

Why Cancun was good and bad

AS Christian Aid's new rep for your diocese, one of my jobs is to keep you informed about our campaign issues.

At the moment, our biggest campaign centres around world trade. Half the world's population is living in poverty, and the gap between rich and poor is getting wider.

The global trading system lies at the heart of this inequality. The United Nations has estimated that unfair trade rules deny poor countries \$700 billion every year. Less than 0.01 per cent of this could save the sight of 30 million people.

Global trade is regulated through the policies and priorities set by international institutions, including rules made at the World Trade Organisation. Yet poorer countries are not negotiating on a level playing field - at the last full meeting of the WTO, the European Union had 500 negotiators and Haiti had none.

Many of you will know how much campaigning was done by Christian Aid and others before the latest round of trade talks in Cancun, Mexico, in September. In our view, a global trading sys-



by Susan Barry, Christian Aid area co-ordinator for Hampshire, Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight

Each month, columnists in The Big Issue challenge us with moral, spiritual or social concerns. This month we give an update on the trade justice campaign

tem that leaves half the world living in poverty cannot be judged successful. This level of mass poverty is a scandal.

Instead of helping to reduce inequality, the current trading system is reinforcing it. We believe we can make trade work for poor people and start to make mass poverty a scandal of the past. We are campaigning for trade justice - not free trade - with the rules weighted in favour of poor people

As the meeting in Cancun was beginning, Christian Aid was hosting Britain's trade secretary, Patricia Hewitt, as she visited poor farmers in nearby Honduras. Ms

Hewitt will probably never forget the welcome she was given when she arrived at the tiny house owned by rice farmer Maria Marcos Rivera. The diminutive 62-year-old Honduran woman threw her arms around the politician and embraced her like a long-lost friend.

So what was achieved at Cancun? Well, there were several bits of good news:

- Poor countries were well prepared and refused to be bullied in to agreeing to a deal they didn't want;
- Poor countries were successful in preventing the introduction of the so-called 'new issues' onto

the WTO agenda. This was described as a 'victory for campaigners' by Martin Khor, Director of Third World Network;

- Poor countries succeeded in making their case at the WTO and exhibited an impressive show of strength;

- Poor countries made it clear that if you want to have a 'development round' of trade talks, you have to listen to what people in developing countries want;

- During the negotiations the EU announced it was willing to drop discussions on two of the 'new issues' of investment and competition;

- The world media are now much more aware of the issues surrounding the WTO;

- Many poor country delegates expressed support and thanks to trade justice campaigners and urged them to continue.

But there was some bad news:

- Developed countries missed an opportunity to place poor countries' concerns at the heart of trade negotiations. Thousands of poor people will continue to suffer under the impact of unfair trade rules;

- Little attention was paid to the right of poor countries to protect and support their own producers;

- Rich countries refused to

focus primarily on the concerns of poor countries and continued trying to push ahead with their own agenda;

- The draft declaration which formed the basis of the negotiations was clearly biased in favour of rich countries.

Christian Aid believes that no deal is certainly better than a bad deal and that there are some real messages of hope and strength to be taken from the summit.

Where next for the World Trade Organisation? We believe a true 'development round' of talks must deal with the issues that have been identified as most important for development rather than introducing new areas for negotiation, like investment.

And there must be a decision on agriculture that leads to substantial reductions in support to farmers in rich countries, while allowing for protection for farmers in poor countries.

With the support of people such as yourselves, these issues can be addressed in the future.

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