

Dear Member of Congress,

October 6, 1993

We write to share several concerns as you move toward consideration of the North American Free Trade Agreement. We represent religious bodies whose concerns around trade and trade rules center on their impact on the lives of ordinary citizens and workers--particularly the poor in all three countries. During final negotiation over implementing legislation to complete the NAFTA package, we raise concerns dealing with labor rights, human rights, and environmental dignity, not fully addressed in NAFTA nor in the side agreements.

We unite in pointing to several opportunities for the final NAFTA package now being negotiated between Congress and the Administration to more adequately address several of our concerns. Recognizing the complexities of NAFTA it is difficult for us to take a united position, nevertheless we share reservations about the basic document and disappointment in the failure of the side agreements to correct its weaknesses.

In the short term NAFTA will eliminate border tariffs and trade barriers and allow investment capital, goods and services to move among the three nations. However, we see the present package affirming current economic trends rather than serving as an impetus for change in the three countries. The citizens of all three countries expect treaties of fair trade to insure not only economic security, but also environmental and work place safety and full participation in the social, economic and political life of their nation. We urge Congress to evaluate the NAFTA package, not merely as a trade pact, but as a catalyst for understanding the developmental needs and environmental concerns of all three countries.

Implementation of democratic practices and the guarantee of human rights are critical to the success of North American integration and should be incorporated into both the spirit and the mechanisms of the NAFTA package. Many of the human rights necessary for a just hemispheric integration are embodied in the American Convention on Human Rights, which the United States and Canada have not ratified. Mexico has ratified the convention, but none of the three countries has recognized the authority of the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights.

Broad participation in a fair political process is the basic mechanism by which citizens hold democratic governments accountable in all matters. Our country should not establish such special trade relationships as NAFTA proposes without a demonstrated record of authentic democratic performance. To ensure that the agreed upon labor, environmental and consumer standards will make a difference in the lives of the poor and disenfranchised, we strongly advocate the right of citizens to participate fully in the political process and to demand accountability from their governments.

We are also concerned about the negative tone in the debate regarding Mexico. We believe that cooperative efforts with Mexico might serve to diminish racial backlash due to American fear of job loss to Mexico.

We urge Congress to address the following issues in the implementing legislation:

- Guarantee adjustment assistance for displaced workers to include retraining, expanded unemployment benefits, and adequate relocation allowances.
- Take unilateral initiatives to clean up the US- Mexico border area, particularly in the Maquiladora region, and assess the cost of such efforts to private corporations that engage in transborder activity.
- Require that the Office of the US Trade Representative make public all proceedings and findings of the Labor and Environmental Commissions, as well as other relevant proceedings, promptly.

Our concerns remain with the future welfare of the poor as we enter a time of further economic integration, as well as the impact this agreement will have on the environment. We applaud your efforts in understanding the complexities surrounding NAFTA and thank you for considering these views.

Sincerely,

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