

US Group Launches Doha Round 'Turnaround' Campaign

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)

A Washington-based advocacy group has launched a multi-city campaign to 'turn around' the WTO's Doha Round of trade talks, which the organisation says "will hurt us economically, increase the flood of unsafe imports and undermine efforts to re-regulate the banks and stabilise our economy."

The campaign will include demonstrations in national capitals around the world and could bring protestors to Geneva for the WTO's upcoming ministerial conference, said Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, the group behind the campaign, on a conference call with journalists on Monday.

"The economic crisis highlights the threats posed by WTO-style globalisation and deregulation to jobs and economic security. Critical to economic recovery here and worldwide will be a re-write of the current rules of the global economy," Wallach said in a statement.

The first day of the WTO's upcoming seventh ministerial conference happens to fall on the 10-year anniversary of the street protests in Seattle that shut down the WTO conference that was meant to launch the Doha Round talks. The campaign organisers have seized on this inauspicious timing - which the WTO secretariat insists was a complete coincidence - and hope to use it as an opportunity to "celebrate the spirit of Seattle."

"When the WTO scheduled their seventh ministerial on the exact day of the ten-year anniversary of the protests in Seattle, people across the country that work with us were geared up," said Andy Gussert, National Director of The Citizen's Trade Campaign. "They heard this as a rallying cry and were calling out, 'let's do something'."

As part of the campaign, the group has created an online petition directed at US President Barack Obama. Part of the letter reads as follows:

"The economic crisis has painfully demonstrated that the current rules of the global economy have failed us. Time is overdue to turnaround the WTO. We supported your campaign commitments to create a new trade policy that works for all of us, not just the special interests. That is why we are calling

on you to replace Bush's more-of-the-same WTO expansion agenda. We're ready to fight for a WTO turnaround plan we hope you will lead."

All eyes are on the United States this autumn as delegates struggle to wrap up the long-stalled trade talks, which were launched in November 2001 with the goal of helping developing countries grow through trade. The Obama administration has yet to truly engage in the talks, Geneva-based delegates complain, and Washington's hesitance is holding up the Round