

# SANCTION IMPERIALISM

**NOT OUR RIGHT  
TO DEVELOPMENT!**



# WTO MC-14 Campaign Briefer

## I. What is the WTO?

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) governs global trade by setting rules, serving as a forum for negotiations, and settling disputes among member states. It replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1995.

Since its creation, the WTO has had far-reaching and harmful impacts on economic and food systems in developing countries. It has compelled poorer countries to open their markets by dismantling trade regulations while exposing them to heavily subsidised imports from developed economies. Policies aimed at protecting or strengthening domestic industries are challenged and penalised, facilitating the concentration of wealth and power in rich countries and their corporations.

Today, the WTO is collapsing under its own contradictions. Powerful countries that peddled liberalisation in a purported rules-based multilateral system have openly flouted it. It has long failed to uphold its development mandate, kicking away the development ladder for the South and denying it the needed policy space for industrialisation and food sovereignty. The injustice reveals a double standard where developed nations increasingly use unilateral sanctions and tariffs with impunity, while the paralysis of the WTO Appellate Body ensures the Global South cannot fight back. As multilateralism has become less useful for dominant economic powers, a [coup](#) disguised as reform is underway at the WTO, with the US and other developed countries pushing for plurilateral discussions to superimpose their trade agenda on all WTO member countries.

## II. What is the WTO MC14?

The Ministerial Conference (MC) is the highest decision-making body of the WTO held every two years. It brings together 166 WTO members to negotiate trade rules and agreements, as well as to decide on matters arising under any of the multilateral trade agreements.

The [WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference \(MC14\)](#) will take place from March 26 to 29, 2026, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It aims to address the pressing challenges facing the global trading system and to put forward solutions and actions for the future work of the WTO.

## III. What are the key issues at MC14 and what are our calls?

The issues at MC14 are interconnected fault lines that expose the deep crisis of the WTO and the growing inequalities built into the global trading system.

### *Unilateralism and the weaponisation of tariffs*

Against WTO rules, the US under Donald Trump has been utilising unilateral tariffs as tools of political and economic coercion. It has [imposed tariffs](#) on Mexico, Canada, and China on security grounds, representing an unprecedented expansion of executive power in trade policy. It has also imposed reciprocal tariffs on ASEAN countries and punitive duties on countries trading with Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, and Russia. These measures disproportionately harm developing countries, small producers, and export-oriented economies, and further weaken their capacity to negotiate trade policies.

The US is also increasingly acting outside a rules-based system, highlighted by its military intervention against Venezuela and recent abduction of President Nicolás Maduro. At the WTO meetings, [Venezuela criticised US'](#) actions, calling for the revival of the WTO Appellate Body, and urged members to defend a rules-based trade system.

At MC14, pressure from the US is expected to intensify. This includes continued obstruction of the WTO Appellate Body, efforts to narrow or remove flexibilities for developing countries, demands to make national security trade exceptions "self-judging," and calls for a permanent ban on tariffs on digital trade. Together, these moves accelerate the shift from rules-based trade to power-based coercion.

### **Our demands at MC14**

- Stop using the WTO and other mechanisms that violate the Global South's policy space and sovereignty to define their own industrial, climate, and development priorities
- Sanction developed countries, especially the US, for unilateral trade actions that violate multilateral agreements
- Restore the Appellate Body by the end of 2026, ensuring an open fairer dispute system and preserving developing countries' right to appeal
- Preserve the special and differential treatment for least developing countries and best endeavour clauses for developing countries

### *Trade's expanding role in the climate crisis*

Trade is increasingly framed as part of climate action, but largely on Global North terms. Climate-linked trade measures are being designed and imposed by developed countries in ways that mirror earlier climate-trade debates, where environmental concerns were used to discipline and limit the policy space of the Global South rather than address historical responsibility.

- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) acts in practice as a "green" tariff. It forces developing countries to absorb the costs of meeting Northern climate standards while rich countries avoid their obligations to provide climate finance and technology transfer. CBAM and similar "green tariffs" undermine the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and risk deepening climate and economic injustice.

### **Our demands at MC14**

- Respect developing countries' policy space to manage natural resources, pursue sustainable industrialisation, and carry out structural transformation without unfair WTO constraints
- Ensure environmental measures do not create new barriers to exports from developing countries
- Provide finance, technology, and training to help developing countries meet new green trade rules
- Apply the principle of Common-But-Differentiated-Responsibilities by holding developing countries to carbon standards suited to their capabilities and developed countries accountable for their historical emissions

#### *Digital trade, e-commerce, and technological sovereignty*

Since 1998, the WTO has imposed a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, leading to significant revenue losses for developing countries. This moratorium is about to expire by 2026, and Big Tech firms and developed countries demand its indefinite extension, pushing the agenda through so-called Joint Statement Initiatives rather than open multilateral negotiations. Likewise, most developed countries oppose data localisation requirements and source code disclosure which developing countries deem essential for the development of their domestic digital ecosystems and national security. Technology transfers are also important factors in the industrialisation prospects of developing countries.

### **Our demands at MC14**

- End the 1998 moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions and reclaim the right of developing countries to fiscal sovereignty and impose tariffs on digital imports
- Preserve the right of developing countries to implement data localisation requirements and oppose rules prohibiting disclosure of source code which are vital for technology transfer, domestic innovation, and cyber security audits
- Stop Joint Statement Initiatives and shift discussions toward inclusive, multilateral, and transparent work programme on e-commerce
- Make the transfer of digital technology to the global South mandatory and an operational component of negotiations on e-commerce

#### *Agriculture, fisheries, and food systems*

Long-standing injustices in agriculture and fisheries remain unresolved. The WTO continues to restrict developing countries' use of subsidies, public stockholding, and safeguards to protect food security and rural livelihoods. Meanwhile, fisheries subsidy reform remains stalled, allowing industrial fleets to continue depleting fish stocks while small-scale fishers and coastal communities pay the price.

