



## International Labor Rights Fund

733 15th Street, NW, Suite 920, Washington, DC 20005

November 8, 2005

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*Via fax: 202-395-4549*

Ambassador Robert Portman  
United States Trade Representative  
Office of the United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Portman:

The International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF), joined by the organizations identified below, write to express our grave concern regarding a worker rights issue that has arisen during the ongoing U.S.-Andean Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the United States, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

It has come to our attention that during these negotiations, the Andean countries have proposed to include the elimination of employment and workplace discrimination to the list of internationally-recognized worker rights identified in the trade agreement. However, we understand that the United States has refused to accept this proposal.

We urge you to reconsider this position. We believe that it is wrong and misguided for the United States to resist the efforts of the Andean countries to strengthen non-discrimination provisions in the U.S.-Andean Free Trade Agreement, particularly as the elimination of workplace discrimination is one of the four core labor rights identified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The United States adopted the Declaration with full support in 1998.

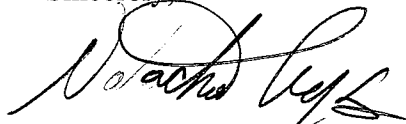
We note the importance of such an anti-discrimination provision in affording labor rights protections to women workers in the export sectors within the Andean countries, and cite in particular the example of the cut flower industry. Nearly all the roses and carnations sold in the United States now originate in the Andean countries. Reports from Colombian and Ecuadorian research groups indicate that there are 80,000 women working in the Colombian flower industry, representing seventy percent of the workers in the industry. In Ecuador, nearly 70 percent of flower workers are women.

In a study conducted earlier this year through ILRF's Rights For Working Women Campaign, we learned that 55% of women workers in Ecuador have suffered from some form of sexual harassment,

including being forced to have sexual intercourse with a co-worker or supervisor and being sexually attacked. There is little protection from these atrocities and consequently an extremely small number of cases are reported and sanctioned. Alongside these abuses, women are frequently denied basic rights such as maternity leave and proper minimum and overtime pay.

Workers, and particularly women workers, who are the supposed beneficiaries of the Andean Free Trade Agreement, deserve at least the basic worker rights protections advocated by their own governments. The United States government's failure to accept the proposal to include discrimination as a component of the labor rights clause is unconscionable and would represent a significant step backwards for this Administration. Therefore, we as concerned organizations working to promote human and labor rights urge you again to accept this proposal by the Andean countries.

Sincerely,



Natacha Thys, Project Director  
ILRF Rights for Working Women Campaign

Alliance for Responsible Trade

Washington Office for Latin America

Global Exchange

US Nicaragua Friendship Office

Center of Concern (Global Women's Project)

Utica Citizens in Action

The Development Gap

Citizens Trade Campaign

Border Ecology