

REGIONAL WORKSHOP
RCEP, LABOUR & PUBLIC SERVICES

6-7 September 2017

9.30AM-5.30PM

B Hotel Quezon City, Philippines

Organised by: Focus on the Global South, Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ), NAGKAISA Labor Coalition, Public Services International (PSI), Transnational Institute (TNI)

Dear all,

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is currently the biggest and most ambitious mega Free Trade Agreement (FTA) being negotiated. Its members include 16 countries in the Asia Pacific region (ASEAN plus China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, India and South Korea) encompassing 50% of the world's population and 40% of the world's GDP. Its twenty three trade chapters aim to go beyond current WTO and FTA commitments of member countries on issues ranging from agricultural commodities, manufactured goods, services, intellectual property, foreign investment, government procurement and the digital economy.

Since negotiations were launched early 2013, public interest groups including trade unions and social movements have consistently questioned whether the RCEP is in the public interest. Impacts on farm livelihoods, job losses in manufacturing, undermining public services, curtailing of democratic policy space, deregulating rules around FDI, decreased government revenues due to removal of import tariffs and higher costs of essential medicines due to restricted intellectual property (IP) rules rank among the issues they have raised with negotiators, elected representatives and media. Further, despite nineteen trade rounds (as of August 2017), there is a cloud of secrecy over the texts with no legislative scrutiny at the national or sub-national level in RCEP member countries.

Among the key concerns is how the RCEP, by facilitating trade in services, will undermine access to public services, entrench privatisation and hinder the creation of decent jobs. Given the failures of two decades of privatisation, especially in public services, there is now an evident trend (especially at the municipal level) to take back services into public hands. RCEP clauses can make it impossible for citizens, unions and governments (at any level) to reverse privatisation. Rather, RCEP commitments will force governments to either maintain current levels of privatisation or go further down the path of de-regulation. Prohibiting contractual employment and ensuring decent wages can also fall foul of RCEP clauses. If countries decide to do otherwise, the investment chapter in RCEP will allow affected Transnational Corporations (TNCs) to sue Governments in secret international arbitration tribunals.

This two day workshop will aim to demystify the RCEP and trade agreements from the viewpoint of public services and implications for workers.

We invite you to join this meeting and contribute to the deliberations.

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