



JAPAN RESOURCES

COMPILED NEWS FROM
CONSUMERS UNION OF JAPAN
No. 161
August-December 2014



Japan Resources is available on a web site in English.

English web site: <http://www.nishoren.org/en>



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OP-ed Against TPP by Ralph Nader and Koa Tasaka in Asahi Shimbun

We got the following op-ed published in Japan's Asahi Shimbun this week, co-signed by Ralph Nader from Public Citizen and Koa Tasaka from Consumers Union of Japan. It was written in response to a column that made unsubstantiated claims about TPP and consumers.

In its September 08, 2014 editorial, Asahi Shimbun argued that "Japan, U.S. should consider consumers, not industries, in reaching TPP deal."

As consumer movement leaders in the U.S. and Japan, we agree that it is crucial that both countries prioritize consumer interests. However, we strongly disagree with the editorial's unsupported assumption that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as it is currently being negotiated would benefit consumers.

What is important to consumers? Healthy and safe food. Banking and insurance services that protect their financial well-being. Affordable medicines and health care. Access to an open Internet and privacy protections. A clean environment.

From what we know about the TPP text, it would undermine these critical consumer priorities, not promote them.

Consider who has had the greatest influence on the TPP. Almost all of the 500 official U.S. private sector trade "advisors" represent corporate interests. While agribusiness, Wall Street, and pharmaceutical interests have had special access to the process and negotiating text, representatives from consumer, health, and other public interest organizations have been left in the dark. Even members of the U.S. Congress cannot easily access the draft text. Similarly in Japan, elected members of the Parliament are unable to provide any constructive input to the negotiations.

Due to the extreme secrecy of the negotiations, it is impossible to know everything damaging to consumers that may be included in the TPP text. However, leaked draft texts of some of the chapters have confirmed that the TPP rules would benefit large multinational corporations at the expense of consumers.

The leak of the TPP's environmental chapter shows that the U.S., which is not a party to United Nation conventions such as the Climate Change Convention or the Biological Diversity Convention, will do everything it can to use TPP to continue to avoid rules suggested by the international community.

Also, a leak of the TPP's investment chapter indicates that it will include Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), a controversial system that grants foreign investors the right to sue governments in extrajudicial tribunals to demand taxpayer compensation for domestic policies or government actions that may diminish the investors' future "expected profits." This brazen infringement of national sovereignty has been used under NAFTA and other treaties by corporations to attack toxics bans, nuclear energy phase-outs, tobacco regulation, unsafe food import bans, financial stability measures, water and timber policies, mining safety rules, fracking bans, and more. The cases are heard by three private-sector lawyers, many of whom are in a conflict of interest as they rotate between serving as "judges" and suing governments for corporations. These cases cannot be appealed and there is no limit on what the tribunals can order governments to pay. This is corporate supremacy run amuck.

Under U.S. trade agreements alone, governments have been ordered to pay more than \$430 million in compensation to corporations – with \$38 billion more in claims now pending. And in some cases governments have also eliminated important consumer safeguards to avoid paying more. Or, to avoid threatened challenges, governments have been “chilled” from taking action, such as after R.J. Reynolds threatened Canada when it was considering stronger tobacco regulation. ISDS is not the only anti-consumer aspect of the TPP.

As well, a leaked draft of the Intellectual Property chapter revealed that TPP would expand the scope of medicine patents and strengthen drug monopolies, increasing the consumer price of crucial drugs. The TPP would also require countries to allow the importation of food that does not meet domestic safety standards. Under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary chapter, food labels providing important information for consumers could be challenged as a trade barrier, including labels for Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). This is completely unacceptable in Japan, where we are asking for better protection of biological diversity, and Japan’s mandatory labeling rules should be improved, not challenged.

Despite the lessons learned from the global financial crisis, the TPP’s Financial Services chapter would limit our governments’ ability to regulate to preserve financial stability and protect consumers’ hard-earned savings. Draconian copyright provisions pushed by Hollywood could jeopardize consumers’ access to information on the Internet.

These are just a few examples of crucial consumer policies that could be jeopardized by the TPP in its current corporate dominated form.

