

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE CLAI: NICARAGUA, COSTA RICA AND PANAMA

Secretaría Regional para Mesoamérica del Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias
Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Costa Rica
Misión Luterana Centroamericana
Iglesia Luterana Costarricense
Iglesia Episcopal de Costa Rica
Seminario Teológico Bautista en Costa Rica
Iglesia Misión Cristiana de Nicaragua
Iglesia Metodista Wesleyana Costarricense
Iglesia Luterana de Nicaragua "Fe y Esperanza"
Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana Costarricense
Comunidad Emaús
Iglesia Episcopal de Panamá
Iglesia Evangélica Metodista de Panamá
Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana
Centro de Amigos para la Paz

We, the representatives of the churches of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama which are members of the Council of Churches of Latin America (CLAI), have met at the Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana (UBL) in Cedros de Montes de Oca, San José, Costa Rica, on July 6-8, 2004, to discuss the *Free Trade Agreements and their Implications for the Churches of the Mesoamerican Sub-Region*, and have reflected on the social, economic, political, ecological, and cultural crises in our towns.

The presence of free trade agreements (FTAs) in Latin America and the Caribbean has been incompatible with human development. Such is the case in Mexico, where, ten years after the signing of NAFTA, there have been disastrous results: an unequal balance of powers, a decrease in production subsidiaries, the collapse of food production autonomy, a strong decrease in the minimum wage, and other side effects.

In the light of the gospel and our pastoral experience that has allowed us to guide and represent our communities, we affirm that:

-Every human institution, including those attributed to God, is and should be for the development of life and not to the contrary; and what does not contribute to human development is not Christian nor desirable.

-The concept of exclusion is foreign to the spirit of the Gospel. In the vision of the Kingdom of God, power is given to serve especially those who most need help, and not to accumulate more power. As such, an economic system that is not capable of nourishing the entirety of the population under its care and that doesn't have mechanisms of self-correction cannot be legitimized; and goes against the justice of the Kingdom of God.

Considering these theological foundations, we denounce the Free Trade Agreement between Central America and the United States, because:

- The FTA lacks transparency the participation as much of the social sectors (workers, women, indigenous people, and those of African descent, among other groups) as of the communities of Central America and the United States.
- The FTA accelerates impoverishment.
- The FTA marginalizes large sectors of society.
- The FTA increases the earnings of multinational corporations.
- The FTA is a means of the multinationals to gain political, economic, and environmental domination of other countries.
- The FTA does not promote equal trade opportunities.
- The FTA gradually eliminates the access of social security institutions to generic medicines.
- The FTA undermines national juridical sovereignty by overriding the Constitutions of the signed countries.
- The FTA aggravates competition between the workers of the signed countries.
- It is not true that the best way of creating employment is through foreign enterprises, because the social cost is larger than the generation of employment.
- The FTA does not eliminate the subsidiary system for agricultural corporations in the U.S., nor promote mechanisms to guarantee the survival of Central American farmers.
- The FTA promotes the irrational exploitation of natural resources, which puts the environment at risk. It does not provide effective mechanisms of controlling contamination.

For all of the above reasons, we urge the churches and the civil societies of our countries to unite with us in common action, committing ourselves to:

1. INFORM OUR COMMUNITIES:

- By taking advantage of existing mechanisms
- By inviting popular leaders to discuss the FTA
- By creating spaces for sermons, analyses, and studies of the social situation and the implications of the FTA through our spirituality and ideology (which is supportive of life, justice, and peace).

2. ENCOURAGE:

- Unity between the popular and the ecclesiastic movements in order to raise awareness and mobilize communities in the search for fair alternatives to the FTA, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP).
- Communication networks between ecclesiastic and civil groups that oppose the FTA on a regional level.

- Alliances between organizations that promote alternatives for sustainable human development.
- 3. ENFORCE AND SUPPORT NATIONAL PRODUCTION:**
- By uniting the efforts of the popular and ecclesiastic movements in organizing a campaign for the consumption of alternative food sources produced by independent companies and cooperatives in our countries that have democratic and ecological ideals.
 - By protesting against the large exporters and multinationals that support the FTA through a “no consumption” campaign.
- 4. DEFEND:**
- The State of Law, national sovereignty, and natural resources by raising awareness about the legal, political, and economic strategies of the multinationals and the Central American governments that promote constitutional reforms which injure the institutions of public service and the rights of their citizens.
- 5. SUPPORT POPULAR OPPOSITION TO THE FTA:**
- With the physical presence of leaders, clergy, and congregations in the popular manifestations against the FTA.
 - By elaborating a letter campaign directed to government representatives who are against the FTA.
 - By forming a committee for monitoring activities related to the FTA in each nation of the CLAI region.
- 6. APPEAL TO THE CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA:**
- By informing them about the consequences of the FTA in their communities, through visits, campaigns, brochures, letters, and communications through the CNI-USA.

In light of all of the above, we urgently appeal to our brothers and sisters in the churches of the United States: please insist of your congregations and directly of the U.S. Congress that they denounce the CAFTA. This agreement does not even give our communities the minimum conditions of justice and equality. We ask you to urge your representatives in Congress to vote against the CAFTA.

**MAY THE PEACE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE, THE PROTECTION OF THE
SON
AND THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU**

Cedros de Montes de Oca, San José, Costa Rica, July 8, 2004.

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