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About IATP

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with an office in Geneva.

WTO Ministerial fails to make progress, again

Nearly decade-old agenda is outdated, time for a new start

MINNEAPOLIS/GENEVA – Negotiations at the World Trade Organization are intractably stalled as trade ministers find themselves stuck debating a Doha Round that has long been outdated for the times. Instead, trade ministers need to step back and chart a new course for trade, according to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

“This ministerial was so meaningless that many trade ministers actually left before the meeting was over,” said IATP’s Anne Laure Constantin in Geneva. “They continue to be mired in an endless Doha Round discussion. Even at a time of unprecedented global crises, there is no appetite for meaningful reform. The outcome of this conference is a weakened, not strengthened, trading system stuck in an unacceptable status quo.”

“The Doha Round is the wrong approach for the times,” said Karen Hansen-Kuhn, director of IATP’s international programs, in Washington. “The Obama administration should have advanced bold new proposals to refocus the global trade conversation on a different set of rules. Instead, USTR keeps pressuring for more market access. This approach is leading nowhere. It is time for USTR and Congress to get to work to design a trade policy that benefits workers rather than shareholders. The introduction of the TRADE Act yesterday in Congress was a good first step in that direction.”

Constantin added, “With 1 billion people going hungry every day, governments must build a more coherent system of global governance for food and agriculture. The WTO needs to rejoin the wider multilateral system and defer to other institutions with the mandate to advance human rights and sustainable development, rather than reducing them to an afterthought in the trade debate. World leaders should take a fresh look at the Marrakesh Agreement, which established the WTO. It sets overarching objectives to raise standards of living, promote sustainable development and protect the environment. The obsession with tariffs and subsidies, at the expense of public policy goals, needs to end.”

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