

**Statement of Citizens Trade Campaign on the Congressional Vote
to Remove the Colombia Agreement from the Fast Track Timeline**

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CTC Supports Reasserting Congressional Authority Over Trade
Faith, Farm and Environmental Groups Join Unions in Opposition to Colombia FTA

Washington D.C. – The unprecedented action of the President to send the Colombia FTA to Congress, over the leadership's opposition, was an arrogant display of disdain for Congress' Constitutional role regarding U.S. trade policy.

We commend House Speaker Pelosi in reasserting Congressional authority over trade by removing Fast Track treatment from the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Citizens Trade Campaign has always opposed the seriously flawed Fast Track procedure, and we are pleased that Democratic Leadership has exerted its rightful constitutional authority over trade.

CTC member groups are strongly united against the Colombia Agreement, along with hundreds – if not thousands – of other organizations across America. Not one U.S. labor, environmental, faith or consumer group has endorsed the Colombia FTA.

While all of our CTC organizations support trade, and want to see fair agreements pass in the future, we also know that trade and investment are not ends unto themselves. Trade agreements must be designed to achieve other societal goals such as fair wages, economic justice, human rights, healthy communities, and a sound environment. The economy exists to help people, not the other way around.

Faith and religious organizations have led the charge against this agreement because of violent human rights abuses in Colombia. “The Colombia ‘free trade’ model is the antithesis of what’s needed to guarantee basic human rights and to overcome poverty,” said Mark Harrison, Director of the Peace with Justice Program at United Methodist General Board of Church and Society. “Faith leaders stand together with Afro-Colombians, unionists, indigenous leaders, human rights and environmental groups who are unified in opposition to the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.”

Farming organizations echoed their opposition. "America's farmers and ranchers produce the safest, most abundant, most affordable food supply in the world," said National Farmers Union President Tom Buis. "Colombia is not required to meet our high environmental, health and safety standards, leaving American producers at a disadvantage without a level playing field. This agreement is another step in the wrong direction."

Environmental groups are also unified in opposition. "Given the egregious human rights abuses in Colombia, including extreme antiunion violence, we stand in solidarity with our friends in labor to oppose the Colombia FTA," stated Brent Blackwelder, President of Friends of the Earth.

The United States should not be entering a trade deal with a country where over 2,500 unionists have been murdered since 1986, including more than 400 during the administration of President Alvaro Uribe. Seventeen trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia during 2008 – a rate of over one a week. The murder toll for Colombian trade unionists this year is higher than last year at this time. By the end of last year, thirty-nine unionists had been murdered, eleven were victims of attempted murder, and 224 received threats. By choosing to push this particular trade agreement at this time, the Bush Administration indicated that it wants a political election year battle, rather than bi-partisan cooperation on trade.

We know Congress and the Administration have a responsibility to pass legislative priorities, but other policy issues should never be tied to the consideration of the Colombia FTA. Our field staff work within 16 states, and our organizations work across the entire country. If the Colombia Free Trade Agreement is brought up for a vote, CTC will leverage all of our resources to ensure that it is defeated by Congress.

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Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, family farm, faith, and labor groups working for trade policy that reflects the interests of the majority of working people. Members include Friends of the Earth, United Steelworkers of America, Americans for Democratic Action, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, National Farmers Union, International Association of Machinists, Public Citizen, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, National Family Farm Coalition, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, Communications Workers of America, UNITE-HERE, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, IATP Action, United Students Against Sweatshops, the Western Organization of Resource Councils, as well as regional, state, and city-based coalitions, organizations, and activists throughout the United States. For more information about trade, call CTC at (202) 494-8826 or email Andy Gussert at agussert@citizenstrade.org.

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Citizens Trade Campaign is a coalition of labor, environmental religious, family farm, and consumer organizations united in the pursuit of social and environmental justice in trade policy