



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development Committee on International Justice and Peace

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January 26, 2015

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Chair
Senate Committee on Finance
104 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sander M. Levin
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways and Means
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hatch, Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Wyden, and Ranking Member Levin:

As a new Congress convenes, you may consider legislation relating to the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements. History provides evidence that increased trade and investment can be truly beneficial, provided that they are structured in a way that helps to reduce, not exacerbate, inequality or injustice. History also teaches that the parameters set in trade promotion authority legislation for the negotiation of specific agreements may not sufficiently protect against potential serious moral and human implications. Trade policies must be grounded in people-centered ethical criteria, in pursuit of the common good for our nation and people around the world. Any legislation pertaining to the negotiation or implementation of trade agreements must abide by principles which promote and defend human life and dignity, protect the environment and public health, and promote justice and peace in our world.

Our moral tradition articulates principles to evaluate any proposed trade deal:

- **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 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.
- **Participation.** It is critical the people have a voice in decisions that touch their lives. Human dignity demands transparency and the right of people to participate in decisions that impact them.

Participation has particular application to the negotiation of both trade promotion authority and agreements. They should be pursued in fora and through processes that will assure that voices from affected sectors of society can be heard and that their interests are reflected in whatever agreements emerge.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis notes: “The world wide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption” (no. 55). Pope Emeritus 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.

The USCCB does not take a position for or against particular trade agreements, however 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 stand ready to work with you to ensure that policies abide by these criteria.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace