

### ***Between Reform and Rejection: Can a Gender Agenda be integrated in the WTO?***

On Friday, September 12, 2003 (10:00-12:00 p.m.) the Public Panel Discussion entitled *Between Reform and Rejection: Can a Gender Agenda be integrated in the WTO?* was held at the NGO Centre, Hotel Sierra, in Cancun, Mexico.

The panel was attended by **Gigi Francisco** (Regional Coordinator for Southeast Asia, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), International Gender and Trade Network, Philippines), **Brigitte Young** (Professor, University of Muenster, Germany), **Maria Karadenizli** (WIDE, Advocacy and Network Officer, Brussels), **Sigrid Skarpelis-Sperk** (Member of Parliament, Germany) and **Aminata Traoré** (Member of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Civil Society and the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, Mali). **Petra Pinzler** (Die Zeit) chaired the session.

The speakers introduced their positions in short statements. Gigi Francisco gave an overview on the history of the International Trade and Gender Network (IGTN) and its main policy strategies. She stressed that IGTN does not favor the integration of Gender Mainstreaming in the WTO but works on alternatives outside the WTO framework. Brigitte Young underlined that the formal structures of the WTO are democratic whereas the informal structures are highly intransparent and undemocratic. From a gender perspective informal structures are even more problematic as they easily mirror inequalities from outside the WTO inside the institution. Brigitte Young also pointed to the importance to analyze the WTO in the context of the international institutional setting. Maria Karadenizli spoke about the different attempts to integrate gender indicators in the Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) of the European Commission, DG Trade. She discussed the possibilities to transfer this approach to WTO level. Sigrid Skarpelis-Sperk stressed that genderspecific concerns and issues should be directed to parliaments and governments of WTO member states and not exclusively to the WTO secretariat in Geneva. Further, she argued in favor of more policy coherence on national and international level. Aminata Traore underlined that Africa is in a bad shape and that the situation is getting worse. Discussing the role of Africa in a globalized world economy needs therefore to be linked to the historical context. Another Africa will only be possible when institutions like the WTO, IMF and World Bank decrease their influence and pressure so that Africa can set up a more self reliance oriented policy.

A key issue in subsequent discussion focused on whether an equal participation of women and men in negotiations and decision-making structures at all levels of the WTO would be desirable and whether a Gender Agenda could be profoundly integrated in the issues discussed and deliberated at the WTO. There was no clear consensus on this issue. However, it was agreed upon that two strategies would be important. First, civil society needs to put more pressure on their own national governments and parliaments in regard to genderspecific concerns and issues. Second, the (inter-) national network of stakeholders that deals with globalization, trade and gender need to be strengthened. It was consensus to increase the lobbying work in Geneva through the IGTN office. Further it was suggested to improve the electronical networking through virtual platforms. In addition, Sigrid Skarpelis-Sperk suggested to link public discussions on GATS with genderspecific issues in regard to Public Services and Public Goods. Maria Karadenizli stressed the necessity of Capacity Building in the area of WTO and Gender and to an increased elaboration of genderspecific indicators and tools. Brigitte Young argued that it would be important to profit from academic resources by integrating universities more in the debate on gender and trade. Gigi Francisco argued in favor of a reduced agenda and more democracy.

The Public Panel Discussion was attended by about 37 people from NGOs and trade unions.