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BRAZIL

FTAA still at an impasse

No progress was made in the latest regional trade consultations as Brazil and the U.S. failed to set a date to reinstate the 34-country negotiations.

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The latest attempt by Brazil and the United States to bridge the gap over the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas ended Tuesday with scant progress toward an agreement on the scope of negotiations.

A joint statement by the Brazilian and U.S. co-chairs of the Trade Negotiations Committee for the regional trade talks made no mention of a date to reconvene a full session of the Trade Negotiations Committee. Officials have delayed restarting this crucial step in the regional trade talks three times already this year.

U.S. Deputy Trade Representative Peter Allgeier and his Brazilian counterpart, Adhemar Bahadian, met on Friday and Monday in Washington as part of the continuing effort to establish the minimum level of commitment for each participating government that wants to benefit from lower tariffs and other parts of the proposed accord.

Brazil has balked at putting stronger intellectual-property rights protection, access to some of its service industries and investment rules on the table unless Washington increases access to the U.S. agricultural market. Washington insists that many farm issues can only be discussed in world trade talks, not on the FTAA level.

The statement said the negotiators had agreed there was "a need to continue informal consultations" and that they would "meet again later in May in order to make further progress in the FTAA negotiations."

Besides establishing "a balanced set of rights and obligations" for each country participating in the FTAA process, negotiators must agree on how to negotiate accords among small groups of nations.

The Washington meeting was held just after the World Trade Organization issued a preliminary ruling siding with Brazil against U.S. subsidies for cotton growers.

The delays by the Trade Negotiations Committee in completing procedures to finish the negotiations have raised doubts as to whether negotiators can meet the year-end deadline for reaching a FTAA accord.

The United States, meanwhile, has launched a series of trade negotiations with individual countries around the world. On Monday, Washington announced the start of talks with Ecuador and Peru.