

## **How does the WTO affect you, and why should you care about it?**

Global trade affects many aspects of life. It can impact on everything from the health of the environment, to the well-being of people, to the amount of food that is produced all over the world. At the next WTO meeting, it is not just trade that is on the agenda. Governments will be discussing how to make sure that poorer countries have access to medicines and vaccines. The meeting will also discuss the relationship between trade rules and environmental agreements – which could end up making trade rules more important than protecting the environment. With environmental and human health directly on the negotiating agenda for the next WTO meeting, the results will affect everyone. Below are some specific examples of why you should care about the WTO meeting, and why you need to let your politicians know that you care!

### **1. If you care about the environment...**

**Then you will be concerned about the WTO, and its free trade mandate.** The free trade agenda is increasing the production and consumption of natural resources at a rapid rate. This is adding to the destruction of ancient forests, leading to overfishing, as well as creating more and more pollution. WTO rules are also being used to undermine global environmental agreements, principles and standards. Trade rules should not be allowed to take priority over environmental protection. Governments should focus not only on economic issues, but environmental and social ones as well – just like they agreed to do at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and its ten-year anniversary in Johannesburg last September.

### **2. If you want to be able to choose whether or not to eat genetically modified foods...**

**Then you will want to stop the US from using the WTO as a weapon to push GMO foods on the rest of the world.** Because of the threat of trade sanctions, as well as the massive pressure on certain governments by powerful corporations, many countries and consumers could be forced to eat genetically modified foods. Consumers have a right to know what they are eating, and governments must feel free to use the strictest possible standards to regulate GMOs, rather than being bullied into accepting them. This is especially because science has not proven that GMOs are safe – either from a human health perspective, or for the environment.

### **3. If you care about equity between the rich and the poor, and feel that everyone has a right to be free of poverty...**

**Then you will feel outraged over the lack of transparency, democracy, and blatant arm-twisting that goes on at the WTO.** There needs to be a re-balancing of trade rules and procedures – one that puts environment, development and social

**free people from forced trade**

equity at the heart of the decision-making process. All countries must have the same opportunity to participate in the negotiations, rather than the current closed-door approach. Civil society organisations should also have input into certain processes. The public, especially marginalised groups who do not have access to their own governments, should be entitled to participate in decisions that may affect environmental quality and social welfare.

#### **4. If you want corporations to be held accountable for their actions...**

**Then you will be against having WTO member countries negotiate a new investment agreement.** Such an agreement will extend the power and control of the WTO, which is already suffering from problems of legitimacy and overreach. And corporations will be given broad powers, without being held accountable for their actions. This is not the time for such an agreement.

### **What you can do:**

- 1. Contact your Trade Minister? Head of State?:** Tell your Minister/Head of State that the WTO rules and procedures are not promoting sustainable development, even though they agreed to this in Rio and Johannesburg at the two last Earth Summits. Tell them that the global trade rules need to be reviewed and put on a sustainable path and until then, the WTO should not be extended. This means no new agreements! Governments should not negotiate an investment agreement in the WTO, when the existing rules are already causing such problems. Demand that environmental agreements be strengthened, and that they should not take a back seat to trade rules.
- 2. Let your government know that you do not want to eat GMO foods!** Express outrage at the US case against the European Union on GMOs, which is against the rights of farmers, consumers and the environment. Demand the right to know what you are eating by insisting on consumer labeling of all foods containing GMOs.
- 3. Visit the Greenpeace web site** at [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org) and take action to free people from forced trade.