



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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July 19, 2013

The Honorable Michael Froman
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Froman:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), please accept our heartfelt congratulations on your recent confirmation as United States Trade Representative. The Conference of Bishops and our Committees in particular have long valued an effective working relationship with the distinguished agency that you will now lead.

As the Administration prepares to make recommendations to Congress on the negotiation of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, as well as possible agreements with the European Union and other trading partners, we offer a moral framework for examining such agreements. The USCCB does not take specific positions for or against particular trade agreements; rather we offer principles that defend human life and dignity, protect the environment and public health, and promote justice and peace in our world.

Pope Francis, in connection with the recent G-8 summit, wrote, “[T]he goal of economics and politics is to serve humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable wherever they may be, even in their mothers’ wombs. Every economic and political theory or action must set about providing each inhabitant of the planet with the minimum wherewithal to live in dignity and freedom, with the possibility of supporting a family, educating children, praising God and developing one’s own human potential. This is the main thing; in the absence of such a vision, all economic activity is meaningless.”¹

These concerns have practical implications in the following key areas:

- **Labor Protections.** The Church teaches work has inherent dignity. We support the protection of worker rights, including the right to organize, as well as compliance with internationally-agreed worker standards. Our concern with job loss in our own urban and rural communities requires that any agreement be accompanied by firm commitments to help U.S. workers, as well as their families and communities, cope with both the social and financial strain of dislocation that free trade might bring about. Similarly, our concern extends to the human rights implications that any U.S. action can have for the people of other countries, especially developing nations. In particular, this requires special attention devoted to safe working conditions, reasonable work hours, time off, living family wages and other recognized social benefits. This also demands commitments to provide aid, either directly or through international institutions, to displaced workers and their families in countries affected by the agreements.
- **Indigenous People.** Catholic bishops throughout the world minister extensively among indigenous groups. Out of respect for their cultural heritages and in view of their economic development, we hope that the United States will give careful attention to requirements that commercial agreements honor the patrimony of these indigenous communities, and share equitably the benefits of any commerce with groups in which traditional knowledge and natural resources originated.
- **Migration.** Our Church has long defended the right of people to migrate when conditions in their home countries prevent them from providing for themselves and their families. If migration is to be reduced, we

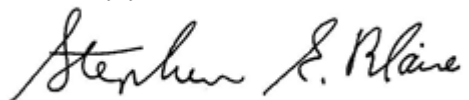
¹ Pope Francis, Letter to the Right Honorable David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, June 17, 2013.

believe that it must be done through alleviation of the conditions that impel people to leave their homelands. Any trade or investment agreement should be designed in a way that would assure a reduction in the need to emigrate.

- **Agriculture.** Our brother bishops at home and abroad, along with other partners with whom we work, have expressed grave fears about the vulnerability of small agricultural producers when confronted with competition by U.S. agricultural products that enjoy a notable advantage due to U.S. government policies. Any agreement should promote the agricultural sector of developing countries and protect those who live in rural areas.
- **Sustainable Development and Care for Creation.** Increasing global economic integration holds potential benefits for all participants, but it should do more than simply regulate trade and investment. The essential link between preservation of the environment and sustainable human development requires giving priority attention to protecting the environment and health of communities, including assistance to poor countries that often lack sufficient technical knowledge or resources to maintain a safe environment. Agreements should include relieving the crushing burden of external debt held by poor countries and support development which increases self-reliance and broad participation in economic decision-making.
- **Intellectual Property Rights.** We are also concerned about intellectual property rights provisions with regard to pharmaceuticals. The Church locates intellectual property rights within the broader framework of the common good and believes these rights should be balanced with the needs of the poor.
- **Dispute Resolution Mechanisms.** We question the merits of requiring sovereign parties to international treaties to agree to binding international arbitration as the forum for dispute resolution. Such a path may lead to unfair advantages for commercial interests willing to exploit the rules of the arbitral system and may result in the weakening of important environmental, labor, and human rights standards.
- **Fast Track Authority.** We understand the argument that fast track authority is necessary for effective trade negotiations. Our belief is that the primary benefit of economic exchange must be the improvement of living standards, particularly of poor and vulnerable workers and their families. While we have no position on the fast-track procedure as such, we are concerned about the moral and human implications of the limits and parameters that may be set in the pending legislation for the rapid negotiation of such specific agreements, and their potential effect on human life, human dignity and the right of people to participate in decisions that impact them.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, stated, “*The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly--not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centered*” (no. 45). Our teaching puts people--especially the poorest and most vulnerable--first. As pastors and teachers in a global Church, our experience of the impact of trade and other aspects of economic integration, their possibilities and perils, is both broad and deep. We look forward to discussing these matters with you, and to participating in a consideration of the terms of the TPP and related international trade agreements in an open, transparent, and cooperative manner.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace