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Cynical WTO COVID Response PR Ploy: CSOs Call “Health and Trade” Walker Process an Offensive Sham

Quotes from Around the World

Civil society leaders from around the world are decrying a World Trade Organization (WTO) effort to issue a declaration on trade and health as a ploy to distract from inaction on a waiver of WTO intellectual property barriers that are prolonging the pandemic. Such a declaration hatched via the so-called “Walker Process” would undermine whatever remaining relevance and legitimacy the WTO has. **The only thing the WTO can do to help end the pandemic is to get out of the way.** The vast majority of WTO member nations agree that means waiving some WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) rules. More than 100 nations support a waiver. But, the European Union, led by Germany, plus Switzerland and the United Kingdom are siding with pharmaceutical corporations to block a waiver even as millions die waiting for shots and treatments. Despite many WTO members’ objections on process and substance, Ambassador David Walker from New Zealand is pushing negotiations supported by the few TRIPS waiver blockers for a declaration listing more trade “liberalization” and new regulatory constraints as the WTO’s response to COVID-19. Civil society groups are calling out this “Walker Process” sham and pledge to escalate efforts to secure a waiver of WTO IP barriers, which would address real barriers to scaling-up production and supply of vaccines, treatments and tests.

Professor Jane Kelsey, University of Auckland New Zealand: “New Zealand’s Ambassador David Walker is facilitating a broader Covid-19 recovery plan that has become skewed towards the interests of richer countries, especially the “Ottawa Group” that includes New Zealand. Reports from Geneva show the so-called “Walker process” has become a Trojan Horse to introduce a raft of new obligations through the back door. Least-developed and developing countries, and their priorities, have effectively been excluded” -

-Sangeeta Shashikant, Third World Network: "Without a meaningful TRIPS waiver there cannot be a meaningful WTO response to the pandemic. This is recognized and reiterated by a broad base of WTO developing and least developed Members but their calls have been repeatedly ignored. Instead, Ambassador Walker set up a process that keeps the majority of WTO Members outside the negotiation room and is using multiple pressure tactics to push through his agenda and that of countries that want to use the pandemic to repackage old liberalization and deregulatory wishes. Their attempts to set up a future work plan and new body on the WTO response to the pandemic, based on the same premises, is only promising more of these tactics to continue post the 12th Ministerial Conference and could in effect bring an end to any remaining hopes that the WTO could deliver to developing countries and LDCs on any developmental elements, such as in agriculture and special and differential treatment, promised back in 2001 (i.e. WTO Doha Development Agenda)"

Ann Harrison, Senior Advocate, Amnesty International “It is deeply disturbing that the proposed text unilaterally tabled by Ambassador Walker of New Zealand on WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic does not address the proposed temporary TRIPS waiver proposed by India and South Africa and supported by over 100 WTO members. No credible WTO response to ending the pandemic can exclude the immediate agreement to the proposed waiver. Had the waiver been agreed when it was first introduced over a year ago, additional manufacturing capacity for critical Covid-19 tools would now be in place. WTO members should not allow themselves to be distracted by the ‘Walker Process’, which will not fulfil states’ human rights obligations in relation to ensuring human rights through international cooperation and assistance, including the rights to life, health, and non-discrimination. Instead, we call for those states blocking the TRIPS waiver – notably the European Commission, the UK, Norway and Switzerland – to drop their opposition and to allow the waiver to be agreed. As has been demonstrated in a recent [legal opinion](#) endorsed by our Secretary General, states that are party to the ICESCR must not oppose the waiver in order to comply with their human rights obligations”

Baone Twala, Legal Researcher, SECTION27, South Africa: “The Walker Process undermines developing countries’ right to access Covid-19 vaccines. Conversely, the TRIPS Waiver seeks to realise this right”

Jaume Vidal, Senior policy advisor European Projects Team, Health Action International: “The so-called Walker process is but another attempt by a few countries to push their own agendas, needs and goals under guise of consensus. It is difficult to comprehend how a multilateral response to the current pandemic does not include a reference to the need to curb the excesses of IP enforcement, especially on health goods. The support around a TRIPS waiver clearly demonstrates what is the opinion of WTO members on the issue.”

Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch: “In the rich history of cynical WTO efforts to evade accountability for the damage WTO rules have wrought, this effort by the few countries that oppose a WTO waiver to issue a “Trade and Health” Declaration is especially disgusting given this would not improve access to the medicines needed to end the pandemic, and instead is about trying to cover up the grim reality that WTO rules are prolonging death and economic devastation. Time has long passed for WTO declarations about trade and health, the cynical misdirect of the so-called “Walker Process,” or any other attempted PR stunts aimed at protecting the WTO’s reputation rather than saving lives and ending the pandemic”

Arthur Stamoulis, the executive director of Citizens Trade Campaign, a U.S.-based coalition of labor, environmental, family farm, faith and consumer organizations: “The world desperately needs the WTO to waive intellectual property rules that continue standing in the way of increased production of the COVID vaccines, test kits and treatments needed to save lives and end the pandemic. After more than a year of debate, any WTO response to COVID that fails to deliver a comprehensive waiver agreement would call into question not only the point of holding a ministerial in the middle of a public health emergency, but also the credibility of the entire institution,” -

George M. Carter, Director, the Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research: “COVID is not over. We want it to be in order to freely and safely open up economies, schools and make work

safe. But typically, the WTO and their fake Walker Resolution seems only to be to open up more profits for those who do not deserve them. A few companies and their executives hold “their” intellectual property to profiteer at the expense of millions of lives around the world. While President Biden has made a tepid call for the TRIPS waiver that would indeed free the vaccines complete recipes, allow for more manufacturing and help to END the pandemic, he has done nothing to press this issue. The WTO, the “Walker” process, the EU and the failure of the United States to actually manage this one small demand, for publicly funded vaccines, places us all in dire jeopardy. We need publicly available treatments, testing and vaccines. Why is the greed of pharma’s executives held sacrosanct while the lives of millions always of no value?” -

ANALYSIS OF THE WALKER PROCESS BY THIRD WORLD NETWORK: So “Walk Away Walker” – WTO needs to focus on saving lives and not corporate profits! **[WHAT’S COOKING FOR MC12? Two processes that could reshape the WTO in the interest of the most powerful](#)**

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