

# **Bilateral Trade deal between Philippines and Japan should not be signed in Helsinki!**

Thursday 7 September 2006, by [Attac Japan](#), [Focus on the Global South](#), [Freedom from Debt Coalition](#), [Laban ng Masa, No to WTO Coalition \( Japan\)](#), [Stop the New Round Coalition!](#) (Date first published: 6 September 2006).

Filipino and Japanese groups participating in the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF) in Helsinki expressed their strong opposition to the reported plan of Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi and Philippine President Arroyo to finalize the deal over the contentious Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) on the sidelines of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Helsinki next week.

The groups criticized Koizumi and Arroyo for their urgent and haphazard behaviour toward JPEPA. According to Yoko Akimoto of Attac Japan, "JPEPA negotiations have been done in almost total secrecy with government officials in both Japan and the Philippines refusing to disclose information on the agreement to the public."

In the Philippines a petition to the Supreme Court has been filed by party-list group Akbayan seeking to stop the government from signing a bilateral trade pact with Japan without a full disclosure of its provisions to the public.

"The Philippine government has invoked executive privilege in order to deny information to groups who have raised serious concerns over the potential negative impact of JPEPA on the Philippine economy. But we believe that it is the right of sectors who will be affected by such deal to know the details of this agreement and to voice out their opposition" according to Joseph Purugganan of Focus on the Global South.

Under their FTA, Japan and the Philippines will cut import tariffs on industrial goods by 90 percent or more within 10 years after the agreement takes effect. The Philippines will immediately abolish tariffs on at least 60 percent of its steel imports from Japan and fully scrap tariffs on automobiles and auto parts by 2010.

On farm goods trade, Tokyo will expand imports of such products as chicken, pineapples and bananas, through tariff cuts and other measures. Manila will abolish tariffs on grapes and pears.

The negotiations have been delayed over highly contentious labor issues particularly the request of the Philippine government for Japan to open its labor market for nurses and caregivers. Recently, the Japanese newspapers have reported that Japan has agreed with the Philippines to set an upper limit on the number of Filipino nurses and caregivers. Tokyo is expected to receive 400 to 500 nurses and caregivers annually from the Southeast Asian nation under the FTA that will take effect next year.

According to Yoko Akimoto "the designated number and work period are totally unrealistic. The reason is that in order to do it, the Japanese strict immigration laws must be revised immediately. In addition, there is still much discussion or doubt about such acceptance or their entry even within the Justice Ministry as well as in Japanese community including trade unions and NGOs."

Social movements in both Japan and the Philippines have raised opposition to JPEPA arguing that

the deal will have negative consequences on the economies of both countries and have vowed to continue their campaign against JPEPA.

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Helsinki, Finland

ATTAC Japan, Association for the financial Taxation for the Aid of the Citizens

No to WTO Coalition in Japan

Focus on the Global South

Stop the New Round Coalition

Freedom from Debt Coalition

Laban ng Masa (Struggle of the Masses)