Decades of trade and agricultural liberalisation have forced many developing countries to open their markets to cheap, subsidised imports, undermining local agriculture and food self-sufficiency and deepening dependence on global markets.

### **Our demands at MC14**

- Respect developing countries' prerogative to maintain public stockholding programmes for food security, without being penalised under WTO rules; and ensure these programmes support affordable access to staple food and resilient local production systems
- Permit subsidies for domestic and sustainable agriculture to strengthen livelihoods, promote agroecology, and protect local markets; and prohibit trade-distorting subsidies from industrial agriculture in developed countries that undermine local producers in developing countries
- Ensure that developed countries end all fisheries subsidies that fuel overcapacity, overfishing, and high-seas exploitation
- Support food sovereignty, land justice, and the rights of peasants, smallholder farmers, and Indigenous Peoples

#### *WTO reform and dispute settlement*

The WTO's dispute settlement system has been paralysed since 2019 due to the US blocking appointments to the Appellate Body. Without a functioning system, trade disputes are increasingly settled through power and pressure rather than rules.

While calls for WTO reform are growing, technical or procedural fixes alone will not suffice. For grassroot communities and their movements, addressing historical injustice, correcting structural and power imbalances and unequal rules, and asserting sovereignty and policy space remain the overarching calls framing advocacy fights. Otherwise, "reform" risks entrenching the status quo.

### **Advance the People's Trade Agenda!**

Amid escalating trade wars, the crisis of multilateralism, and the continued suffering of the peoples of the global South under imperialist plunder and exploitation, we need people's trade agenda that:

- Promotes and realises peoples' rights and needs not corporate profits and market
- Defends Southern people's right to development and sovereignty
- Reorients rules towards climate, economic, and social justice
- Democratizes governance and peoples' participation

## **IV. How can we engage and take action inside and outside MC14?**

Civil society and allies have multiple ways to engage and make their voices amplified both inside and outside the MC14:

**WTO and Beyond: Trade Wars, Crumbling Multilateralism, and the Way Out of the Crisis | March 16, 2026, 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM UTC, via Zoom**

IBON International is organising a webinar to strengthen our collective analysis, inform our campaign and advocacy initiatives in the lead up to and during MC14, and highlight peoples' immediate and long-term demands for trade and economic justice and alternatives.

The webinar is set to take place on March 16, 2026, from 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM UTC, via Zoom. More information about the webinar, such as the context, objectives, and the program can be found [here](#).

IBON International will tap partners to co-host and co-organise this webinar. If you are interested in getting involved, you can contact us at [mferanil@iboninternational.org](mailto:mferanil@iboninternational.org) or at +639555644136 (WhatsApp/Signal).

## **Global Day of Action For for the Right to Development and Economic Sovereignty | March 19, 2026**

IBON International is organising a global day of action this March 19, 2026 to echo and amplify peoples' immediate and long-term demands for trade and economic justice and alternatives, and hold duty bearers accountable for unjust trade regimes which result in erosion of developing countries' sovereignty and its peoples' rights and livelihoods.

This global day of action aims to bring together movements, communities, workers, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, women, and the youth across the world, and especially in the South, to assert collective power and solidarity in the face of worsening economic crises. It is a moment to resist imperialist wars, reject Northern-led 'reforms', and advance a Peoples' Trade Agenda rooted in genuine development and economic sovereignty. Some of the concrete ways to participate in the day of action are the following:

### ***Post a Photo of Your Call!***

Take a photo of yourself with a placard or banner reflecting your local context and campaign priorities. You may use this [template](#) to print out your calls.

You may also draw inspiration from the following suggested messages written on a [pre-made placard](#) or a [frame](#):

- Trade and Climate Justice for the Global South!
- Peoples' Trade Agenda, Not Imperialist Globalisation!
- Minerals for People and Climate, not Corporations!
- No to JSIs and Unilateral Trade Measures!
- Junk WTO!

Post your photo on social media during the day of action ([March 19, 2026](#)) and tag IBON International. You can also upload your photos and videos to this [drive folder](#) so we can help amplify them. (When uploading, please ensure to rename your file as *Your Name\_Organisation*)

### ***Hold Local Actions***

Actions can take many forms such as public demonstrations, art installations, forums, panels, or gatherings. If planning a local action on the day of action or gearing toward MC14:

- Share details of time, location, and program in advance
- Indicate if the action is public or discreet
- Assign a point person for coordination and media outreach

You can also contact us at [mferanil@iboninternational.org](mailto:mferanil@iboninternational.org) or at +639555644136 (WhatsApp/Signal) if you need further support in organising an action.

### **Inside Advocacy**

#### ***Materials Distribution and Lobbying***

IBON International will prepare key materials for distribution during MC14, such as our published policy briefs, pamphlets, and info sheets on critical minerals and sustainable industrialisation.

### **Post-MC14 Engagement**

We will use these resources to conduct lobbying and advocacy with delegates and national officials, and share clear positions and recommendations on trade, climate, and industrial policy, emphasising the People's Trade Agenda.

After MC14, we can continue the momentum by:

- Drafting a thematic report or discussion paper summarising outcomes and lessons learned
- Publishing digestible social media updates to maintain public attention
- Organising follow-up webinars or forums to consolidate lessons and strategise next steps
- Conducting evaluation meetings to assess engagement effectiveness, gather feedback, and identify immediate advocacy priorities

If you are planning to do, or support any of these activities, feel free to contact us with the contact details above so we could help and assist with anything needed.

Together, let us stand firm against imperialism and defend our collective right to development!

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