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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC Comment on WTO Future of Trade Report

Brussels, 24 April 2012 (ITUC OnLine): Responding to the release today of a WTO report following deliberations of a 12-person "Panel on Defining the Future of Trade" in Geneva today, ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow who took part in the panel said:

"In joining this panel I had four main ambitions:

to have the dominant context of inequality and unemployment recognised and the trade regime located in the context of a failed model of globalization;

to re-affirm the case for development through industrialization and structural transformation;

to argue the case for public policy interventions and a floor of rights and standards for labour and environment; to consider and qualify the '21st century issues'.

The report recognises that trade cannot be divorced from national realities, including serious unemployment and inequality. It addresses the issue of policy space for developing countries to industrialise and move into higher value added sectors, but we would like to see more clear recognition of this critical question. The report also argues that 'the issues linkages between trade and development, trade and jobs and trade and income distribution' cannot be avoided. Nevertheless there is a defensive qualification that trade is not to blame.

Global coherence through convergence of a global framework of rules is very important, but not at the expense of social justice. The recognition of development, labour rights, social protection and environment is welcome, but the references in the report are cautious and WTO commitments need to be strengthened.

The dominant power of corporations from industrialized countries is not recognised and therefore the exploitative pressures are not balanced against growth and opportunity. We remain cautious about competition policy unless it can deal with the exploitative power of oligopolies and we are not convinced about the tone of the report with regard to investment.

The global trading system needs major reform, in particular to address unemployment, inequality development and rights. We still have a lot of work to do and the ITUC will continue to fight for trade justice."

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