

Invitation

# **Post-Seattle Forum on Trade and Agriculture: Advancing the Call to Take Agriculture out of the WTO**

February 9-10, 2000, Bangkok, Thailand

Sunday 1 January 2006, by [Focus on the Global South](#), [ISGN](#) (Date first published: January 2000).

The massive street protests and collapse of the 3<sup>rd</sup> WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle highlighted the bankruptcy of the “free trade” dogma that rules the multilateral trading system. It was a significant advance in the people’s struggle against the WTO especially since the US and other big players failed to introduce new issues into the domain of the WTO. The sharpening of contradictions within the WTO, most significantly the growing collective challenge posed by the developing and least developed nations is a positive development that has to be pushed and supported.

However, even if the 3<sup>rd</sup> WTO ministerial meeting failed to agree on a broad agenda for a millenium round of negotiations, the trade body will resume talks on key areas such as agriculture, services, and intellectual property rights, as mandated under the 1994 Marrakesh agreement. Agriculture remains a contentious issue not only between the big players and developing nations but also among the developed nations themselves. Talks remain deadlocked between the US/Cairns Group and the EU on the issue of subsidies, and between the powerful and developing nations on the issue of market access and special and differential treatment, among others.

Peasant movements worldwide have already put forward the call, Take Agriculture Out of WTO. The call aptly mirrors the position and perspective of small farmers, peasants and marginalized rural sectors who have been the worst victims of agricultural trade liberalization. It is a radical departure from simply pleading the WTO for more export market access in favor of developing countries or dismantling subsidies in the North to make third world exports competitive. Small farmers in the third world do not gain anything from increased exports. Only big agribusiness TNCs and the local landed elite benefit from it. In fact, it is the orientation towards export agriculture that has made the third world perpetually underdeveloped and which has exacerbated peasant landlessness, food insecurity and environmental degradation.

On February 12-19, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development will hold its tenth quadrennial conference in Bangkok. Since the WTO came to existence, big players in the global trading regime have sidetracked the vital link of trade to development, relegating such concerns to the UNCTAD. While it is a non-binding trade body in contrast to the WTO, the UNCTAD has more or less served as a forum of developing nations to raise development issues in relation to trade.

The aftershock from Seattle is bound to shape the outcome of UNCTAD X . It will be worthwhile to observe and explore possibilities of pushing developing nations into firming up a collective position in support of people’s demands in Seattle.

From Seattle to Bangkok and then on to Geneva, we should not let our guards down and vigorously

oppose all moves by the US and other big economic powers to pursue their failed agenda in Seattle. We must support the call to get agriculture out of the WTO even as we find ways of pushing the processes of the WTO towards emasculating its hold on key and related issues around agriculture and stopping further liberalization of third world economies. We must work for a united front of all developing and least developed nations in fighting for national economic sovereignty and genuine development.

### **Tentative Program:**

February 9 (Wednesday) 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Opening and Welcome Remarks:

- Assembly of the Poor (Thailand)
- ISGN
- Focus on the Global South

Plenary Forum I:

- The WTO Fiasco in Seattle: Analysis and Prospects - Dr. Walden Bello
- UNCTAD and Which Way Forward for Developing Nations - Dr. Yash Tandon

February 10 (Thursday) 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Plenary Forum II:

- The Political Economy of Trade Liberalization in Agriculture - Francisco Pascual
- The WTO Review of the Agreement on Agriculture: Issues and Problems - IATP
- The Global Farmers' Campaign to Take Agriculture Out of the WTO - La Via Campesina

Lunch Break: 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

Plenary Forum III: Perspective and Positions of Farmers and Peasant Organizations: 1. Brazil, 2. Africa, 3. Philippines, 4. Mexico, 5. India, 6. Norway, 7. USA

Synthesis and Closing Remarks

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The forum is being organized by the International South Group Network (ISGN) in cooperation with Focus on the Global South.

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