

Letter from the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha (NP), India
to the World Trade Organisation's 13th Ministerial Conference

26 th February 2024

To all WTO Members,

We are writing to you on the occasion of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, on behalf of the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political), an Indian farmers' network of more than 3 million members. India is a country where farmers are already facing a crisis and 10,000 farmers, on an average, are committing suicide every year.

We have been watching the negotiations on agriculture in the WTO for a long time as it has critical implications for our lives and livelihoods. We are extremely concerned about what is happening on agriculture at MC13. We are shocked to hear that, like the last few Ministerials, crucial issues that are mandated by earlier Ministerial conferences have been completely blocked by developed countries and farm exporting countries.

We want to draw your attention to some key issues.

First of all, we heard that the **permanent solution on public stockholding** is again blocked by the US and other rich countries and will most probably not see any outcome in MC13. It was mandated by the Bali Decision of 2013 and the General Council Decision of 2014 and was to be agreed by 2017. But many ministerials have passed and we are yet to see the permanent solution. For us, and for our brothers and sister farmers across the developing countries and LDCs, this is an important policy tool to ensure our farming and our livelihoods. That itself is also critical for our public food programmes to run and ensure food security for our citizens. The Peace Clause, as you well know, is ineffective in meeting its objective, as it has been riddled with limitations and difficult and irrational conditionalities. We want to again reiterate that the permanent solution is must for us. Developing country and LDC governments are fighting to get this since 2013 and we are with them in this fight. We insist that the WTO Membership agrees to a permanent solution and show your commitment in MC13!

The second critical issue for us is the **Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM)**. We know negotiations have been going on for nearly two decades and there was a renewed mandate in the Nairobi Ministerial. But it is again not agreed in MC13. Sudden import surges are a major cause of uncertainty, price crash and volatility in our countries, leading to destruction of farmers' livelihoods and uncertainty in further production. We are shocked to hear that the US is asking for further market liberalisation for giving an SSM, but the markets are already distorted by the developed country subsidies leading to increasing import surges. The SSM should have been given long ago as most developed countries already enjoy the SSG. We demand the SSM immediately.

Finally, the issue of **cotton, in particular the massive cotton subsidies** given by the US and other developed countries have wreaked havoc on the livelihoods of cotton farmers in Africa, in particular the poorest 4 cotton producing countries, as they have also done in Asia. This issue is again stalled for years by those who have given

massive subsidies to capture global markets. Now they are turning back and demanding market liberalisation. This is totally unacceptable for us. We again demand that the issue of cotton subsidies be resolved in MC13! We want you understand that our governments cannot and must not depend on food exports sold by developed countries and farm exporters given a volatile and concentrated global market. We have to ensure we continue to produce all the food we can domestically, in keeping with our food habits, climate, and cultures.

We want to again remind you that agriculture is not just a business for us, it is our culture, our food security, our health, and our existence. And it is also the lifeline of our compatriots across the developing countries and LDCs. We urge you to take these issues up seriously, with integrity and honesty, and fulfill your promises to farmers across the world.

Yours sincerely,

K V Biju,

Coordination Committee Member (Samyukta Kisan Morcha (NP))

(contact information redacted in this online version)

Kurbur Shanthakumar,

Coordination Committee Member (Samyukta Kisan Morcha (NP))

Narasimha Naidu

Committee Member (Samyukta Kisan Morcha (NP))