

98.6 GLOBALIZATION: NEGOTIATING MULTILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENTS (with particular reference to MAI)

Whereas, it should be the democratic right of Canadians to be informed of foreign trade policies, which are being negotiated on their behalf and to be assured that: a) The interests of those least able to speak for themselves will be safeguarded; and b) The particular interests of one sector, such as investors, will not be allowed to take precedence over the interests of the majority; and c) All Canadians will have access to affordable essential services and resources, such as water; and Whereas, openness, transparency and public accountability should be the hallmarks of a sound, sustainable economy; and

Whereas, the terms of any multilateral trade treaty or agreement could override Canadian federal, provincial or municipal laws or regulations; and

Whereas, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), where the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) is being developed, is committed to balancing economic growth with social well-being and must, therefore, respect any signatory's restrictions/exclusions made in the public interest; and

Whereas, Canadian experience under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) demonstrates that exclusions to a trade agreement are a temporary safeguard at best and require constant vigilance by successive governments; and

Whereas, agreements being developed by trade organizations (i.e. the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) would restrict the ability of the government to fulfill its commitments made under the agreements, such as the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action; and

Whereas, in Canada, during the time period since recent trade agreements (FTA and NAFTA) have been adopted, the income of approximately 60% of wage earners has dropped, cuts have been made to social programs and environmental protection standards have been lowered; and

Whereas, the social and environmental impact of trade policies are outside the mandate of APEC and WTO; and

Whereas, APEC, WTO and OECD pay close attention to the interests of transnational corporations and do not have a good record of preventing vulnerable people from being hurt by such agreements; and

Whereas, the time tables for trade liberalization by APEC and OECD are not well understood by the general public; and

Whereas, trade agreements to date have included an open, appealable disputes-resolution process rather than the binding, non-appealable decisions as has been suggested under MAI; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Women of Canada strongly urge the Government of Canada to release the full text of all proposed trade agreements (for example, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), in sufficient time to ensure widespread public consultation; and be it further RESOLVED that the National Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to sign only those agreements which:

1. Respect the economic, political and constitutional sovereignty of Canada including the ability of all levels of government to direct investment to community based projects and underdeveloped regions of the country, to influence job creation and to protect culture, health care, social programs, the environment and to maintain labour standards; and
2. Include gender analysis and analysis of environmental concerns, particularly as they relate to the ability of Canada to fulfill its obligations made in UN conferences in Nairobi, Vienna, Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing; and
3. Guarantee Canadian ownership and control over the delivery of vital natural resources, such as water, electricity and natural gas; and
4. Guarantee compliance with Canadian environmental standards; and

5. Ensure enforcement of this compliance; and be it further
RESOLVED, that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that trade negotiations within such transnational organizations as WTO, APEC and OECD represent the interests of all citizens by:

1. Working for the equal representation of women on trade delegations from all countries, particularly by setting the example in delegations from Canada; and
2. Ensuring that gender analysis, as well as social and environmental assessments are an integral part of the process of trade negotiations; and
3. Ensuring that the public is fully informed of proposed time tables for trade liberalization taking place within trade organizations; and
4. Ensuring an open appealable disputes-resolution process.