

PRESS RELEASE

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World leaders urged to attend the WTO Conference

Brussels, 18 October 2005 – CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis urge Heads of States and Governments to attend the Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Hong Kong in December. At this conference, trade ministers are expected to make serious progress in the negotiations on agriculture. There is a need for a complete change in the approach to trade policy to make it deliver on poverty reduction and development.

“It’s all about political will. Under their current mandate, ministers and trade experts are unable to solve the political deadlock, and that’s why negotiations are now stuck in technicalities. Only heads of states and governments can ensure this deadlock will be broken”, explain the two global Catholic development networks, assessing the preparations of the WTO General Council this week in Geneva.

Given the requests from rich countries on market access in agriculture, industrial goods and services, most poor people in developing countries would never benefit from any compromise in the current situation. The Hong Kong trade talks urgently need strong leadership and real commitment towards a pro-poor trade.

The Doha Development Round has so far failed to reach its development goal. Meanwhile, WTO decisions affect the lives of millions of people in poverty throughout the world.

In Thailand for instance, WTO policy has had devastating effects on rural poverty and small-scale rice farmers although the country has increased its global rice exports in the last few years. And Thailand’s cheap rice exports have had repeated negative impacts on rice farmers in other Asian or African countries which were not able to protect their markets due to increased forced liberalization. This example is but one of thousands across the world, but it shows that trade policies should be shaped in a development perspective if trade is to deliver for poverty eradication.

“After the progress – however minimal – on debt and aid within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals at this year’s G8 summit, we now expect a move on trade”, the Catholic networks added. This should include concrete measures ensuring the implementation of the pro-poor commitments and allowing developing countries to decide on their own development policies. “World leaders have to work in consultation with civil society organisations and take their responsibility to change the current mandate of the negotiators. Together with millions of people around the world, we urge them to show real leadership towards Trade Justice” the networks concluded.

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Contact:

For more information and to set up interviews, please contact Philipp Rohrer, +32 2 282 40 71, +32 478 526 578, rohrer@cidse.org. CIDSE will be represented in Geneva during the WTO General Council. Interviews are possible in French and English.

Notes to the editors:

- **CIDSE** is an alliance of 15 catholic development organizations from Europe and North America (www.cidse.org). CIDSE is based in Brussels.
- **Caritas Internationalis** is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organisations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories. Learn more about Caritas Internationalis on www.caritas.org.
- Read CIDSE’s and Caritas Internationalis’ Position Paper “Make a difference for poverty reduction at the next WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong-Kong” on <http://www.cidse.org/docs/200507041413202219.pdf>

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