



April 10, 2006

Ambassador Rob Portman
U.S. Trade Representative
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ambassador Portman:

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services, we are writing to urge you to support meaningful trade preferences for Haiti similar to those granted to poor African countries by the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

During an Oval Office meeting with President Bush in December 2005, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, urged the President to move quickly to support trade preference legislation for Haiti. Since then, Haiti has taken important electoral steps towards a more open and democratic society. Recently, President-elect Préval visited Washington, as well as the United Nations Headquarters in New York, to begin strengthening the bonds of solidarity between Haiti and the international community. Given our historical ties with the Haitian people, the United States has a particular obligation to use all means possible in assisting Haiti to continue on the path of political stability and integral human development. We were encouraged that you met with Mr. Préval to discuss the situation in Haiti and to hear first hand how AGOA-like trade preferences are a necessary next step in Haiti's on-going economic and political development.

Progress on the political front can be secured only if there is genuine progress in achieving a decent living for the masses of the Haitian people. This in turn depends heavily on foreign investment so that, for example, the once vibrant apparel industry might return or at least not continue to disappear. While USCCB supports the existing United States-Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act that includes duty-free access for Haitian exports to the United States, such preferences are insufficient in stimulating a meaningful investment climate for Haitian industry. These benefits are further jeopardized by the recent passage of the US-Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement.

We were encouraged last year with efforts in both houses of Congress to provide for some trade preference legislation for Haiti. However, we were disappointed that the first session of the 109th Congress ended without any of the bills being brought forward for floor consideration. We are also disappointed that the Administration has not formally supported an AGOA-like trade preference package for Haiti. We urge you to work with Congress to pass meaningful trade preferences as a matter of urgency.

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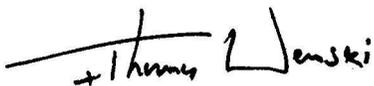
Recently, key Members of Congress including Chairman Thomas and Ranking Member Rangel of the House Ways and Means Committee, as well as Trade Sub-committee Chairman Shaw, have lent their support to passage of AGOA-like trade preference legislation for Haiti. In the Senate, similar legislation sponsored by Senator DeWine has garnered 19 co-sponsors. The Catholic Church in the United States and Haiti are fully supportive of such legislation and will make every effort to secure the necessary support for this legislation. What is needed is a determined effort from the Office of the United States Trade Representative to ensure passage of AGOA-like trade preferences.

The Haitian bishops tell us that their people are longing for the opportunity to work and to build a solid future for themselves and their children. During a joint USCCB and CRS visit last summer, many Haitians expressed their concern about their country's long-term political and economic recovery, including leaders in the business community, the interim Prime Minister, members of the *Conseil des Sages* and representatives of the principal political parties. All agreed that support for the struggling apparel industry is essential for the Haitian economy to grow.

The Church here is ready to offer its full support for trade preferences for Haiti. Many parish communities across the United States that are twinned with Haitian parishes are watching to see how those in leadership are prepared to convert words of solidarity into concrete action. Catholic Relief Services is the largest private voluntary organization that currently operates in Haiti. From our work among some of the poorest and more vulnerable people in the hemisphere, we know first hand the need for the type of economic stimulation that free and fair trade can offer.

We urge you to work with all those concerned for the future prosperity of Haiti to ensure prompt passage of AGOA-like trade preferences. At a time when protectionist tendencies seem to prevail, and the importance of free and fair trade to a secure and peaceful world is disparaged by so many, we look forward to working with you to explore further measures that offer hope for the long-term stability that Haiti's people so desperately need and truly deserve. U.S. trade policy must express solidarity with those in need, while fostering economic growth and human development. Otherwise the moral foundation of a just trading is seriously weakened.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy



Ken Hackett
President, Catholic Relief Services