	Panamá
155	Project Sepik	Papua New Guinea
156	FED CUT ESSALUD	Peru
157	IBON Foundation	Philippines
158	Ladlad Caraga Incorporated	Philippines

159	Institute of Global Responsibility (IGO)	Poland
160	Ole Siosiomaga Society Incorporated (OLSSI)	Samoa
161	Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes du Sénégal	Senegal
162	Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC)	South Africa
163	Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	South Africa
164	Institute for Economic Justice	South Africa
165	National Public Service Workers Union (NPSWU)	South Africa
166	South Durban Community Environmental Alliance	South Africa
167	Support for Peace and Education Developmnt Program (SPEDP)	South Sudan
168	CIG. CONFEDERACIÓN INTERSINDICAL GALEGA	Spain
169	Association for Proper Internet Governance	Switzerland
170	Bread for all	Switzerland
171	Coalition suisse de la diversité culturelle	Switzerland
172	FIAN Switzerland	Switzerland
173	Public Eye	Switzerland
174	HakiMadini	Tanzania
175	Tanzania Organization for Agricultural Development (TOfAD)	Tanzania
176	La'o Hamutuk	Timor-Leste
177	ICT4D Uganda	Uganda
178	Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute	Uganda
179	Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute	Uganda
180	Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI)-Uganda	Uganda
181	Women's Probono Initiative (WPI)	Uganda
182	Global Justice Now	United Kingdom
183	War on Want	United Kingdom
184	AFL-CIO	United States
185	Campaign for America's Future	United States
186	Citizens Trade Campaign	United States
187	Democratic Socialists of America, International Committee, Economics and Trade	United States
188	Fair World Project	United States
189	Food & Water Watch	United States
190	International Center for Technology Assessment	United States
191	National Family Farm Coalition	United States
192	NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice	United States
193	Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness	United States
194	Public Citizen	United States
195	Sierra Club	United States
196	United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)	United States

197	Win Without War	United States
198	Amigos de la Tierra (FoE) Uruguay	Uruguay
199	Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition (VHRC)	Vanuatu
200	Coalición de Tendencia Clasista (CTC-VZLA)	Venezuela
201	SCODE	Vietnam
202	Zimbabwe Urban Councils Workers Union	Zimbabwe