

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Union Concern at APEC Hawaii Summit Outcome

Brussels, 15 November 2011 (ITUC OnLine): While this year's APEC Leaders' Meeting in Hawaii lauded their region as providing "the vanguard for global growth.... performing beyond even the most optimistic expectations" it said nothing about the need for strong government measures to achieve economic recovery, establish a fairer trading system, invest in decent jobs or strengthen social protection. APEC Leaders said they "applaud" APEC's business wing for its inputs to APEC but referred nowhere to the contributions of workers' trade union representatives. Unions were particularly concerned at the statement on a Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement (TPPTA) announced at the APEC summit on November 12, 2011.

"Time has nearly run out for trade negotiators to show us that this time it is different. We cannot and will not support a trade agreement that lifts the boats of the 1%, leaving the rest of us washed up on the rocks," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

It is apparent that the TPPTA negotiators, while delivering on meetings, have done very little to deliver on trade unions' well-grounded concerns. Instead, the TPPTA framework document appears in many respects to be more of the same, if not worse than before. Indeed, the paragraph on labour omits any mention of an enforcement mechanism, which is found in many existing FTAs and a key demand of the trade unions. Mechanisms that allow corporations to sue governments over their regulatory decisions, such as a current attack against Australia's tobacco packaging regulations meant to safeguard public health, remain in place. Leaked documents on intellectual property and pharmaceuticals appear to sacrifice access to affordable medicines to greater pharmaceutical industry profit by, for example, erecting barriers to cheaper, generic drugs entering the market. This is not the "21st Century" agreement that working people had in mind. Indeed, it seems like yet another trade agreement that privileges substantial new opportunities for investors over good jobs for workers.

The present situation needs to be matched against the joint statement issued in 2010 by trade unions engaged in the TPPTA, in which they called for a well-balanced agreement that "foments the creation of good jobs, protects the rights and interests of working people, leads to long-term, balanced economic development and promotes a healthy environment" and urged the negotiators to adopt "a new trade framework that will make a positive difference in the lives of working people." The declaration called on the process to be transparent, where draft texts, proposals and requests would be made available for public review and comment. And unions have made several detailed proposals on substantive areas of the agreement, from labour standards to investment to intellectual property. Trade union delegations have engaged at the national level, and have joined together to talk with negotiators in the recent Chicago and Lima negotiating rounds.

For the full trade union statement to the APEC Summit sees: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/statement-of-the-ituc-asia-pacific,9816.html>

For the 2010 union statement on the TPP negotiations see: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/labor-declaration-on-the,10077.html>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 308 affiliated national organisations from 153 countries and territories.

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