

November 30, 2017

RE: Civil Society Organizations Call on Argentine Government to Rescind Disaccreditation, and Call on WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo and the General Council Not to Hold the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Argentina Unless Decision is Reversed

Dear Director General Roberto Azevêdo, and WTO Members,

In an unprecedented action, the Argentine government has revoked the accreditation of 63 civil society experts — trade unionists, development advocates, digital rights activists, environmentalists, and others — just days before the 11th Ministerial meeting of the WTO in Buenos Aires, advising the WTO that the experts will not be allowed in the country.

Civil society delegates from the following countries and organizations, many of whom have attended multiple WTO Ministerial meetings in the past, were sent a note from the WTO Secretariat on November 29 notifying them that the Argentine government had denied the accreditation already issued by the WTO: Argentina (Instituto del Mundo del Trabajo, Fundación Grupo Efecto Positivo, and Sociedad de Economía Crítica), Belgium (11.11.11), Brazil (Brazilian Network for People's Integration, REBRIP), Chile (Derechos Digitales), Finland (Siemenpuu), Indonesia (Institute for National and Democracy Studies), the Netherlands (Transnational Institute), the Philippines (People Over Profit), and the UK (Global Justice Now!), as well as delegates registered with international organizations including UNI global union, UNI Americas, and Friends of the Earth International.

The majority of the rejected organizations work together through the global Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) network, which works for a sustainable, socially just, and democratic multilateral trading system. It has also not gone unnoticed that of the 20 organizations we understand have been banned, only two are from corporations, while the overwhelming number of corporate representatives will be allowed.

The standard agreement between international organizations and the host country of an international conference provides for accreditation, visas, and entry to all those the international organization accredits — diplomats, media, observers from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, etcetera. The agreement has a provision for the host, only on exceptional security considerations, to refuse entry. But based on the experience of the more than 250 members of OWINFS who have attended international meetings of the WTO, the United Nations, and other fora, hosts have never denied entry, except for at most, one or two specific persons, with at least some justification provided. Previous WTO Ministerial meetings in Singapore, the United States, Qatar, Mexico, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Indonesia, and Kenya did not see similar such repression.

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. The WTO should not accept such a blatant violation of well-established international norms. Thus, we call on the Argentine government to reverse the bans, and on the Director General and the WTO membership not to hold the Ministerial in Argentina unless the participation of the civil society groups is re-instated.

It is ironic that this occurred on the same day that Argentina is celebrating the transfer of the presidency of the G20 from Germany to Argentina. 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.

Sincerely,

Deborah James for the
Our World Is Not for Sale network

cc: Government of Argentina

The WTO message noting the Argentine government's denial of accreditation states:

Date: Wed, 29 Nov 2017 15:20:02 +0000
From: MC11-NGO, WTO <mc11-ngo@wto.org>

Dear [registered participant],

The WTO has duly accredited your NGO as an eligible participant of WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires from 10 to 13 December 2017. However, we are informed by the host government that for unspecified reasons, the Argentine security authorities have decided to deny your accreditation.

We have made repeated enquiries about this unexpected development, but we have little to no hope that a solution will be found. We therefore discourage you from travelling to Argentina so as to avoid being turned away upon entry into the country.

We asked the Argentine authorities to contact you directly and inform you of their decision but to avoid that it does reach you at too late a stage, we have decided to contact you now.

We apologise for the inconvenience that the Argentine decision may cause. We are unfortunately not in a position to provide any explanation or background and suggest you contact the Argentine authorities directly on acreditaciones.mc11@mrecic.gov.ar.

Yours sincerely,

Head of External Relations
WTO