

# Protect Filipino Workers, Farmers and Fishers against WTO impositions!

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We Filipino Workers declare our support for the demand of Farmers and Fishers for protection against the liberalization of agriculture and fishing. Should the first world countries' agenda for the WTO negotiations be followed to the letter, both the agriculture and fisheries sectors of the country will be besieged, just as what had happened to our country's industries when trade was liberalized, which aggravated the exploitation of the impoverished Filipino Workers.

The experience of Filipino Workers with the deluge of globalization should serve as an example to the Farmers and Fishers to the peril of liberalization. Since joining the WTO, more than 2,000 factories have been closing down annually, with hundreds of thousands of Workers being laid off and thrown out like dirty rags. Job security has been demolished, with meager wages and benefits given those who are lucky enough to have kept their jobs. The daily minimum wage, together with cost-of-living allowance (COLA), remains at a Php325, amounting to less than half of the daily cost of living of Php680.

After entering the WTO in 1995 and with the economy liberalized, conditions of the Filipino Workers continue to degenerate with unabated oppression and poverty. Cheaply priced goods from the multinational corporations of the first world flooded our markets. Industries that was unable to compete in such unfair conditions closed shop left and right. Filipino capitalists intensified their exploitation of Workers in a desperate attempt to confront the fierce competition. Wages were cut, contractualization became rampant, and unions were busted.

This is the Filipino Workers' experience. This is what the Filipino Farmers are experiencing. And this is what the Filipino Fishers will be experiencing in due time, should we be unable to fight back and stop the total liberalization of the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

The reduction of tariff rates in the fisheries sector and in additional agricultural products will be forced upon the third world countries at the negotiations in the ongoing WTO ministerial meeting in Hong Kong. First world governments subsidize their fisheries and agricultural sectors with billions of dollars. In 2000, their agricultural subsidy amounted to \$73.2 billion in the European Union, \$24.8 billion in the US, and \$6.8 billion in Japan, while subsidies in the fisheries sector in the US, Europe, Japan and Taiwan amount to \$14 - \$20 billion. In contrast, the Philippine government's subsidy to agriculture amounts to only \$300 million, while Filipino small fishers hardly receive any subsidy. If the scant protection of the Farmers and Fishers in the third world will be battered down in Hong Kong, we will be swallowed whole by the unfair competition of very cheaply priced subsidized agricultural and fishery products.

On the other hand, first world countries have set various impediments to the entry of third world products, like for example very strict sanitary/phytosanitary standards. The latter's tariff rates have also been reduced from an average of 30% in 1990 to only 18% in 2000, thus allowing the flooding of their respective domestic markets with cheap products. Worse, the Philippines' tariff rates averages at only 8%. And WTO continues to push for more unfair trade policies.

Growth and development promised by globalization have been exposed as rotten lies. Whatever marginal progress that globalization has engendered have been enjoyed only by multinational corporations and Filipino capitalists. The old adage of the rich becoming richer, and the poor becoming poorer ring loud and true. One of every two Filipinos earns less than a dollar a day.

Why is it then that the Philippine economy has not been overturned completely by the deluge of globalization? This is because of the billions of dollars of remitted by Overseas Filipino Workers. It has been the blood, sweat and tears of 8 million Filipinos working abroad that has been salvaging our country's economy now pulverized by liberalization. One out of every ten Filipinos are forced to work abroad, since our own government cannot provide us decent jobs and wages are much too meager to support a family, even the most basic of their needs. As the economic crisis rooted in globalization deepens, the migration of the Filipino modern-day heroes swells likewise.

The remittances of Overseas Filipino Workers through banks will amount to around \$10 billion in 2005; remittances made through other means are assessed to triple the amount. Foreign investments, touted as the ultimate jobs provider of globalization, from January to June of this year has only been at \$495 million. This only means one thing - the so-called benefits of globalization remains a myth. In truth, the sacrifices of Overseas Filipino Workers have born more fruit than foreign investments.

If globalization is truly for humanity's progress and not only for capitalist gains, why is it that negotiations tackle only the free flow of goods and capital, and never of the freedom of movement and utmost protection for migrant workers?

While investments and trade of multinational companies enjoy the protection of WTO agreements, millions of migrant Workers are left unprotected and liable to be abused. The Philippine government pays lip service to support for Overseas Filipino Workers even as it continues to be the number one promoter of labor migration with tremendous social costs.

We cannot expect the WTO to benefit the third world countries for it was primarily founded as an instrument of globalization, as a weapon of multinational corporations to subjugate the markets of other countries. Globalization is nothing more than the old imperialism metamorphosed. The liberalization promoted by WTO is meant to clear the way for investments and trade of the multinational companies. Its objective and processes have been precisely designed to force the third world countries to agree to the agenda of multinational corporations.

It is but an illusion to think that third world countries will be able to compete fairly within the bounds of the WTO. Fair trade is a pipe dream in the global trade scene dominated by multinational corporations. Since the WTO's creation, third world countries have been coerced to agree to unfair agreements and policies favoring the developed nations. Talks have collapsed because when the third world countries object to further liberalization, the first world countries have been unwillingness to compromise. To which we say, no deal is better than a bad deal.

Protection for Workers, Farmers and Fishers can only be achieved outside of the bounds of the WTO, beyond the framework of globalization. The first step in that road is the abolition of the WTO through the united struggle of Workers, Farmers and Fishers. In place of imperialist globalization, a new world must be established on the basis of international cooperation not global competition, of social justice not personal profit.

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