

BACKGROUND FOR RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE CHURCHES' RESPONSES TO PROPOSED TRADE AGREEMENTS

Old Cambridge Baptist Church brings a concern to the annual meeting of TABCOM about international trade agreements the U.S. government is working on. We see your support for this concern as support *for fair trade* and against the unfair arrangements the proposed trade agreements would put in place in the name of free trade.

Two of the trade agreements in development have been labeled Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). "Free" trade seems like a good concept for making sure that everyone everywhere has access to all the world's goods and services. The trouble is, the proposed agreements are not really about "free" trade and certainly are not about "fair" trade. They are developed basically by corporate interests for their benefit and not for the general good of ordinary people and are developed practically in secret at that.

The agreements being worked on are modeled after, and would be extensions of NAFTA, the North America Free Trade Agreement. Despite assurances to the contrary, NAFTA has meant huge shifts in U.S. jobs to countries with low-paid workers, poor working conditions and with lax environmental protections. Recently, parishioners visiting relatives in North Carolina took a taxi ride with someone who previously had a little trucking business before NAFTA gutted the North Carolina textile industry. He was quite upset at how these national policies had destroyed his trucking business. The taxi driver asked, "You know what NAFTA stands for? North America's Future Thrown Away."

The way these trade agreements are framed, they harm ordinary people in the U.S. and in other countries. Two years ago, our church had a Salvadoran visitor who works with rural communities in El Salvador. As Osmin Salinas told the congregation during worship that Sunday, "I want to bring you my concern about these trade agreements and what they mean to my country. They put our peasants and small businesses into competition with the large, multinational corporations. You know who will win."

Please give your prayerful consideration to this resolution concerning the fairness and justice evident in the process of creating international trade agreements; that the process is not fair and open to the public; that churches ought to be aware of national and international actions that may impinge on rights and freedoms of all who live in God's community (locally and internationally); that public comment be made to our government and religious leaders concerning the process and results of such agreements; that churches and members ought to be socially responsible in how they make purchases.