



Regional Consultation on  
**'Road to Bali: South Asian Priorities for the Ninth WTO Ministerial'**

Organized by  
**South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)**  
**Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)**  
In collaboration with  
**Oxfam Novib, UNESCAP and Commonwealth Secretariat**

2-3 July 2013, *Club Palm Bay Hotel, Marawila, Sri Lanka*

### **Background Note**

#### **Background**

The Eighth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Geneva, Switzerland in late 2011 provided a platform for discussion under three broad themes: "Importance of the Multilateral Trading System and the WTO", "Trade and Development" and "Doha Development Agenda" (DDA). The Conference approved the accessions of the Russian Federation, Samoa and Montenegro. More importantly, the ministers adopted waivers to permit preferential treatment of least-developed country (LDC) service suppliers. However, the Conference was widely viewed as just another ministerial exercise which failed to produce any significant outcome.

Moreover, the DDA, despite being targeted at further liberalizing trade, whilst facilitating the integration of developing countries, particularly LDCs into the WTO multilateral system, has also failed developing nations. Despite years of negotiations, the DDA has made little progress. Disagreements between the developed and the developing world, mainly regarding agricultural trade policies, have been a major reason for such sluggish progress. There is now broad convergence on the view that negotiations, as it stands now, is not on course to lead to a successful outcome at the upcoming Ninth Ministerial Conference (MC9). And many fear that if Bali fails, Doha is also likely to fail as well.

Amidst growing scepticism regarding the future of the Doha Development Agenda, MC9 is going to be held in Bali on 3-6 December 2013. Expectations are high as all 159 members of the WTO prepare to voice their concerns in the two-day conference. Though there are no definite agendas that will be discussed in the conference, it is likely that discussion on the topic of trade facilitation, LDC package, agriculture and climate change will take centre stage. Thus, it is high time for the Members to start working towards a common understanding to identify achievable targets to ensure that the Doha process runs as smoothly as possible before and during MC9, hence delivering some tangible outcomes.

#### **Regional Consultation on Road to Bali**

With the aim of contributing to the negotiating position of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries in MC9, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Kathmandu and the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), with the support of Oxfam Novib, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, are organizing a two-day regional consultation on "Road to Bali: South Asian Priorities for the Ninth WTO Ministerial" on 2-3 July 2013 in Marawila, Sri Lanka. SAWTEE and its member institutions have confirmed that the SAARC Commerce Ministers are going to meet in Colombo on 21-23 August 2013, which is likely to, among others, adopt a SAARC common position for the WTO Ministerial, provided there is an interest amongst the member countries to do so. Hence, this consultation is timed such that it would be able to generate ideas for critical engagement amongst various stakeholders in the run-up to the SAARC Commerce Ministers' meeting.

Specifically, the consultation, in which major stakeholders, including think tanks, private sector, government officials and media, will be invited, will adopt a resolution outlining proposed common positions of SAARC member governments for MC9, which will be immediately submitted to the SAARC Secretariat as well as respective commerce ministries in each member country (including Afghanistan and Bhutan, which are currently observers of the WTO).

It is the understanding of SAWTEE and its member/partner organizations that a relatively comfortable lead time between the completion of the regional consultation and dates of the SAARC Commerce Ministers' meeting means that SAWTEE and its member/partner organizations will be able to utilize their contacts in national capitals to convince the respective commerce ministries about the need to adopt SAARC common positions on the following issues:

- Agriculture and Food Security
- Climate Change
- Trade Facilitation
- Aid for Trade
- Intellectual Property Rights
- Least Developed Countries issues, including:
  - Market access
  - Enhanced Integrated Framework
  - Services waiver
  - Expeditious accession of Afghanistan and Bhutan

### **Date and Venue**

The two-day regional consultation will take place on 2-3 July 2013 at Hotel Club Palm Bay, Marawila, Sri Lanka.

### **For further details about the consultation, please contact:**

Mr. Chandana Karunaratne  
Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)  
Tel: +94 (011) 2143216  
e-mail: [chandana@ips.lk](mailto:chandana@ips.lk)

and

Ms. Charmaine Wijesinghe  
Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)  
Tel: +94 (011) 2143234  
e-mail: [charmaine@ips.lk](mailto:charmaine@ips.lk)