



PIANGO

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Civil Society Organisations Urged To Raise Voice against Free Trade

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been urged to make their voices heard against the signing up to stringent free trade rules as it would allow richer countries to dominate economic life in the Islands says the Coordinator for Pacific Network for Globalisation, Roshni Sami.

Speaking at the Regional CSO Forum at the *Lopaukamea II, Atele* in Tonga yesterday, Ms Sami said the agreements will force the Islands to be more dependent on imports, including essentials such as food.

“Once locked into binding free trade agreements with larger economies, it will be very difficult – if not impossible for future Governments to opt out of those agreements if they want to change things.” She told the participants of the annual civil society event.

Ms Sami also stated that many would argue that free trade is good for the Pacific with regards to competition from imports that will force local firms to become more efficient.

“We already know that few local producers will be able to compete with cheaper food and goods from countries that have bigger scale and higher-tech producers. Instead of becoming more efficient, many local business, farmers, and workers are likely to lose their livelihoods.” she said

She added that there are very few high-value foods and goods that Pacific Islands can produce more efficiently than other countries.

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“Our economies are often too small-scale and remote, with high transport costs and lack the necessary skilled workers, technology and capital. Realistically, few foreign investors will bring those inputs to the Islands. Unrestricted global competition means most Islands will be left selling unprocessed natural resources like fish, timber or minerals to other countries that make the big profits out of ‘adding value’.”

Ms Sami stressed to the participants that local producers would be driven out of business and the Island country will become dependent on imports, as there will be no guarantee of food security.

Moreover, she said foreign producers and ‘middle-men’ tend to increase their prices when tariffs are removed, so they would take the benefit rather than passing it to consumers.

She added that many argue that tariff cuts force governments to raise revenue in ways that don’t disrupt trade however new taxes increase poor people’s need for cash in Islands where most people live from the land and the sea, supported by remittances from overseas.

Ms Sami’s presentation on - *Where are we headed? Free trade in the Pacific* was well received by the 120 participants present at the Regional CSO Forum that is being held from the 12th – 15th October, 2007.