



Canadian Association of University Teachers
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The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of International Trade
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Freeland:

As the organization representing 68,000 teachers, librarians, researchers, general staff and other academic professions, we are concerned about the potential impact of the negotiations on the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) on the quality and affordability of education in Canada.

The agreement is intended to further liberalize trade in services and provide legally-binding rules in areas such as licensing, financial services, telecoms, e-commerce, maritime transport and professional services, which would give foreign investors and companies free access to the markets of the TiSA Parties and ensure that governments do not discriminate between public and private sector service providers. TiSA is intended to be a broad and comprehensive agreement with no exclusion of service sectors at the outset. Potentially, therefore, all service sectors could be covered, including public services like education and health care.

The broad scope of TiSA means that education could be covered directly or indirectly. Education remains one of the least-covered sectors in the international trade agreements of services because of legitimate concerns that trade liberalisation can constrain the ability of governments to effectively provide and regulate quality education. However, private sector lobby groups and several countries have been pressing for further and deeper commitments to open education to the rules and disciplines of trade agreements.

Including education services in any trade agreements raises significant concerns. Trade rules are legally binding and can have the effect of locking-in and intensifying pressures of commercialization and privatization. For instance, rules around market access can limit the ability of countries that make commitments on education services to restrict the entry and regulate the operations of private and for-profit schools and institutions. TiSA is aimed at ensuring "competitive neutrality" or a level-playing field between public and private providers, meaning governments could not treat public schools, colleges, and universities more favourably.

Trade agreements can also adversely affect the ability of authorities to ensure the quality of education provided. TiSA, like other agreements, is intended to promote free trade in services by guaranteeing open markets for all. However, by granting unfettered market access to all foreign education enterprises, governments could very well usher in a flood of providers of questionable quality.

Finally, commitments made in TiSA around other service sectors could also have an effect on the provision of education. Education systems in many parts of the world have suffered because of the global financial crisis and subsequent recession. TiSA aims to liberalise the financial services sector in ways that will weaken regulations designed to prevent another crisis, and indirectly public education.

During the next round of TiSA negotiations, the Canadian government should stand up and protect public services and education, ensuring a broad carve-out from the agreement. Furthermore, considering the secrecy of these negotiations, the Canadian government should communicate to Canadians the status of negotiations and release material regarding the negotiation of such an agreement.

Yours sincerely,



David Robinson
Executive Director

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