

Toward an Effective Parliamentary Forum for the WTO

**World Federalist Movement – Canada &
World Federalist Movement International Secretariat
Comment to the World Trade Organisation (WTO)
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Since the time of the founding of the World Trade Organisation, parliamentarians and civil society organizations have called for the creation of a WTO parliamentary oversight body.

In 1999 in Seattle and again in 2001 in Doha calls for a parliamentary forum were heard from parliamentarians from around the world. Following the **“Parliamentary Conference on the WTO” held in Geneva, 17 – 18 February, 2003** parliamentarians have taken an important first step in actually creating the “parliamentary dimension” envisioned at the meeting of parliamentarians November, 2001 in Doha.

WTO trade rules intersect with national legislative responsibilities. When the WTO acts, the democratic accountability of trade and trade-related governance is affected. Parliamentarians and the world’s citizens must be informed and have formal mechanisms to engage in these processes.

Creation of an effective parliamentary forum for the WTO is a necessary and proportional step toward democratizing one of the world’s vital institutions of global governance. Parliamentarians themselves should lead in this process. Parliamentarians can help create a parliamentary oversight mechanism that is effective and that helps address the widely perceived “democratic deficit.”

To do so, the following measures should be considered:

(1) Collaborate with civil society

Civil society organizations and parliamentarians have a shared interest, and shared objectives: bringing the “voice of the people” to bear on WTO decision-making. The expertise and information developed by so many NGOs can and should be mobilized to complement and support the democratic legitimacy inherent in a transnational assembly of elected parliamentarians.

International parliamentary meetings tracking the WTO must adopt significant new rules to fully enable meaningful NGO participation.

(2) Become a representative forum

Ad hoc “meetings” of parliamentarians who have the means to arrive at gatherings on the margins of WTO diplomatic conferences is not a sufficiently representative and democratic basis for organizing a consultative oversight body to scrutinize WTO decisions. These gatherings – made up disproportionately of parliamentarians from states whose governments have the means

to include parliamentarians on their national delegations – do not fairly represent the perspectives of global public opinion or the world’s parliaments. The “Post-Doha Steering Committee” which assumes responsibility for convening these meetings should also become a more transparent and inclusive body.

(3) Organise for ongoing parliamentary dialogue

For parliamentarians as well as trade diplomats, timing matters. Parliamentarians require the means for timely interventions and ongoing and consistent access to WTO diplomatic deliberations. The WTO parliamentary forum must develop the capacity – through **committees** and/or **Parliamentary – CSO working groups** - for between-meetings dialogue and study on issues of broad concern to global publics.

These measures of **parliamentary – CSO partnerships, a representative structure and between-meetings deliberative capacity** are not difficult to achieve. They represent next steps in a larger evolutionary process of democratizing WTO decision-making and global governance.

These pragmatic steps could be implemented quickly, without the formal consent of governments. They require only the organized will and commitment of parliamentarians.

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Founded in 1947, World Federalist Movement (WFM) is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. World Federalist Movement – Canada is a member organisation of WFM. World federalists call for an end to the rule of force through a world governed by international law that is based on strengthened and democratized world institutions. Inspired by the democratic principles of federalism, world federalists support the creation of global structures accountable to the citizens of the world. WFM has particular expertise on issues surrounding the development of a more just and accountable framework of democratic global governance. WFM promotes the division of international authority among separate agencies with a balance of powers among judicial, executive and parliamentary bodies. WFM serves as the Secretariat for the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court (web site: www.iccnw.org). Other WFM priorities include global governance, civil society participation, conflict prevention, sustainable development and a strengthened and democratized United Nations.