

INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT

✠ A WASHINGTON-BASED WORKING GROUP WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM A RANGE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTED TO ASSERTING A STRONGER PRESENCE OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN PUBLIC POLICY DISCUSSIONS ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT ✠
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Dear Member of Congress,

We write to you as faith-based organizations deeply concerned about the state of the global trade agenda in Congress. The May 10th agreement struck among Speaker Pelosi, Chairman Rangel, Rep. Levin and the Bush Administration was inconsistent with the will of the electorate expressed last November and registered in numerous polls of U.S. public opinion.

We are saddened that the May agreement appears to ensure a vote on the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement. Some argue that this FTA will benefit ordinary people in Peru; but we are hearing just the opposite from our Peruvian colleagues. They tell us that this agreement will harm ordinary people in their country, not fuel sustainable development; and they urge us to oppose it.

Ironically, by accepting only minor -- and probably unenforceable -- improvements for the labor and environmental chapters and some easing of restrictions on generic medicines, the Democratic leadership is now supporting a model of trade liberalization that it struggled so notably to move Congress to reject in the CAFTA debate. Indeed, a number of new Democratic House members were elected in opposition to this model, which the leadership now seems poised to embrace.

Our colleagues in the region tell us that these changes will do nothing to address the rampant problems of labor rights enforcement in Peru -- which lacks the resources and the political will to improve labor and environmental standards. Beyond these enforcement issues, the recent additions fail to address the broader human rights and moral concerns around the other twenty Peru FTA chapters -- especially in the areas of agriculture, indigenous knowledge, services and investment.

Trade should be a vehicle for broad-based social and economic development for both partners in the agreement. In contrast, the Peru FTA will increase joblessness, poverty and income disparity in Peru, and force migration, in the same way that NAFTA has done and CAFTA is doing elsewhere in Latin America.

During the Senate Finance Committee's recent hearing on the Peru FTA, not one Senator mentioned the words "development" or "human rights," nor did anyone express concern about the possible negative impacts in Peru. Instead the focus was on market access for U.S. goods and, of course, security—invoking the threats of Presidents Chavez of Venezuela and Correa of Ecuador.

What Finance Committee members failed to discern is that the passage of these pending trade agreements would actually jeopardize U.S. security. They would increase the number of impoverished, unemployed and disenfranchised people in the developing countries where they are implemented.

We regret that the Ways and Means Committee has set the 'Informal Markup' for September 25th, indicating a desire quickly to move the Peru FTA to a vote. In the name of justice, compassion and, indeed, U.S. interests in a more secure and prosperous Americas, we ask that you reject the mistaken decision to move forward on the Peru Agreement. We urge you to defeat this and other pending FTAs.

International trade can serve worthy ends, but the existing model of trade liberalization is increasing, not decreasing inequality and insecurity. It must be re-evaluated and replaced. We urge that before any more such “free trade” agreements are ratified, Congress enter into a new, far-sighted process of dialogue and discernment about what constitutes a trade policy that is genuinely pro-development and that truly benefits working people in the U.S. and abroad.

Thank you for your urgent attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

- American Friends Service Committee
- Center of Concern
- Church World Service
- Columban Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office
- Conference of Major Superiors of Men
- Global Ministries - Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
- Holy Cross International Justice Office
- Institute Justice Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
- Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
- Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
- Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate - Justice, Peace/integrity of Creation Office, USA
- NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
- Presbyterian Church, (USA), Washington Office
- Quixote Center/Quest for Peace
- Sisters of the Holy Cross, Notre Dame, Indiana
- Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Justice and Peace Network