We, the undersigned civil society groups, urge you to conduct any further trade negotiations in a manner consistent with the democratic principles of openness and accountability.

Countries participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations must reconcile the radically secretive process against the transparency values they purport to hold, to strengthen the legitimacy of any international agreements, and to seek appropriate balance between corporate and public interests.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a binding international agreement that could have far-reaching implications for commerce and trade around the globe, while modifying or undermining policies affecting consumer safety, access to medicine, intellectual property rights, and internet freedom. Twelve Pacific Rim countries participated in the most recent round of negotiations, which took place this August in Brunei, and several others have expressed interest in joining.

This agreement has the power to override national and local legislation on any number of issues because signatories to the Trans-Pacific Partnership will be required to bring existing and future national policies into compliance with the international norms established in the agreement. Despite the substantive importance of this agreement and growing international support for “open government” principles, it has been negotiated in secret, with only cursory input from the public; only government officials and a small group of industry representatives have been given access to the drafts of this agreement.

Many of the very same countries that have participated in the secret Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, including Chile, New Zealand, the United States, Australia, Peru, Mexico, and Canada, attended this month’s Open Government Partnership meeting to tout their commitments to transparency. But, the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiating process has embodied the opposite values -- secrecy and elite access that undermines the democratic principles that these countries purport to represent.
The secrecy surrounding the TransPacific Partnership negotiations has led to a widespread and decisively negative public reaction, including growing opposition in the U.S. Congress and among Members of Parliament in New Zealand, frustration in Japan and Australia, and skepticism all around the world. As shown by reaction to recent disclosures by Wikileaks which, for the first time, allowed advocates and experts to see and analyze a portion of the agreement, there is a clear need, and desire, for the public to have access to the negotiation process. Allowing industry representatives, in particular, to have access to the drafts and negotiation process all but guarantees that corporate interests will be represented at the expense of the public interest in areas as diverse as freedom of expression, access to medicine, consumer product safety, and many more.

In order to ensure that democratic principles are preserved, policy makers, civil society, and members of the public must be given the opportunity to have a level of participation and engagement in this process that is at least equal to that of industry representatives. Attempting to conduct international negotiations in secret has proven untenable in the past, with public opposition swelling when details of the plans are apparently leaked by those in positions of power who share these concerns. We believe that it is time for governments around the world live up to their own rhetoric and extend their commitments to openness and public participation to the TransPacific Partnership and any future negotiations.

Signed,
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Center for Effective Government
Center for Independent Journalism, Romania
Centre for Law and Democracy
Christopher Allan Webber
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington CREW
Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society
Common Cause Zambia
Concerned Citizen
CPI Foundation, Sarajevo
David Eaves
Diritto Di Sapere
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente
Global Financial Integrity
Government Accountability Project
Knowledge Economy International
IndyMedia
International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development INFID
Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association
Melbourne Social Forum
New Rules for Global Finance
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