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RIP Doha Round - Another WTO Collapse in ‘Make or Break’ Talks Shows New Direction Is Required; Victory for Small Farmers, Workers, Civil Society and Developing Nations as WTO Expansion Bid Is Again Defeated in Geneva

Statement of Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch Division

Thank God no deal was reached, because the proposal under consideration would have exacerbated the serious economic, food security and social problems now rocking numerous countries.

The moldering corpse of the Doha WTO-expansion Round should have been buried years ago. Hopefully after this latest rejection of the Doha agenda, countries will move on to a new agenda focused on fixing the existing WTO rules.

Countries’ unwillingness to concede on particular themes is the proximate cause for the collapse, but government positions were based on strong public opposition in many poor and rich nations alike to expanding WTO scope and authority after more than a decade of experience of the WTO’s damaging outcomes. By calling a ministerial summit to try to force agreement on a WTO expansion agenda opposed by many countries, WTO Secretary General Pascal Lamy set up the conditions for yet another direct blow to the beleaguered global commerce agency’s shaky legitimacy.

The WTO’s 14-year lifespan has sparked a dramatic wave of popular protest across the world, and this week’s talks were no different, with small farmers, fishers and workers protesting in various national capitals and teams of civil society activists traveling to Geneva to remind their countries’ WTO delegates of the political consequences at home of damaging compromises.

Now that WTO expansion has been again rejected at this “make or break” meeting, elected officials and those on the campaign trail in nations around the world – including U.S. presidential candidates – will be asked what they intend to do to *replace* the failed WTO model and its version of corporate globalization with something that benefits the majority of people worldwide.

While the “blame-country-x game” is likely to reach a frenzy this week, seven years of virtual deadlock since the Doha Round WTO expansion talks started signals that most WTO countries and their populations are seeking a different direction than what was offered with the Doha agenda. The WTO Secretariat and the small bloc of mainly rich country governments who stubbornly insist on continuing with the Doha WTO expansion agenda after it has been repeatedly rejected are the ones to blame for the repeated summit collapses and deadlocks.

With the damaging socio-economic consequences of WTO implementation and an exclusive negotiating process at the summit having once again translated into a rejection of WTO expansion, the organization's already-shaky legitimacy is nearing rock bottom.

Acknowledging the broad opposition among WTO member countries to aspects of the Doha Round agenda, WTO officials had called last week's invitation-only mini-ministerial with the intention of allowing 35 of the WTO's 153-member nations to participate in a selective process known as the "Green Room". But even this exclusive process was abandoned by the third day of talks in favor of closed-door meetings among representatives from seven large countries. This so-called "G-7" group completely excluded African and Caribbean countries, included only Japan and China from all of Asia and only Brazil from all of Latin America. And this was the so-called Doha "Development" Round! The remaining trade ministers – mainly from poor countries – were left "in the dark sitting in the dark", as the Indonesian trade minister complained. Kenya's Deputy Prime Minister and Commerce Minister Uhuru Kenyatta spoke for the African countries in expressing similar anger. The seven large nations announced a tentative deal this weekend, warning that it represented a non-negotiable balance of interests. They declared to the press that a ministerial declaration resolving various issues was at hand. However, when this take-it-or-leave-it deal was brought back to the exclusive 35-country grouping, inquires began about the details. Over the past two days it became clear that the proposed modalities agreement was unacceptable to blocs of countries and the 8-day summit ended where it began: with countries in deep disagreement about the future direction of global trade rules and negotiations.

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