

Citizens Trade Campaign

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U.S. Seeks Trade and Investment Agreement With Panama

With FTAA Stalled, U.S. Engages in NAFTA Extension Piece by Piece

WASHINGTON – The Bush Administration has announced it will begin trade negotiations with Panama today in the hopes of completing a bilateral “free trade agreement” (FTA). The negotiations represent the latest attempt to expand NAFTA further into Latin America. A Panama FTA would complement the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic that the Administration finished negotiating last year.

CAFTA is facing growing opposition in the U.S. Congress, and talks for a proposed “Free Trade Area of the Americas” (FTAA) that would encompass every country in Latin America and the Caribbean except Cuba have been stalled for months. The Bush Administration has also announced plans to begin negotiations for a “free trade” agreement with Colombia next month.

“Like CAFTA, the Panama FTA is just a Trojan horse for the stalled FTAA” said Larry Weiss, Executive Director of Citizens Trade Campaign. **“Many Latin American countries reject the NAFTA model and refuse to go along with the Bush Administration’s plans to extend that model throughout the hemisphere. The administration is employing a backdoor FTAA strategy by twisting the arms of the small and weak governments in the region.”**

“The Administration will likely offer a raw deal to Panama with any trade agreement they negotiate,” said Bill Klinefelter, Political and Legislative Director of the United Steelworkers of America. **“The U.S. Trade Representative showed that labor rights are simply not a concern with the CAFTA negotiations. We have no reason to think they will have any more regard for Panamanian workers.”**

The Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, labor, consumer, family farm, religious, and other civil society groups founded in 1992 during the fight over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). CTC members include the National Family Farm Coalition; United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society; Public Citizen; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; UNITE!; Friends of the Earth; the United Steelworkers of America; United Students Against Sweatshops; Communications Workers of America; Western Organization of Resource Councils; American Lands Alliance; Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment; Defenders of Wildlife, and Americans for Democratic Action, as well as regional, state, and city-based coalitions, organizations, and individual activists throughout the United States.

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