

Trade unions in TPP countries call for a fairer trade framework friendly to working people

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In an historic move, peak bodies of Trans Pacific trade unions have called for a new and fairer framework for trade and investment agreements.

The unions are from countries which are due to begin negotiations today in Melbourne to extend the Trans Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement. The parties to the negotiations are New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Chile, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and Brunei Darussalam.

NZCTU President Helen Kelly, one of the signatories to the Declaration, said that it is time that such agreements focused on the needs of working people. "There is a high risk that this agreement will make it more difficult for future governments to make the changes that are needed to improve the lives of working people," she said. "Some of the directions proposed would threaten public services, make medicines more expensive, and make it more difficult for us to regulate our financial sector."

"We are calling for an agreement that puts good jobs and the protection of our rights at work first."

Kelly said that the NZCTU has been in active consultation in recent months with the AFL-CIO in the United States and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. There has also been increasing contact between unions right across the scope of the proposed trade agreement.

"This is a very significant development. It means that working people across the region are coming together in a strong voice for fair trade."

"While we support increasing trade opportunities we cannot support an agreement which further undermines well paid work and social protections, and which is negotiated without open and wide consultation with unions and other community representatives."

"The CTU is committed to maintaining an open dialogue with the Government and business interests throughout the TPP negotiation process."

The Declaration calls for protection of public services. It opposes proposals that would limit the ability of government to regulate the financial sector, and calls for full and enforceable compliance with multilateral environmental agreements.

The Declaration calls for transparency in the negotiation and ratification process, replacing the usual closed doors.

Kelly continued: "Protection of labour rights must be an essential ingredient of trade, and the TPP should provide enforceable processes to ensure all parties adhere to International Labour Organisation (ILO) core labour conventions."

The unions also oppose proposals that would give foreign investors greater rights than those enjoyed by domestic investors.

Kelly said that unions will continue to work closely together on these matters throughout the negotiations.

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