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October 12, 2021

The Honorable Katherine C. Tai
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20508

Dear Ambassador Tai:

As you prepare for the twelfth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC12), we write today to emphasize the importance of including labor and worker rights in the agenda. We support the Biden Administration's focus on a worker-centered trade policy and were encouraged by the forced labor proposal proposed during the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations. For far too long, labor issues have not been central to the work of the WTO despite clear indications of its prominence in the foundational legal text of the organization as well as Congress' intent for the WTO to address labor and worker rights.

The preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO identifies "raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand" as part of the primary goal in creating the WTO. Moreover, in 1994 Congress passed the Uruguay Round Agreements Act (URAA) which approved and implemented into U.S. law the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO. Section 131 of the URAA directs the President to seek the establishment of a WTO working party on worker rights to examine the linkage of trade and internationally recognized worker rights on developing and developed countries, address systemic labor violations, and coordinate engagement between the WTO and International Labor Organization (ILO). To date, no working party exists nor have there been any recent progress to establish one.

Over the last 25 years, Congress has prioritized the important nexus between labor standards and trade. Many bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements contain requirements to abide by internationally recognized worker rights. Most countries across the spectrum of development stages have now come to accept and incorporate compliance with core labor standards as a necessary component of trade agreement commitments, as well as a prerequisite to receive trade preference program benefits. A level playing field for trade cannot be achieved without elevating labor and employment standards within the WTO.

We request that the United States seek to negotiate a Ministerial Statement at MC12 that affirms

overarching commitments on labor and full employment priorities as reflected in the preamble of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO. We also request that the United States propose at MC12 a working party on worker rights as directed in Section 131 of the URAA. Until consensus is reached for a working party, we implore you to create an informal working group with like-minded countries to discuss the issue of labor standards and trade.

In the wake of historic economic distress and disruptions over the last year that have touched nearly every country around the world, the United States and WTO Member States must directly engage and elevate labor and employment standards within the organization. We look forward to the United States driving the long overdue and necessary debate at the global stage on labor and trade, and thereby, effectively bringing the voice of workers across the globe to the table to set a modern trade agenda. We stand ready to support the United States in these efforts.

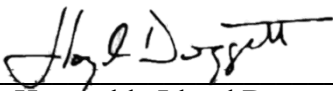
Sincerely,



The Honorable Earl Blumenauer



The Honorable Ron Kind



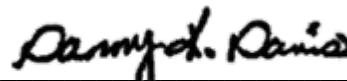
The Honorable Lloyd Doggett



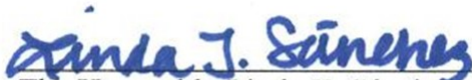
The Honorable Mike Thompson



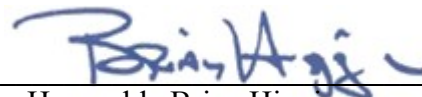
The Honorable Bill Pascrell Jr.



The Honorable Danny K. Davis



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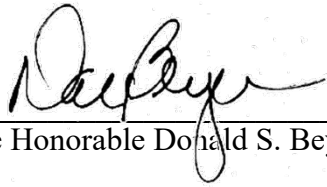
The Honorable Judy Chu



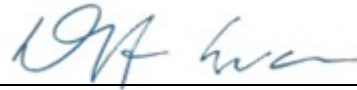
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The Honorable Daniel T. Kildee



The Honorable Donald S. Beyer



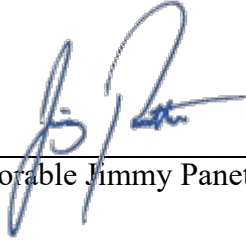
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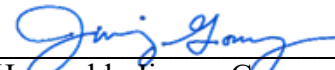
The Honorable Bradley S. Schneider



The Honorable Tom Suozzi



The Honorable Jimmy Panetta



The Honorable Jimmy Gomez



The Honorable Stacey Plaskett