

Water Out of the WTO campaign launched in Hong Kong

Contributed by Administrator
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With representatives from every continent, the campaign "Water out of the WTO" was launched today in the Convention Centre at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Hong Kong. Watch video of protest actions in Hong Kong.

Speakers included Anil Naidoo of the Council of Canadians, Mike Waghorne of Public Service International, Jose Enrique Africa from the IBON Foundation in the Philippines, Heide Grande of Save the Children Norway, Gyekye Tanoh of the Africa Trade Network y Pablo Solón from the Solón Foundation in Bolivia.

The speakers spoke of how the current WTO negotiations are seeking to liberalise and privatise public services (especially water) in exchange for some illusory offers in the area of agriculture.

Mike Waghorne noted that when a service like water is committed in the WTO it is a permanent irreversible commitment. A resource which is essential for life can not be offered in perpetuity, he added. Jose Enrique Africa de Philippines spoke of the serious impacts that privatization has had in the Philippines which could be soon be shared by the whole planet unless water was taken out of the WTO. Gyekye Tanoh related how private companies in Ghana continued to cut drinking water connections during a cholera epidemic which killed hundreds of people in his country. Anil Naidoo explained that this campaign is part of a series of actions by hundreds of organisations that are mobilising against the privatisation of water.

Heide Grande explained that thanks to public pressure, they had succeeded in forcing the Norwegian government to withdraw all its demands from the WTO related to liberalisation and privatisation of drinking water services. Pablo Solón proposed that the campaign should not only call for water to be taken out of the WTO but withdrawn from all free trade and investment agreements.

Responding to the question on how to achieve the campaign's goals, the presenters said that it would require information and awareness raising, strengthening of national campaigns against privatization, public pressure on governments, and a building of international solidarity and coordination.

The different speakers explained that whilst the challenge is great, that there is a good possibility of success because of growing concern by people across the world about the mercantilisation and privatization of a resource and service on which everyone depends for life.

After Hong Kong, the campaign will continue to build in the various world social forums in 2006 and the world water forum in Mexico, uniting various social movements and putting pressure on key governments to take water once and for all out of free trade and investment treaties.

More info on www.waternoteforsale.org
To join campaign e-list, send email to nick@visionsocialagua.org