

December 3, 2017

Dear Mr. Roberto Azevêdo,

Greetings from Our World is Not for Sale (OWINFS) network. We are writing to remind you that we are awaiting a response to our letter, and to bring additional facts to bear on our predicament.

We fully understand that in the case of the banned civil society representatives, that they had been duly accredited by the WTO, and that the decision to revoke the accreditation lies with the Argentine government. We also understand that the WTO pushed back on the blacklisting, and that you have engaged the government to try to convince them to reverse their position. We appreciate this.

However, at this point, we find that not enough action has been taken by the WTO to guarantee the proper functioning of the Ministerial. As we stated in our letter, "if any host country starts limiting access and does so arbitrarily and without having to explain any motives, not only is this conference's integrity being attacked, but a key principle of international diplomacy is being violated." We further find that "the banning of registered WTO delegates is an outrageous and worrying precedent, not just for the WTO meeting itself, and also for the G20 presidency of Argentina, but also for all future international meetings."

As you are aware, the Argentine government's only public explanation has been that they found that the targeted organizations were "more disruptive than constructive," which, not only is incorrect, but does not fall within the international norms or host country agreement for refusing accredited participants. And today, we find posted on the website of the Foreign Ministry, a [statement](#) accusing the listed organizations of having "hecho explícitos llamamientos a manifestaciones de violencia a través de las redes sociales, expresando su vocación de generar esquemas de intimidación y caos." This is outrageous libel. It is impossible to justify that organizations such as the Instituto del Mundo del Trabajo or REBRIP or UNI Américas or CNCD-11.11.11 (an umbrella organization with 90 members including Caritas, Oxfam, Médecins du Monde, Rotary Club for Development, Conseil de la Jeunesse Catholique, etcetera) are "disruptive" or "violent." None of the organizations we know have expressed calls to violence on social media. If the Argentine government is using this claim as its justification, it should be required by the WTO to offer proof (which of course does not exist.)

We have understood through various channels that the Argentine government may be reviewing groups on a "case by case" basis, asking the home governments of the respective organizations for verification. This may be helpful for some groups, because some of the targeted organizations are funded partially by their governments, such as Siemenpuu (Finland) or Transnational Institute (the Netherlands); another aspect which makes the accusations against them laughable. However, we find that the requirement that a government verify organizations to participate, to be repugnant. While not every banned group is known to us, we demand that ALL organizations which are accredited to the WTO, are duly allowed to participate in the meeting.

In all of our organizations' and allies' experience with international meetings of multilateral member-state organizations, none of us have ever witnessed such a wholesale, and meritless, banning of accredited organizations from an international meeting.

We find only one related situation: in 2006 at the World Bank-IMF annual meeting in Singapore, 27 civil society delegates accredited to the official meeting and dozen others that wanted to attend the parallel meeting were denied entry in Singapore. Under pressure from the civil society community, then-President of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, and then-Managing Director of the IMF, Rodrigo Rato, declared publicly that the Singaporean government had "shot itself on the foot," and met with the Prime Minister to request that all those granted accreditation be admitted, in accordance with

standard diplomatic practice for governments hosting international meetings. Because they took public leadership regarding the meeting of their organizations, 22 of the 27 were allowed in.

Since officially accredited civil society groups are an integral part of the conference itself, the host country is bound by the host country agreement to let them in. A violation of the terms of the host country agreement that deprives the conference of duly accredited participants should not be acceptable by the international organization (the WTO in this case) and if a single legitimate participant is not allowed entry this should be a reason to move the conference to another location. This should be done in defense of the integrity of not just of your organization but any other multilateral member-state conference, where the host country cannot block delegates that it doesn't like.

Since the people in the list are not a threat to Argentine security, then the list has been constructed for other reasons, like for example a judgement of the banned persons and organizations' views. This seems like a far more credible underlying reason, given that half of the blacklisted groups are members of the OWINFS network and many others are well known to us. At the same time, the government of Argentina is hosting the International Chamber of Commerce for a joint trade fair. Given that only two of the blacklisted groups are trade associations, that means that other companies such as DHL, UPS, Fedex, the Global Express Association, the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Economic Forum, the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, Philip Morris, the European Services Forum, the Semiconductor Industry Association, etcetera have not had their accreditation denied by the Argentine government and will be able to advocate for their views during the meeting.

Thus, Argentina is exerting an undue pressure on the Ministerial Conference, by choosing to censor some views and favor others (those accredited and accepted). Since those censored views would be related to the issues being discussed at the conference, and might coincide with some parties' positions, the presumption of good faith on which all diplomatic agreements are based would be distorted, and thus the outcome of the conference would be distorted and thus lack legitimacy. Specifically, many of the banned organizations support the policy proposals of developing countries, in favor of the G90 proposals on development and the G33 proposals on public stockholding, while opposing proposals that are intended to benefit the (permitted) corporations named above, such as on e-commerce, investment facilitation, and domestic regulation.

Lack of good faith and attempt to distort the conference outcome by the country that not only hosts the conference but chairs its proceedings, added to a violation of the host country agreement, are serious offences that the WTO Director General should have brought to the attention of the General Council, with a request to delay the conference until a proper host could be found or, alternatively, host it in Geneva.

Since this was not done, it appears that the WTO agrees with the view of Argentina that its national security is under threat, and that the WTO does not oppose the distortion of the conference outcome.

We urge you to immediately correct this situation, and to intervene with the government to reverse its decision; and if the government maintains its violation of the host country agreement, to bring this issue immediately to the General Council and reschedule the meeting when a proper host can be found.

Sincerely,

Deborah James for
Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS)