



**Gender and Trade Coalition Statement**  
**to the 14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation**  
**26-29 March 2026, Yaoundé, Cameroon**

As the 14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) approaches, the [Gender and Trade Coalition](#) (GTC)– a global alliance with over 300 members spanning international and regional feminist networks, progressive allies across civil society, academia, and trade unions– is taking this opportunity to articulate their position on the current global trade order, and the WTO within it, to Member States.

**The GTC in relation to the WTO**

The GTC was born in response to the joint statement on Women’s Economic Empowerment that was launched at the WTO’s Buenos Aires Ministerial in 2017. We have closely observed the formation and activities of the Informal Working Group (IWG) on Trade and Gender, and time again reminded Member States that for the initiative to genuinely address gendered impacts of trade, it had to make a critical assessment of the WTO’s own agreements and functioning, with a close focus on the impact on Global South countries and the women within. However, such a critical assessment and redressive effort has been missing so far. We see that the IWG has tabled two submissions, entitled “Proposal for a new compendium on ‘Empowering women to trade through digitalisation: Policy insights’” and “Access to finance for women-led MSMEs- Key Lessons learned,” at MC14.

While these documents share some lessons on these issues, they bypass the key question of correcting the imbalances in the WTO agreements. For example, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and the General Agreement on Services (GATS) all discriminate against women, and not only women but several marginalised constituencies, by threatening access to critical resources for maintaining livelihoods, food security, health, education, and so on. Indigenous, rural, and migrant women are among the hardest hit.

On the path to Yaoundé, we want to call on the WTO Membership to understand gender differentiated impacts of trade policy, and to also acknowledge that gender fixes cannot solve problems unleashed by unfair agreements. Gender and trade are inherently linked, and gender impacts of trade policies cannot appropriately be evaluated in a vacuum, artificially separated from development and structural concerns. To help women, particularly in the Global South, integrate fairly into the global economic order, they must be involved as equals in all areas of trade, including design and implementation of trade policy.

**Urgent issues at MC14**

Introspection on the functioning of WTO rules is now warranted more than ever, given the mayhem global trade has witnessed in recent times. While the recent proliferation of aggressive and unilateral trade policies have hurt both developed and developing countries,

the latter have been forced to make much wider policy sacrifices within and outside the WTO, in turn impacting women and other marginalised constituencies. It has been laid bare that WTO rules are binding for those economically and politically weaker, whether it is at country level or constituency level, while the powerful actors that pushed these rules in the first place are free to break them. This also illuminates what we have long argued is the practical function of WTO rules: to act as straitjackets on developing countries. Along with trade, aggressive military operations across the globe have supported such economic imperialism, aggravating the poly crisis we face today. No rule, no principle, no values are sacrosanct anymore.

The issues on the table at MC14 bear testimony to this approach. Instead of changing its course in favour of development and equity to respond to the current challenges, the current WTO reform agenda is towing the line of the mighty, attempting to turn the WTO into an even more exclusive, opaque, and anti-development body, that cannot address the actual threats the world is facing today. The attempts to undermine consensus-based decisionmaking, weaken special and differential treatment, and force through plurilateral agreements in place of multilateralism, is a slippery slope for the future of global trade. In particular, the push to get the plurilateral agreement on investment facilitation illegally adopted will set a hugely dangerous precedent for the future.

At the same time, longstanding decisions in favour of developing countries in agriculture such as on public stockholding, a Special Safeguard Mechanism, and cotton subsidies continue to be blocked. Now there are efforts to obliterate past mandates and launch new negotiations after MC14. In fisheries subsidies negotiations, while large industrial scale fishing subsidies are getting leeway, special and differential treatment for developing countries and even for small-scale fishers is being restricted. The e-commerce moratorium, which has been disastrous for developing countries and in particular women in these countries who are exploited through gig and online work, is once again set to be renewed, with pressure mounting from developed countries to make the moratorium permanent.

### **Development, gender justice, and the continuing existence of the WTO are all at stake at MC14**

The status of rulemaking in each of these areas has increasingly restricted policy space for pursuing development objectives across the Global South, and negatively impacted women in their diverse roles in which they contribute to development, including as providers, caregivers, citizens, and workers. In these turbulent times, when women's lives and livelihoods are facing diverse challenges, a global trading system that is oriented towards development will go a long way towards supporting them. Women are fifty per cent of the world's population and have a stake in every issue on which the WTO formulates rules. It would be far more useful if the WTO can reach fair, equitable, and development-oriented outcomes in all its areas of work and institute the necessary safeguards, rather than put women in a separate box. The latter also holds women hostage to becoming tools in global fights to use trade as a weapon of economic domination by the most powerful corporations and countries.

If the WTO wants to stay relevant in this situation of turmoil, it must do better. It must do significant course correction, and that must include delivering on its promises to all its Member countries and their citizens, especially those lagging behind.