

No sign that gov't is listening to the people on TPPA

MalaysiaKini.com

July 26, 2013

By Badan Bertindak Bantah TPPA

COMMENT On June 13, 2013, the Malay Economic Action Council (MTEM) met with top officers of the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) - the lead ministry coordinating Malaysian negotiators in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement talks - expecting to be given the ministry's reply to 16 questions and concerns that MTEM had raised in an earlier meeting on the TPPA and its potential impact on Malaysia and Malaysians.

MTEM and the other non-government organisations eventually walked out of the June 13 meeting, aggrieved that Miti felt it sufficed merely to parrot the standard assurances of how it was taking the NGOs' concerns into account, rather than meaningfully and substantially engaging with MTEM on the questions and concerns raised.

Miti also refused to actually show how it was doing so - what positions and proposals it had assumed in the negotiations to address the questions and concerns raised by civil society - on the pretext that it was obliged to honour its obligation to other governments participating in the TPPA talks by maintaining the secrecy of the proposed texts (even Malaysia's) and negotiating positions. It's a given that Miti's obligations and accountability to the Malaysian citizenry is of secondary - or even lower - priority.

NONEBut before the walkout took place, MTEM and Miti had at least reached an agreement on one thing: Miti secretary-general Rebecca Sta Maria (right) agreed to MTEM's request that a meaningful and holistic framework of consultation and representation be drafted to serve as the basis for Miti's further engagement with MTEM and environmental, health and other NGOs over the issues and concerns relating to the TPPA negotiations.

If the texts being proposed by Malaysia or other TPPA negotiating countries could not be disclosed to the public, MTEM suggested, perhaps some mechanism could be developed by which MTEM and other stakeholders could be engaged in order to buttress Malaysia's negotiating position with the actual, meaningful, contributions of civil society organisations while maintaining the integrity and flexibility of Malaysia's negotiating position.

Six weeks since lifeline was extended

It has been six weeks since that lifeline was extended to Miti, and the promise made by Miti's top bureaucrat. Neither MTEM nor any other NGO - or any member of the Badan Bertindak Bantah TPPA (Bantah) coalition that was subsequently formed to highlight the concerns surrounding Malaysia's involvement in the TPPA negotiations - has received even a hint that the framework of consultation and representation sought by and by which Malaysian NGOs can meaningfully engage with the government over the TPPA was at all in the pipeline.

Yet, in the course of the past six weeks, Miti has embarked on a series of public relations exercises to market the TPPA as a positive boost for Malaysia's strengths as a trading nation and a panacea for the much-publicised ills of its delivery systems.

An example of these public relations exercises is Miti's half-day 'Open House' to be held on Aug 1 for members of the public to 'engage' with government officers on the TPPA, with the aims, specifically, of:

Clearing some misconceptions about the TPPA;

Explaining the rationale for Malaysia's participation; and

Hearing the concerns of the public towards the TPPA

Miti's promises yet another PR exercise?

But beyond the general remarks regarding the structures and processes of the negotiations, and the general parameters and principles by which Malaysian negotiators carry out their tasks, what genuine understanding can Malaysians obtain from this engagement on Aug 1:

Beyond what they have already been told?

Beyond assurances that Malaysia's sovereignty will be protected?;

Beyond assurances that the government's regulatory and policy-making space will not be in any way constrained by the TPPA?;

Beyond assurances that Malaysia's GDP will gain by so many billions of dollars, that exporters will have access to trillions of dollars of TPPA countries' markets?; and

Beyond assurances that we are signing onto the 'gold standard' of FTAs of the

21st century?

When Bantah submitted our memorandum of concerns and demands to Miti on July 19, we were extended a verbal invitation by its deputy secretary-general, Rizal Sharif to the Aug 1 event, at which a 'forum' would be held to address the concerns and questions we sought to be addressed.

However, we fear that this forum would be yet another public relations exercise, without any intention on Miti's part to engage with the rakyat and meaningfully address our concerns as the most important stakeholders.

To Miti's possible claim that turning down the invitation to attend its open house would contradict Bantah's demand for Miti to show greater transparency and accountability, we would like to state that should Miti fail to come up with the framework of consultation and representation it promised six weeks ago, it would demonstrate Miti's lack of seriousness and sincerity.

This will force Bantah to expose the Aug 1 forum to be what it is suspected to be: yet another public relations exercise and an attempt to hoodwink Malaysians into supporting the TPPA.

We hope we are proven wrong by Miti's submission on the framework of consultation and representation it had promised before the Aug 1 forum.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/236834>