

INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT

✠ A WASHINGTON-BASED WORKING GROUP WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM A RANGE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTED TO ASSERTING A STRONGER PRESENCE OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN PUBLIC POLICY DISCUSSIONS ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT✠
1225 Otis Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017 • Tel: 202.635.2757 x 134 • Fax: 202.832.9494 • Email: iwg@coc.org

March 27, 2007

Dear Representative:

We write as religious institutions and faith-based organizations to ask that you oppose legislation granting “fast track” Trade Promotion Authority (TPA).

As religious organizations with global relationships and concerns, we affirm the importance of international trade in an interdependent world. Our concern is for the character and quality of these trade relationships.

- TPA advances global trade rules driven by narrow commercial interests that have often resulted in growing inequality, destruction of livelihoods, increasing deterioration in the health and well-being of people living in poverty, and environmental devastation in both the U.S. and abroad. Our international partners in Latin America, Africa and Asia tell us that, contrary to claims made by “free trade” advocates, trade liberalization in the form promoted by the U.S. government is causing tremendous harm to impoverished communities around the world.
- Because there is not open debate and an opportunity for citizen input and Congressional involvement in trade policies before these agreements go to Congress, the democratic process is undermined by TPA legislation. Full public participation is needed to create a moral and legal framework for trade agreements.

For these reasons, we call on Congress to put an end to Trade Promotion Authority and begin a conversation about a new framework that will make U.S. trade policy congruent with our international humanitarian commitments in areas such as health, education and poverty alleviation, as well as the our nation’s interest in the emergence of more secure and stable world

The examples of inconsistencies and short-sightedness in U.S. trade policies are all too numerous. It is unconscionable, for example, that in bilateral agreements, our trade negotiators press for stricter patent protections on medicines above World Trade Organization (WTO) standards, making it even harder for developing countries to treat AIDS, malaria and other life-threatening illnesses. It does not make sense to decimate local agricultural production in Mexico (over 1 million corn farmers were driven off their lands as a result of the inflow of subsidized U.S. corn with the North American Free Trade Agreement) and then complain about illegal immigration.

We urge you to create a new framework for trade that includes the following elements:

- Ensure that trade agreements are formulated with full democratic accountability and citizen participation both in the United States and U.S. trading partners.
- Put people first in trade negotiations, placing priority on improving the lives, food security, health and livelihoods of ordinary people – workers and farmers -- in the U.S. and developing countries.
- Require (pre and post) country impact evaluations to assess the effects of provisions in the trade

agreement on key issues such as, poverty eradication, job growth, food security and the categories of the UNDP Human Development indicators.

- Safeguard the livelihoods of workers and family farmers in the U.S. and developing countries -- helping them to survive and flourish -- rather than destroying their jobs and way of life.
- Fully respect the right of developing countries to safeguard their own domestic economies through the sovereign implementation of trade policies, regulations and mechanisms, which promote and protect their own small-holder farmers, vulnerable workers, and homegrown manufacturers.
- Strike a balance between creating a predictable structure for international trade and preserving the policy space necessary for national governments to foster and secure economic, social and human development for all their citizens.
- Exclude provisions that require the liberalization or deregulation of essential public service, such as water, health care and education.
- Place no greater intellectual property rights restrictions on the manufacture, import or use of generic medicines than are already incorporated into existing WTO rules.

Crafting trade policy to bolster global humanitarian goals can improve Americans' well being too. The 12-year track record of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) offers strong evidence of how bad trade policy hurts people living on the economic edge in both the United States and developing countries.

By ending TPA Congress will create the opportunity to expand the goals of U.S. trade policy beyond narrow commercial interests. A wise and effective trade framework would preserve Congress' constitutional authority over international commerce and serve America's national security and long-term interest in global stability and authentic human security. Trade is not an end in itself. It's time to place trade in the service of the common good for people here and abroad.

Thank you.

This letter is endorsed by the following members of the Interfaith Working Group:

Center of Concern
Church World Service
Columban Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office (USA)
Common Global Ministries, United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) Justice and Peace Office
Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Justice Peace/Integrity of Creation Office
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Quixote Center
SHARE Foundation
Sisters of the Holy Cross Congregation Justice Committee
United Methodist Church Board of Church and Society
Washington Office on Africa