So, yes, the U.S. and Japan have an obligation to protect consumer interests within an open democratic process. However, the TPP negotiations are achieving the opposite, posing a dire threat to consumer protection and the public interest. That is why many of the largest consumer organizations in the U.S. and Japan are vehemently opposed to the TPP’s dictatorial impacts.

Ralph Nader, Public Citizen

Koa Tasaka, Consumers Union of Japan

(私の視点) TPP 消費者への深刻な脅威だ ラルフ・ネーダー、田坂興亞
朝日新聞は、英文サイトに掲載した9月8日付の社説(本紙は7日付朝刊)で、TPP(環太平洋経済連携協定)は消費者にメリットをもたらすという前提でTPPに賛同するような姿勢を示したが、日米両国の消費者運動の主導的立場にあるものとしてTPPが内包する問題を提起したい。

October 24, 2014

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Closing Statement by Civil Society at MOP7, 2014

Little progress, conflict of interests & unabated unintentional transboundary movements

Closing Statement by Civil Society at MOP7

While we welcome the continued work on risk assessment and socio-economic considerations via the continuation of two AHTEGs (Ad Hoc Groups), progress on these issues is regrettably still too little, very late and largely repetitive. These two issues are of central importance to the Protocol, and to many Parties' implementation of biosafety.

There must be no more delay in developing further guidance and guidelines in order to assist Parties in their implementation of the Protocol. Implementation is crucial to safeguarding biological diversity, human health, and the wellbeing of peoples everywhere. In the composition of the two extended AHTEGs, civil society demands that potential conflict of interests (including financial and other vested interests) are transparently declared and scrutinized, and that the appropriate steps are taken to avoid conflicts of interest unduly influencing decisions.

We wish to remind Parties that the work of the socio-economic AHTEG must be within the scope and objective of the Protocol, which is to contribute to ensuring an adequate level of protection with regards to LMOs that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health. The issue of the benefits of modern biotechnology is not within the scope, nor in line with the objective of this Protocol.

Cases of unintentional transboundary movement of LMOs continue unabated. This is exemplified here in Asia with the discovery of unapproved LM papaya imported into Japan and subsequently cultivated. There is urgent need for measures to prevent more cases from happening, and increased capacity to take emergency action where prevention is no longer possible. Illegal transboundary movement must be addressed.

Parties need to have the capacity to detect and identify LMOs, and LMO developers must provide the necessary information for authorities and citizens to detect and identify LMOs used both in field trials and commercially. This information must include sequence information and reference materials.

Parties can and should require this in their national biosafety laws. The Strategic Plan requires guidance on how to detect and take measures to respond to unintentional releases of LMOs to be developed.

We will meet the challenges of concurrent meetings of the COP and COP-MOPs in 2016. These organisational changes also have financial implications: the full and effective participation of developing countries, especially least developed countries, small island states and countries with economies in transition, must be ensured by providing adequate financial support.

October 6, 2014

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GM Canola Contamination Cases in Japan

How to reduce GM contamination cases?

Masaharu Kawata
Japan Citizens' Network for Sustainable Food and Agriculture

Side-event presentation at the MOP7 conference in Pyeongchang, South Korea

Countries must do more to implement the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety 2011-2020. At our MOP7 side-event we discussed the adverse effects of LMO in different countries. Regarding corn, there have been reports of GM contamination in Brazil, South Africa and Kenya. As for Switzerland and Japan, wild growing GM canola has been found. Also, wild growing crops were found in South Korea, and citizens have started doing independent testing. How does this relate to the Strategic Plan?

We have been investigating GM canola contamination since 2004 at many locations around Japan. We have seen the effect of the unintentional transboundary movement of living modified organisms, such as hybridization of indigenous rapeseed as well as the advent of wild growing GM broccoli.

Cross pollination with local varieties of the related brassica species and weeds has repeatedly been found. Regarding identification, we discovered wild-growing plants that first tested negative using the inexpensive lateral flow test, but on later inspection using the PCR method revealed genetically modified traits. This is an example of potential adverse effects and an inadequate level of protection in the field of the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs. It is also an example of how the current risk assessment model fails to cover all the possibilities, once LMOs are released in the environment.

