

What You Need to Know

Colombia NAFTA Expansion: Economic and Human Rights Nightmare

The 1994 **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** required the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to adopt numerous policies giving corporations new rights that were used to export good jobs, jack up drug prices, attack food safety and environmental laws, and squeeze farmers and consumers alike. Fifteen years later, we're living the damage caused by the NAFTA model: wages stagnating as prices rise, 3 million U.S. manufacturing jobs killed, and a \$700 billion trade deficit that threatens global economic stability. Mexico also lost factory jobs, as corporations traded Mexico's \$1/hour wages for China's \$0.40/hour wages. Some 1.3 million Mexican *campesinos* lost their livelihoods, and desperate migration to the United States has increased.



The Bush administration hoped to expand this failed NAFTA model to Colombia before leaving office. Colombia's president, who has been linked to right wing paramilitaries, is eager to lock in the new corporate rights included in the pact. Colombia has one of the world's worst human-rights records – including the highest rate of assassination of labor unionists and systematic violence against Afro-Colombians, indigenous people and *campesino* farmers. The Mexican experience has shown Colombian labor and civil society groups what damage a NAFTA-style pact will cause to their country, and have held major protests against the deal.

Despite clear statements from then-candidate Obama opposing the FTA, corporate interests hope to get President Obama to renege on his campaign promises by adopting the Bush hangover agreement as his own. This would be a serious political and policy mistake: after living through the NAFTA era of depressed wages, devastated manufacturing jobs, and gutted environmental and food-safety protections, the American people used the 2006 and 2008 elections to replace 72 NAFTA-supporters in Congress with those who have pledged to fight for fair-trade alternatives. Obama made commitments in the election to turn the page on the failed trade policies of the past. **We must speak up now and tell Obama and Congress to shelve this offensive trade deal.**

As well as helping working people in both nations, stopping the Colombia NAFTA expansion will shape the future debate on trade by sending a clear message: the time has come that Congress can and will overhaul U.S. trade policy so that it meets the interests of working people, safeguards our environment, and promotes democracy – rather than attacking these basic values we all share.

Tell Congress that expanding NAFTA to Colombia is a bad idea

Call the U.S. Capitol Today 202-224-3121 to be connected to your House Representative. Then ask to get transferred to your Senators.

- ❖ Just give your zip code to be connected to your House Representative if you are not sure who he or she is!
- ❖ When you are connected to your representative and senators' offices, ask for the staffer handling trade issues. Tell him or her that you oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.
- ❖ Ask for your Representative and Senators' to communicate their positions **in writing** by email or regular mail.
- ❖ ***They need to hear from you NOW.*** Use a local or personal story of damage from bad trade deals to illustrate your case or use the talking points on the back of this flyer.
- ❖ After you've called, share with us what you were told. This is key to our holding Congress accountable. Contact James Ploeser at Public Citizen at jploeser@citizen.org or (202) 454-5111.

Talking Points on U.S.-Colombia “Free Trade Agreement” (FTA):

More NAFTA would be bad for our economy. With a \$700 billion U.S. trade deficit, and a major U.S. export being our best jobs and manufacturing base, we can't afford any more NAFTA-style trade deals. The Colombia FTA includes **NAFTA's investor protections that encourage corporations to ship U.S. jobs away and push down the wages of jobs staying here.** *We must change this broken trade model!*

There will never be an acceptable U.S. FTA with Colombia. It's impossible to imagine Congress agreeing to a trade agreement with human rights violators Burma or Sudan. We have to make clear that a deal with Colombia is just as outrageous. Nearly 2,700 trade unionists have been killed since 1986 – more than the rest of the world combined. Less than three percent of unionist murders have been prosecuted. Over 480 unionists have been murdered since the current right-wing president, Álvaro Uribe, has been in power. Human-rights groups have documented collusion between the Uribe government and murderous paramilitary groups on these and other issues. And the number of unionists killed in 2008 (49) represented a 25 percent increase over the previous year. The pact's corporate boosters argue that it is critical to U.S. national security – saying it bolsters Colombia against populist governments in the region. This is idiotic: it is precisely the damage caused by NAFTA-style policies that turns people against the U.S. and leads to the economic instability on which populism feeds. Moreover, once we allow brutal regimes permanent access to our market, we lose whatever leverage we might have had to improve human rights.

“The United States is spending billions trying to eradicate the cocaine trade and here we are giving them an incentive to grow more coca.” -Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate and former World Bank Chief Economist on threat of the Colombia FTA.

With an FTA without agricultural protections, rural Colombians “would have no more than three options: migration to the cities or to other countries (especially the United States), working in drug cultivation zones, or affiliating with illegal armed groups.” –Colombian Government's Agriculture Ministry

The Colombia FTA is a threat to regional and international security: The FTA's agricultural rules will devastate small Colombian farmers, just as NAFTA's did in Mexico. Displaced *campesinos* would add to the over 3 million Colombians already uprooted by that country's half-century long civil war. As the Colombian government's own agriculture ministry concluded, the FTA will eliminate 35 percent of the jobs in crucial agriculture sectors like corn, rice, beans and more. *Another genius Bush-era foreign policy: create more instability in a fragile, war-torn region just so big corporations can make extra profits.*

The Colombia FTA endangers the environment – targeting the Amazon, the lungs of the planet. The upper Amazon basin in Colombia is among the most bio-diverse areas on earth, but is also very much at risk. Deforestation, horrific pollution, and health disasters from oil production and mining are widespread already. The special foreign investor privileges in the FTA empowers corporations to pillage the area for timber, mineral and energy resources, and would chill direly needed efforts to protect the Amazon basin. *Deals like the Colombia FTA gut environmental protections.*

The Colombia FTA is a stepping stone to a hemisphere-wide NAFTA called the FTAA which would pose a massive threat to U.S. farmers: The Colombia pact is part of a corporate strategy to pressure more progressive governments in Latin America into reversing opposition to the Free Trade Area of the America (FTAA), and to put the FTAA into effect country-by-country. Even the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that an FTAA would lead to surges of Brazilian and Argentine agribusiness exports of beef, citrus, sugar, soy, and cereals. Export surges from these nations' agribusinesses countries would **seriously undercut U.S. family farmers.** *We need to fix the trade system that has bankrupted American family farmers, not expand it.*

For More Information about the Colombia-U.S. FTA and other bad trade deals, visit www.tradewatch.org

