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Thursday, January 18, 2007

RE: LULAC Urges Renegotiation of Core Text of Peru and Colombia FTAs

Dear Chairman Rangel:

LULAC is concerned about the lack of enforceable labor provisions in the U.S.-Peru and U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreements. However, addressing the deficiencies in the labor rules in the trade agreements is not sufficient. I would like to draw your attention to the following additional concerns raised in the attached resolution against the Peru-U.S. and the Colombia-U.S. FTAs, approved unanimously at the national LULAC convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on July 1, 2006:

- The U.S.-Peru and Colombia agreements include the same foreign investor rights modeled after NAFTA that allow foreign corporations to bring actions against governments that pass environmental laws that might reduce corporate profits, despite the fact that new environmental laws are desperately needed in the Andean countries to allay the rapid destruction of the upper Amazon basin, which is the most biodiverse area on the planet.
- Government officials, producer associations, and religious leaders in the Andean region have strongly warned that the agricultural rules included in the new agreements would push hundreds of thousands of small farmers into bankruptcy – as happened in Mexico after the passage of NAFTA – and that the pressure to feed their families would force these farmers to grow more coca for cocaine production or join illegal armed groups, leading to an increase in violence and insecurity in the region.
- LULAC joined the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in opposition to the Central America Free Trade Agreement, on which the U.S.-Peru and U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreements are based, and none of the problems cited by LULAC with regards to CAFTA—from labor and environmental standards to agricultural provisions to investor rules—have been resolved in the texts of the new agreements

For these and all of the reasons detailed in the resolution, I urge you on behalf of LULAC to address the U.S-Peru and U.S.-Colombia FTAs beyond the labor provisions, and to make sure that all of these concerns are addressed effectively in the core text of the agreements, as opposed to in unenforceable side letters.

Sincerely,

Rosa Rosales
National LULAC President



League of United Latin American Citizens

RESOLUTION: REJECT NEW TRADE AGREEMENTS WITH PERU AND COLOMBIA

WHEREAS, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has caused net job losses in every U.S. state and the District of Columbia, for a combined total of over one million lost U.S. jobs, including almost 40,000 lost jobs in Florida alone; and

WHEREAS, NAFTA also has a proven record of negative impacts in Mexico, as under NAFTA the median industrial wage has lost ten percent of its value and more than 1.3 million Mexican farmers have lost their livelihood and migrated north to the cities and to the borders looking for jobs in the maquiladoras; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress is currently considering urgently needed immigration reform policies to address the status of millions of undocumented workers in the United States, but has not included in the discussion any recognition of the fact that undocumented migration to the U.S. from Mexico has more than doubled since NAFTA was enacted, not to mention the fact that increased U.S. border policing and militarization since NAFTA has led to more than 2,700 deaths from failed border crossing in desperate attempts to seek the American dream; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), instead of investigating ways to fix the deeply troubling problems with NAFTA, continues to push for its unmodified expansion, including through the passage, by a 1 vote margin last July 27, 2005, of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); and

WHEREAS, the USTR has negotiated new trade agreements modeled on the NAFTA and CAFTA agreements with the South American countries of Peru and Colombia; and

WHEREAS, like NAFTA and CAFTA, these new agreements fail to include adequate enforcement for violations of internationally recognized labor and environmental standards; and

WHEREAS, this failure to include enforceable international labor standards comes despite:

- The fact that over 2,000 labor union members have been assassinated in Colombia since 1990, including 75 in 2005 alone, and the violence continues as Mr. Daniel Cortez, a member of the Sintraelec electrical workers union was shot to death by armed assailants on April 2, 2006 for his union organizing activities; and
- The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the U.S. State Department have published reports of extensive child labor practices in Peru; and
- Anti-union labor regulations that have led to a severe decline in unionization rates, so that now the number of private-sector unionized workers in Peru is only one-sixth of what it was twenty years ago; and
- President Alejandro Toledo's public statements last year that he would *support* a trade agreement that included an enforceable commitment to adopt and comply with ILO core labor standards—a step that was immediately rejected by House Republican chair of the Ways and Means Committee Bill Thomas,

WHEREAS, The U.S.-Peru and Colombia agreements include the same foreign investor rights modeled after NAFTA that allow foreign corporations to bring actions against governments that pass environmental laws that might reduce corporate profits, desire the fact that new environmental laws are desperately needed in the Andean countries to allay the rapid destruction of the upper Amazon basin, which is the most biodiverse area on the planet; and

WHEREAS, well-documented reports from the Colombian government, as well as statements from Peruvian farm organizations and religious leaders express certainty that the agricultural rules included in the new agreements will push hundreds of thousands of small farmers into bankruptcy—as happened in Mexico after NAFTA—and that the pressure to feed their families would force these farmers to grow more coca for cocaine production or join illegal armed groups, leading to an increase in violence and insecurity in the regions; and

WHEREAS, LULAC joined the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in opposition to the Central America Free Trade Agreement, on which the U.S.-Peru and U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreements are based, and none of the problems cited by LULAC with regards to CAFTA—from labor and environmental standards to agricultural provisions to investor rules—have been resolved in the texts of the new agreements; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That LULAC calls upon our national, state-level organizations and local chapters to educate members about the negative impacts of NAFTA and CAFTA and the threat that the U.S.-Peru and U.S.-Colombia free trade agreements pose to workers, health and prosperity and that LULAC supports the efforts of fair trade advocates to defeat passage of these agreements; and be it finally resolved that LULAC urges members of congress to reject the U.S.-Peru and U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreements and work for fair trade agreements that raise the standards of living for labor and protects our environmental standards.

Rosa Rosales
LULAC National President
Approved this 21st day of May 2006.