



Participants at the “Fighting FTAs” international strategy workshop, Bangkok, July 2006 (Photo: GRAIN)

About this publication

In July 2006, in Bangkok, FTA Watch, a large but loose Thai coalition, organised the first international strategy workshop among grassroots activists fighting bilateral free trade and investment agreements (FTAs). They were supported in this effort by Médecins Sans Frontières, bilaterals.org and GRAIN. That three-day workshop, dubbed “Fighting FTAs”, was a unique event for many who attended.¹ Some say that we collectively processed many of the key strategy issues that later became important for them in their national struggles. Others felt that it was an important support to social movements. Yet others continued nurturing the links that were made during the workshop, especially in their regional settings.

While the workshop was never meant to set up any kind of permanent platform, several of the organisers decided in early 2007 to move forward in working together on more tools to share experiences and understanding about FTAs and the growing struggles around them. GRAIN and bilaterals.org initially agreed to draw up a document that would provide a “big picture” view of what these deals are about, coming from a shared political perspective. They were soon joined by BIOTHAI, a member of FTA Watch, who also wanted to take a next step in helping facilitate a sharing of experiences from the national struggles. From this, a project came together to produce a collaborative publication. The three groups called on many people who came to the Bangkok workshop to join them in this effort, as well as others. The feedback was very positive and we pulled together as broad a collection as possible of written, audio and visual materials from around the world about people’s experiences with, and resistance to, bilateral trade and investment deals.

This publication aims to do three things. First, it tries to provide a solid understanding of the “FTA frenzy” that so many governments are caught up in. Many people often do not understand bilateral FTAs very well until their

government is on the path to signing one. Then again, there are significant differences between a US FTA, a Japanese FTA and a South-South one. Part one of this document tries to dissect and make sense of all that. Second, it brings together people’s accounts of the struggle against FTAs in their own countries from different parts of the world. While there is a huge diversity in these struggles, there is a lot of commonality too, as will be seen across part two. Where accounts could not be shared in writing, we tried to pull together some audio interviews, which are available through the publication’s website, <http://www.fightingftas.org>. Finally, part three tries to draw some learnings from people’s experiences to date, which might help those who have yet to engage in the fight against FTAs.

A few practical remarks. The material found in this publication and in the accompanying website is the fruit of a collective effort involving many people. There is no copyright or other form of ownership attached to it – and where we are not able to provide an original source for photos or other materials, we apologise.² We would also point out that the publication was put together through the course of 2007 and some material grew dated by the time it went to print. Finally, this material and the website that houses it will eventually be merged into bilaterals.org to keep things “under one roof”, since bilaterals.org already provides a massive collection of news and analysis about FTAs and peoples’ struggles and has been updated daily since September 2004.

Many people got involved in this project in one way or another, often contributing directly to the production of these materials, and we are keen to thank all of them: Christine Ahn, Anthony Akunzule, Ruperto Aleroz, Jemma Bailey, Andrés Barreda, Marisa Berry, Nicolás Botteghelz, Silvana Buján, Nick Buxton, Byun Jeong-pil, Eva Carazo, Laura Carlsen, Cecilia Cherrez, Choi Sejin, Stefan Christoff, Gabi Cob, Leigh Cookson, Margarita

¹ A summary report is available in English, Spanish and French at http://www.bilaterals.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=162.

² We can easily correct these omissions on the publication’s website. If you would like anything changed in the web presentation, please contact fightingftas.org@gmail.com.

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While this publication is coming out first in English, Spanish and French, we would welcome it if other groups want to make it available in more languages or post it on their own websites. Please don't hesitate to use these materials as you wish.

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