

Statement of the Delegation of Bishops from the Andean Region on Free Trade between the United States and the Andean countries

Our pastoral vision, which is inspired by the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church, holds that the human person is the focus of all economic activity.

In an increasingly interdependent world, it is imperative that economic globalization be humanized by globalizing solidarity among individuals and peoples. In fact, “If globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative” (*Ecclesia in America*, 20).

The overall situation of the people of the Andean Region is characterized by high levels of poverty, social exclusion and a growing gap between rich and poor. In particular, there is a lack of opportunity for small-scale agriculture and small businesses and micro enterprises -- sectors that employ the majority of people in our countries, as well as inadequate educational and public health systems, insecurity and violence, the lack of food security and migration due to limited employment opportunities.

Trade policies need to be fashioned in ways that will stimulate economic growth while at the same time combating poverty and overcoming hunger. We urge decision-makers to give equal importance to these twin goals. From our experience as pastors among our people we have concerns that the free trade agreement currently under negotiation between the United States and the Andean countries may fail to reach its potential in increasing opportunities for the poorest and most vulnerable. For the poor to really benefit from an increase in trade, complementary measures need to be adopted that will improve education and public health, that will include minorities and disabled persons, and that will strengthen the participation of all concerned.

Given this, in light of the principles and values that we have stated and the situation of our people, we express the following concerns about key points in the negotiation of the free trade agreement.

Agriculture. The provisions under negotiation could leave small farmers and their families in our countries very vulnerable. Given the huge subsidies received by North American agriculture businesses, the time frames and other measures proposed to replace the current price band system may well be insufficient. The programs that exist in our countries for the substitution of coca and other illicit crops would also be affected. Each of our countries needs the flexibility to adopt policies that allow our farmers and rural workers to produce food for their people, maintain a stable income for their families and ensure authentic rural development.

Intellectual property. The U.S. is proposing the patenting of seeds and life forms, in addition to the extension of the existing monopoly period that international pharmaceutical companies enjoy over the sale of medicines. These measures may well endanger farmers’ access to the resources on which they depend, as well as access to medicines particularly by the poor and most vulnerable.

Labor. Trade agreements should offer an opportunity to strengthen the protection of workers. In the absence of binding commitments to respect workers' rights, such workers, especially the majority of the working poor, may not enjoy some of the potential benefits of increased trade. Furthermore, the possible loss of rural jobs and the resulting migration to cities or emigration from the region due to the failure to provide adequate safeguards for small and medium-scale farmers must be considered.

Environment. An increase in trade will likely result in an increase of waste products. Without adequate enforceable environmental protections, the trade agreement will not live up to its potential of contributing to the rational, sustainable use of resources such as water and forests, especially given the important role that the Amazon region plays in these four countries. At the same time, we are concerned that the United States has been unwilling to include in the agreement the Andean countries' proposal to protect biodiversity.

Citizen participation. Such trade agreements offer a unique opportunity for the peoples of the region to express and strengthen a sense of participative democracy that will lead to greater security for all. **We urge that the time frame for negotiation of the free trade agreement be expanded to allow for inclusive, participatory dialogue in the region and in each country.** In this way, the sectors potentially affected will have an opportunity to present their own proposals, and have them taken into account in the negotiations.

Comprehensive Agenda: More broadly, any trade agreement should form part of a comprehensive agenda for sustainable human development that is supported by adequate financial and other resources.

The moral measure of any trade agreement should be its positive effect on the life and dignity of families and of poor and vulnerable workers, whose views should receive special attention in this debate.

Signed by the representatives of the following Bishops Conferences:

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