

Regional Trade Agreements versus the WTO: A Human Rights Perspective

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Abstract : In the international economic order multilateral trading system which established by General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1947 (GATT) was dominant until about two decades ago. Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) have changed this order and become an important phenomenon. One of the main objectives of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a central institution of multilateral trading system is raising standards of living. There are many scholars who suggest that WTO should take steps to protect human rights in its activities. Although it has always been opposing views who declare that since WTO has no explicit rule for human rights, it has no human rights related obligations. At the time that the WTO was established, member states began to join RTAs and since then, the escalating growth of these agreements and their effects on multilateral trading system has been controversial. There are some aspects of RTAs that have received too little attention from scholars. It is important to take a different view and evaluate the RTAs based on non-commercial aspects. The present paper seeks to answer this question: which system could be more useful in protecting human rights, RTAs or WTO?

Keywords : WTO, RTAs, human rights, multilateral trading system, non discrimination

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