The economic-oriented GM development strategy needs to be replaced in order to protect biodiversity for future generations. We respectfully ask MOP delegates to fight harder for capacity building in their countries and ensure financial sustainability for the important work within the framework of the Cartagena Protocol.

October 6, 2014

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Impressions from the MOP7 in Pyeonchang, from the NGO Perspective

The Cartagena Protocol is an important tool to deal with transboundary movements of Living Modified Organisms. The MOP7 met in Pyeongchang, South Korea to discuss risk assessment, unintentional or illegal shipments, and how to help countries share information. Also on the agenda was capacity building and guidance, especially ways to aid developing countries, many of which are rich in biodiversity and need assistance to avoid contamination from imports. MOP7 heard a number of delegates voice concern about a lack of resources to deal with GM field trials and how to test and identify suspect cargoes.

The MOP7 was criticized by local Korean non-governmental organizations who felt left out of the discussions, with no support to hold meetings or engage in public information campaigns. A side-event was held to discuss contamination issues, and outside the heavily guarded convention venue, civil society organizations held a conference to discuss seed saving and rural development issues, including women farmers' concerns.

In Pyeongchang, there was a parade on October 3 with some 200 members of local farmers' groups and co-op organizations, Via Campesina and the Slow Food movement in Korea, as well as FA-Net in Japan representing the many organizations opposed to GM food and agriculture in Japan. This peaceful demonstration was greeted by the gates with 4-5 buses of security police who prevented any further access to the MOP7 venue.

Nevertheless, it shows how divisive the biotechnology issue is, full of empty promises from the biotech companies, and the lack of trust among millions of farmers in Asia who refuse to grow GM crops.

CBD Alliance has daily reports from the MOP7 meeting.

<http://www.cbdalliance.org/en/index.php/en/our-work/ecos#cop-mop-7-cartagena-protocol>

October 6, 2014

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CBD Meeting at the House of Representatives, Tokyo

We will be holding a meeting at The House of Representatives in Nagatacho, Tokyo on Thursday September 4, 2014 to discuss the upcoming UN conference about biological diversity. Consumers Union of Japan and the many groups and networks that follow these issues will ask questions to the government and elected representatives in the Parliament (Diet) that also care strongly about these issues. The public is invited.

We will participate in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) conference in South Korea this fall.

Leading up to that conference, we hope this event will be a fruitful discussion about Japan's lack of progress to ratify the Nagoya Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol, that was agreed upon in Nagoya four years ago at the UN CBD conference held in that city (after very successful negotiations held in Kuala Lumpur, thus the joint name). The aim of the protocol is to aid countries in the case of disputes when there is a need to assess the liability and redress, if genetically modified organisms cause harm to the natural environment or human health.

Japan has also made little progress to address the problems with wild-growing genetically modified canola that we have found near harbours and food oil factories over the past 10 years. These GM crops pose a real risk to local biological diversity as a number of related food crops may be contaminated with GMOs.

Meanwhile, Japanese farmers have completely rejected genetically modified organisms. There is no cultivation of GMOs in Japan for commercial purposes. Very few field trials are ongoing at research institutes, which we are keeping a close eye on. Meanwhile, reports from China indicate that GM rice will not be allowed, which is great news. South Korea also does not grow any GMOs commercially.

The failure of GMO foods to catch on in virtually all parts of Asia by 2014 is a story that needs to be told to the world.

September 3, 2014

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Japan Resources is published by Consumers Union of Japan (CUJ). CUJ was founded in April 1969 and was officially certified as a non-profit organization on May 1, 2006 by the new Japanese NPO legislation. We continue to be a non-political and financially independent organization (NGO). CUJ is funded by membership fees and donations. The main concern of CUJ and its members is to realize a world of liberty and equality, a world free of economic, social and legal discrimination, and to preserve a safe and healthy environment for our children's future.

CUJ pursues the following goals on behalf of consumers: (1) To secure for ourselves and our families safe and healthy lives, (2) to establish systems/laws to protect the rights of consumers, (3) to promote peace, social justice and economic fairness, (4) to support and empower consumers who care about the environment, and (5) to cooperate with foreign consumer groups/organizations.

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Photo from the MOP7 Conference in Pyeongchang, South Korea

