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**Civil Society and Journalists Concern WTO before Public Forum 2024**

**Bangladesh must address Data Discrepancy before WTO Negotiation**

Dhaka, 29 August 2024: In a media workshop in Dhaka today civil society and economic journalists expressed their concern about the data discrepancy of Bangladesh before the country starts negotiations in WTO. EquityBD and the Economic Reporters’ Forum (ERF) jointly organised the Media workshop titled “WTO Trade Rules and LDC Graduation of Bangladesh” chaired by Refayet Ullah Mridha of the Daily Star and moderated by Abul Kashem, General Secretary of ERF.

Over fifty economic journalists from different news agencies in Bangladesh participated in the Media Workshop. The event’s main speaker was Mr Hafizur Rahman, Additional Secretary and former DG of WTO Cell, while Mr Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the Chief Moderator of EquityBD gave the welcome speech. Barkat Ullah Maruf presented the keynote on different agreements of WTO.

In his welcome speech, Mr Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said, EquityBD and COAST Foundation have been working on WTO since 2005 when we demanded to form a separate WTO Cell under the Commerce Ministry to effectively monitor the WTO issues and build the country’s negotiation capacity.

Barkat Ullah Maruf of COAST Foundation in his Keynote presentation said we must have a national strategy based on true data and benefit calculation before we go for the graduation from LDC which will ultimately impact our negotiation in WTO in future. He added we have data discrepancies derived from quick political ambition for which we are about to lose some negotiation ground in different sectors including Agriculture and Fisheries.

In his expert speech Mr Hafizur Rahman, the Additional Secretary of the Bangladesh secretariat and a member of the Bangladesh Competition Commission, said we have the benefit of either side of LDC graduation. We will be benefited if we graduate and that will include the advancement of our competencies to openly compete with developed and developing countries. We will also be benefited if delay our graduation for a few years and that will include the continued opportunities that the LDCs have. We have to choose either of those provisions.

Mr. Refayet Ullah Mridha, the president of ERF said in the closing remarks that Bangladesh should take the opportunity to delay the graduation for at least ten more years to review all the national data and get prepared to face the challenge.

The moderator of the session Mr Abul Kashem, the General Secretary of ERF invited all of the present economic reporters to understand the WTO rules and create reports in their news media for the sake of Bangladesh’s development.

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