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## **Public Citizen Condemns Process, Outcome of Geneva WTO Framework Talks**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Future talks under the framework issued this weekend by the World Trade Organization (WTO) will be extremely difficult because the text was hammered out in secret without the participation of many WTO countries, Public Citizen said today.

The framework was issued at a General Council meeting of the WTO after being rubberstamped at midnight by beleaguered developing countries.

“Thanks to their own hype, WTO officials came to a point where they had to produce some text, any text—even if it did not provide a feasible way forward or exposed once again the underlying deadlock over the future of WTO,” said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. “WTO staff and negotiators from the United States and European Union had said that the WTO would be dead if they didn’t get this text.”

The process that produced the text was secretive and unworkable, with many WTO nations excluded from critical talks.

“To produce this text, outrageous procedural tactics—including the exclusion of key players, threats and bribes—were employed against many developing countries. The result is similar to what happened in 2001 at the Doha Ministerial, which purported to start this ill-fated round of talks: a paper but no path forward most countries can accept,” Wallach said.

“We saw what happened with such a text outside of the pressure-cooker moments of Doha and even through the Cancun Summit, in which every country’s trade ministers participated, rather than just a select few: a forced text proved to be the roadblock,” Wallach added.

Wallach urged reporters and policymakers to remain skeptical of claims that this text is a “breakthrough.” The text issued is a framework, which is more vague than the formal modality documents that were to have been adopted by early 2003. From this framework document, modalities—the actual formulas for tariffs cuts and other particulars—must still be forged and agreed to before actual negotiations on specific products or sectors can begin.

As regards the text, the agricultural portion does little to address the problem of export dumping, which is undermining food security and food sovereignty worldwide to the benefit of multinational agribusiness companies. Moreover, the text is very uneven, delivering detail on a few issues but presenting enormous ambiguity on others—including the non-agricultural market access talks that are considered the second key issue in addition to agriculture.

Perhaps the most interesting element of the text is what is not included. After years of developing country and civil society opposition to a proposed broad expansion of WTO scope and powers, the contentious issues of investment, competition and procurement were omitted, and the text on the remaining expansion issue leaves out the degree to which its terms will be binding on WTO nations.

Given that these new issues were at the heart of the U.S., EU and other most powerful WTO member nations' agenda for this round of talks, the scope of the framework agreement itself is a signal of the changing power relations at the WTO—a development that is certain to determine what happens in the coming weeks when a framework text unacceptable to many nations must be put into practical use.

“You can imagine the curse that is cast on future WTO talks by having days of closed door negotiations and then having a handful of mainly rich countries put the majority of WTO member countries into a trap of either having to take a text strongly against their interests or be blamed for causing a disaster,” said Wallach. “This was tried in Doha, and the WTO’s current negotiating morass is the result.”

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