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Religious orders oppose trade pact

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The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is encouraging the 26,000 women and men religious of Canada to help battle the Free Trade Area of the Americas, scheduled to be signed and implemented in January 2005.

In a document sent to the major superiors of religious orders in Canada on Oct. 10, the CRC says opposition is mounting to the agreements that will create a free-trade area in the Americas and the Caribbean.

"This opposition will become more evident as the harmful and negative consequences become clearer for all the people who live in the Americas," it said. "At stake: human rights, the common good, and the environment."

The CRC noted that during the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, Archbishop Maurice Couture, on behalf of the Canadian bishops, denounced the G-8's "neo-liberal" approach in talks regarding the World Trade Organization, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

"Instead of creating greater prosperity in Mexico, NAFTA has only led to more people living in poverty and exclusion, said the CRC, citing the maquiladoras, which it called "the sweatshops of northern Mexico."

The organization urged members to sign the petition of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative. The petition campaign, which ends Oct. 31, is aimed at persuading the federal government to stop negotiations on the FTAA.