

*Food Justice Update is an occasional newsletter of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. It is distributed to supporters of the Foodgrains Bank who are working for public policies that support small-holder farmers in developing countries, the human right to food and fairer agricultural trade rules.*

## **Left in the Dust: Canada and the Development Agenda at the 6th WTO Ministerial, Hong Kong**

*The Canadian Council for International Cooperation works with the Foodgrains Bank in the Food Security Policy Group. Gauri Sreenivasan, chief policy officer of CCIC, is here in Hong Kong and has offered the following analysis:*

Heading into the 6<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial, most civil society groups were extremely concerned that global trade talks were headed in the wrong direction. The draft texts were not only missing key elements of a development agenda, but across the major issue areas of agriculture, service and industrial tariffs, there were distinctly anti-development measures proposed, pressuring developing countries to open markets before they were ready. As Canadian NGOs packed their bags and headed off to Hong Kong, we wondered, what role would Canada play?

For the past number of years, Canadian labour, church, NGO groups have urged the Canadian government to develop a proactive agenda for trade, that starts from the principle that trade is a means to development not an end in itself. We have called for the government to recognize both the importance of a fairer trade system to address global poverty and to see the shared trade objectives Canada has with many Southern countries. Rules must discipline unfair trade practices and allow all countries to manage markets and borders in ways that promote fair returns to farmers, decent jobs, and access to quality services for all.

### *Intransigence in Hong Kong*

More than halfway through the Ministerial, wealthy countries including Canada remain intransigent. Very little progress has been made to narrow differences among positions, and to convert the draft texts into a road map for development. Wealthy countries have attempted to sidestep the critical need to put development into the rules of trade, and focused on offering small measures that are distractions from the job at hand. There have been offers of aid, and lofty promises of improving access of the poorest countries to markets in the North. But nothing concrete on these, nor a diminution of the aggressive demands, including from Canada, for developing countries to open up their service and industrial sectors to competition with global corporate giants in Europe and North America.

Indeed the EU--after more or less empty offers to reform damaging subsidies, and little support to developing country calls for protective measures for poor farmers--has demanded that developing countries concede in services and industrial tariff talks before it will revisit its offer in agriculture. Behind closed doors, outside the scrutiny of press and civil society, wealthy countries have put enormous pressure on poor countries to back off their demands. But this move was a serious miscalculation. Instead of splitting developing countries apart, the bullying has mobilized the South as never

before.

### ***Birth of the G110***

On December 16<sup>th</sup> at a 3:00 pm press conference slated only for the Group of 90 (poorest countries), every single developing country grouping from G-20, to G90 to Africa Group to LDCs to ACP and Group 33 lined up to announce their resolve to hold firm for a real Development Round. While Canada fiddled and quibbled on the sidelines about how we might squeeze more market access out of poor countries, developing countries united in the strength of their numbers, the interconnection of their goals, and their belief in the validity of their claims for fair trade. From the joint walk out in Seattle, to the birth of the G-20 coalition on agriculture at Cancun, developing countries in Hong Kong have announced a broader and deeper level of solidarity: a platform of 110 to seek action on an end to export subsidies, advances in market access to the North, request for measures to protect poor farmers and the need to address issues of preference erosion of the poorest countries.

A few hours later, at a briefing of Canadian stakeholders, the Canadian Mission seemed unaware of what had transpired that afternoon. For now Canada retains its narrow vision that development will come through lowering tariffs and technical assistance, and that while wealthy countries can reform their subsidy programs and sensitive sectors slowly, the South must open quickly and suffer the consequences of unfair trade. It is a vision of development and a global trade regime that has been left in the dust today. . Let's hope Canada notices. New texts are on their way and negotiations will pick back up, and there is little time left to make a positive contribution before the end of the Ministerial meeting.

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