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Civil Society Seminar on the eve of WTO MC13

**WTO’s draft text will obstruct Bangladesh’s fisheries development**

Dhaka, 18 February 2024: Equity and Justice Working Group (EquityBD), a national platform of CSO and NGOs in Bangladesh, organised a seminar in Dhaka today to discuss the possible position of the Bangladesh Government delegation on the eve of the Thirteenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. The seminar is co-organized by Coast Foundation, and Our World is Not for Sale, an international network working against the unjust global trading system.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad chaired the seminar, while Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, EquityBD’s Chief Moderator, moderated it. Dr Mohammad Tanveer Hossain Chowdhury, the Deputy Chief (Marine) of the Department of Fisheries, spoke as the panel speaker along with the other speakers, including CSRL's Ziaul Haque Mukta, COAST Foundation’s Deputy Executive Director Sanat Kumar Bhowmik and Internet Governance Forum’s General Secretary Abdul Haque Anu.

Barkat Ullah Maruf of COAST Foundation presented the keynote at the seminar. The recommendations for the Bangladesh Delegation to the WTO MC13 mentioned in the keynote presentation include demand for the implementation of the benefits promised at the MC12 to sustain the transition of the graduation of the LDC, demand the developed countries stop subsidies on the big industrial fishing which is the responsible for overfishing and depletion of global fish stocks, and Increasing opportunities and subsidies for small-scale farmers in LDCs, removing barriers for the LDC and developing countries to generate revenue from the e-commerce transactions of big tech companies, Support the demand for public stockholding and food security in the agricultural sector, extending the TRIPS Waiver in medicines for the LDC and newly graduated developing countries to ensure poor people’s access to medicines.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said in his speech that dividing the countries into LDC or developed countries is humiliating. All are developing countries in one way or another. When a low-income country is called LDC, its dignity is undermined. In 1971, Bangladesh refused to accept the LDC status. However, we were forced to take this identity later in 1975. These divisions thus disadvantage low-income countries in favour of global trade and power structures.

CSRL's Ziaul Haque Mukta said all the LDCs, even some of the developing countries, should have full market access to the markets of developed countries. They are entitled to this benefit apart from special and differential treatment. However, some rich countries unfairly deprive Bangladesh's RMG products of that advantage. In this regard, Bangladesh should be able to file a complaint against them using the WTO's dispute settlement procedure.

Deputy Chief of Fisheries Department (Marine) Mohammad Tanveer Hossain Chowdhury said that, according to the WTO’s proposed text, Bangladesh, as an LDC, has already harvested more than 0.8% of the quota of global fish production. So, Bangladesh cannot give subsidies to the fisheries sector. However, the fisheries agreement will not be binding unless all countries must sign it within the next two years.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of EquityBD said that since 2005 COAST Foundation has been working on and talking about the WTO issues and Bangladesh's expected position there. If our government delegation informs us what position it will take there, we can help them.

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