



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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Representative Dave Camp
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Sander Levin
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Camp and Congressman Levin:

I am writing on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) regarding the Free trade Agreements (FTAs) which Congress may consider in the near future. While I address the three agreements in general, I focus mainly on the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia because of the possible impact of the agreement on the complex situation in Colombia.

The U. S. Bishops' Conference addresses the moral and human dimensions of trade policy because of trade's potential to promote integral human development in the poorest countries and among the poorest communities around the world. As pastors and teachers in a global Church, our experience of the impacts of trade and other aspects of economic integration, their possibilities and perils, is both broad and deep. The fostering of stronger economic relationships and growth is a shared priority. Trade should also play an essential role in reducing poverty and conflict by helping to shape more just domestic and international legal and commercial frameworks.

The Bishops' Conference does not take specific positions for or against particular trade agreements. Rather we offer a moral framework for examining such agreements. As 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 and experience puts people—especially the poorest and most vulnerable—first. Our moral vision urges strong and enforceable protections for workers and the environment, the provision of access to technology and knowledge for those at the margins of society, and ways to ensure that the rural poor are not displaced and left without a livelihood.

The ability of small farmers to adapt to market forces and develop their farming operations in ways that maintain their livelihoods and the stability of their communities should be enhanced, not undermined, through increased trade opportunities. In Colombia, well over four million people are currently displaced due to the decades-old conflict which greatly affects the rural areas. Colombia now has the highest number of internally displaced people in the world. Further displacement exacerbated by inadequate trade agreement provisions will hurt the poorest people in Colombia's rural areas. Pope Benedict XVI maintains: "Just and equitable international trade in agricultural goods can be beneficial to everyone, both to suppliers and to customers" (*Caritas in Veritate*, No. 58). We ask the Administration and the Congress to give careful consideration to how the rural poor in Colombia would be impacted by a trade agreement and how to ensure they are adequately protected and assisted.

Rural desperation could lead to increased coca production with dire consequences not only for Colombia, but also for the United States and the entire region. Taking steps to mitigate the

considerable risks and to stabilize the livelihoods of small agricultural producers is consistent with the U.S. goal of reducing the illegal production of coca and drug trafficking in the Andean region. Helping to provide ways for Columbian farmers to grow and export other crops should be part of this goal. As Pope Benedict notes: “[T]here are those who fear the effects of competition through the importation of products — normally agricultural products — from economically poor countries. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that for such countries, the possibility of marketing their products is very often what guarantees their survival in both the short and long term” (*Caritas in Veritate*, No. 58).

Death threats and assassinations against human rights defenders (including some members of the Church) and labor leaders in Colombia have been far too common in the last few years. There have been improvements in protection efforts, but more is needed to overcome a sense of impunity. The free trade agreement should not lead to a deepening of labor uncertainty and must promote the creation of a climate in which workers’ rights are upheld. There seems to be a welcome initiative in Colombia to bring about greater justice for victims of the conflict and those who have been displaced. The Administration and Congress should support the government of Colombia in this effort and ensure that the trade agreement promotes greater justice for the victims and increased economic opportunities for the displaced.

Extractive industries often severely and negatively impact the rural communities in which most projects are located. Effective environmental standards require serious attention in trade agreements. Colombia has a booming palm-oil industry and an emerging mining industry that can place the country on better ground for economic development using energy and mining as economic engines. Environmental protection laws need to be strengthened and more resources need to be devoted to ensuring that environmental laws and standards are properly respected. Trade agreements should support, not undermine, environmental protections, local communities and provide a more level playing field for economic competition.

Our Conference’s priorities flow from a moral commitment to defend the lives, rights and dignity of those who are most vulnerable—and have most to gain from a just and effective trade agreement. With good wishes for your efforts to make trade work for all, especially “the least of these,” I remain,

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Cc: Representative Kevin Brady, Chairman, House Subcommittee on Trade
Representative Jim McDermott, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Trade