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Press release

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**Secret RCEP trade deal fails international standards of transparency experts warn**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> round of negotiations of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is taking place in Bangkok, Thailand this week. The mega-Asian trade deal will impact the lives of over 3 billion people, yet a new study which is available at <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/RCEP-trade-deal-secret-deal.pdf> reveals how the deal fails international standards of transparency and public engagement.

Like other mega regional trade agreements, such as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), RCEP negotiations are far-reaching, including trade and investment liberalisation, Intellectual Property Rights, services, competition policy and e-commerce. RCEP will impact on the lives of over 50% of the world's population who live in the countries party to RCEP, from the quality of the food we eat to the energy we consume and the affordability of life-saving medicines

Experts measured the RCEP negotiations against criteria for *Transparency and Public Participation in policy making*. The outcome was a resounding **FAIL**. The report finds the RCEP negotiations to be:

- Non-transparent: negligible public availability of official information on the state of negotiations, a failure to release draft texts and adequate details of key government positions.
- Lacking in independent social, economic and environmental impact assessments, making it particularly difficult for journalists to accurately report on the trade deal.
- Plagued by numerous examples of vested interests influencing the process, such as corporations having privileged access in negotiations.
- Deprived of Asian parliaments and elected officials representation and input. They are frequently shut out, have no meaningful role in negotiations and often cannot access the text .
- Devoid of public participation, with only token or ad hoc stakeholder engagements, at the best.

Sam Cossar-Gilbert from Friends of the Earth International said, “RCEP is a secret trade deal that fails to live up to internationally recognized standards. Secrecy breeds corruption and bad decisions. People have a right to know what is being negotiated in their name.”

“RCEP is being negotiated in secret but leaked drafts of the negotiating text reveal provisions that could undermine access to price-lowering generic medicines, negatively impact farmers and indigenous peoples

rights to seed and food sovereignty, push workers' wages down, lock-in privatisation of public services and restrict in many other ways the ability of governments to regulate public policies leaving them vulnerable to lawsuits in international tribunals, where parts of proceedings can be held in secret", said S.M. Mohamed Idris from Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia).

"In India, the process of negotiating RCEP has been characterised by not just lack of parliamentary scrutiny but also the complete non involvement of regional governments who will bear the brunt of cheaper agricultural and manufacturing imports. Elected representatives such as the Chief Minister of the southern Indian state of Kerala are arguing that this is a violation of the principle of federalism that is enshrined in the Indian constitution", said Benny Kuruvilla from The Transnational Institute.

Kate Lappin from Public Services International (PSI) said, "Trade unions across Asia Pacific are opposed to the RCEP because it is anti-democratic, anti-worker and anti-people. It is a threat to quality public services essential to advancing rights for all people. Governments have made commitments to tri-partism; to involve workers and employers in setting policies that impact on labour rights. Instead, governments appear to be taking instructions from the largest foreign multinational companies and protecting their interests."

"The resounding call of people's movements is for governments to reject RCEP. Yet governments continue to ignore this call by undermining people's efforts to secure access to the negotiating texts and restricting spaces for people's participation in the negotiating process. The democratic deficit in RCEP is made worse by the privilege access given to corporations" added Joseph Purugganan of Focus on the Global South.

Our governments should put the interests of the people ahead of the corporations. Reject unfair corporate trade regimes such as the RCEP.

#NoRCEP

**S. M. MOHAMED IDRIS**  
**President**  
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**Note:**

A full copy of the report is available here: <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/RCEP-trade-deal-secret-deal.pdf>

RCEP is being negotiated between the 10-member ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and Australia, China, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and India.

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