

Testimony of Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini before the House International Relations
Committee Sub-committee on the Western Hemisphere.

Wednesday April, 13, 2005 at 1.30pm

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address the growing impact of international trade on our peoples and our hemisphere. I am Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini, Bishop of San Marcos, Guatemala and past President of the Bishops' Secretariat of Central America. I have met some of you previously, and have engaged many of your colleagues on issues of mutual concern to our countries.

I come before you today to share the experiences of the people of my country, and especially of my diocese of San Marcos, in order to contribute to the on-going debate concerning the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements. These experiences must be considered as part of the overall impact of trade policies throughout the hemisphere. My experience with the United States-Dominican Republic- Central American Free Trade Agreement informs much of what I have to say today. I appear today as a guest of Chairman Hyde and with the support of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In June of last year, bishops of the United States and the countries of Central America issued a Joint Declaration on US-CAFTA which I am appending to my short statement and which I ask be entered for the record.

I would like to begin by evoking the memory of Pope John Paul II whose presence among us at this time is very much felt. The Pope had a tremendous capacity to warn us of dangers that we ourselves are often slow to recognize. At the very start of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II turned our attention to the needs of the poor saying: "The depressed rural world, the worker who with his sweat waters his affliction, cannot wait any longer for full and effective recognition of his dignity, which is not inferior to that of any other social sector. He has the right to be respected and not to be deprived with maneuvers which are sometimes tantamount to real spoliation of the little that he has. He has the right to real help, which is not charity or crumbs of justice, in order

that he may have access to the development that his dignity as a person and as a son of God deserves. It's necessary for bold changes, urgent reforms, without waiting any longer." The Pope's message pushes each one of us to consider how we might better respond to the moral values that flow from his call to solidarity with one another. Mr. Chairman, the rural poor today make up 70 percent of poor people across the globe. In Latin America, two-thirds of those who live in rural areas are poor. In Guatemala, 56 percent of the population is poor and 16 percent is extremely poor with 93 percent of those living in extreme poverty living in rural areas in my country. Almost one quarter of Guatemala's GDP comes from the agricultural sector. Our farmers are hardworking and will continue to find ways to compete with their northern neighbors. But they cannot compete against the United States Treasury and the \$170 billion subsidies granted in your Farm Bill of 2002.

And when they can no longer farm and support their families, because of cheap commodity imports or restricted access to seeds and fertilizers because of stringent intellectual property restrictions, where do my people go? What do they do when they are no longer on the land, growing corn, rearing cattle, raising their family, going to church and building communities? The older people mostly stay on the land, while our young head to industrial centers in search of jobs. This is good, some say, as we enter more and more the industrial age. As you know, Mr. Chairman, many come to the United States, lured by a dream that is shared by all people of the Americas: to build a life, earn a decent wage, be treated well and to raise a family. Some call them "illegals." But according to our market model, they are better described as entrepreneurs without assets, pursuing the American dream. They are not free-loaders. They work hard, often in several jobs, supporting a way of life that many have come to take for granted. They earn minimum wage in large part, can go to your local emergency room when sick, enroll their children in school, and enjoy a relatively safe working environment. Their relatives, meanwhile, who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, have jobs with paid health care, have a voice in the

workplace, receive on-going training to become more skilled and can plan for their future and their children's future. This resembles the culture of life that Pope John Paul spoke eloquently about.

But what about those who move to the cities and industrial areas to work in the maquilas? As is the case in the rest of Latin America, most of them are women, who have children and who are the only wage-earner in the family. Many of them face an uncertain future. I know of repeated instances where workers were treated in a way that would be against basic labor law in the United States. Employment is at the heart of development. We know that poor working conditions make for bad economics. Without enforceable labor rights that are part of trade agreements with sanctions for non-compliance applied to them, you will not raise standards of labor, you will not raise standards of living, wages will not go up and jobs will continue to hemorrhage from the United States. It is forecast that the only country that will not lose jobs with the end of the Multi-Fiber Agreement is Nicaragua. Why? Presumably it's because they have the lowest wages. Without stability in the workplace, there will be no stability in the marketplace, no stability in our democratic reforms and no stability in the hemisphere. We are constantly troubled by the popular manifestations that can often result in a violent response from the security forces.

We will only approach long-term solutions to these problems when we begin to place the dignity of the human person, especially the poor, at the *center* of our discussion. I do so in light of other testimony you will hear today. I recognize that we are all people of good will. We all want the best for the people of our hemisphere. But the hearing this afternoon is exploring vital questions about our future with serious consequences for all of us.

Some see increased trade as the solution to all economic problems; others see it as the source of major economic distress. In fact it is neither. I echo once again the concerns of John Paul II: "If globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative." (*Ecclesia in America*, 20) These include, for example,

“unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority.” (*Ecclesia in America*, p. 20). The terms of trade that will be enshrined in law through these various agreements - laws that constitute a treaty between our countries - will impact more than the movement of goods and services across our borders; more than the private property rights of investors and corporations. These agreements will define the kind of relationship we wish to establish between our countries. As such they should reveal an understanding of human dignity and interdependence between the people of our hemisphere that is marked by solidarity and mutual concern. But, in fact, these are not the primary elements of current trade practices throughout the hemisphere and there is no reason they cannot be. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, current efforts at economic integration are far from our best efforts. The current model is deficient - and I am confident that we can repair it so that trade works for all, and especially the poor there is no reason it cannot be repaired. To do so, we must all look at trade policies from the bottom up - from their impact on the lives and dignity of poor families and vulnerable workers across the hemisphere.

In the case of CAFTA, the United States is entering into a comprehensive trade agreement with some of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. Our hemisphere has some of the largest inequality in the region. It is easy to understand why our national leaders in poor countries such as Guatemala may seem enticed by the prospect of favorable access to the mighty market of the United States. But we must ask the question: will any short-term gains envisaged by such bilateral agreements be far out-weighted by the loss of bargaining power in other forums. It is widely expected that low-income developing countries, such as Guatemala, will be afforded “special and differential treatment” under World Trade Organization rules currently being negotiated in the

Doha Development Round. CAFTA will likely trump such measures that are designed to allow developing countries the time and the space to foster integral human development.

A one-sided approach to economic integration that focuses only on liberalizing trade barriers makes it difficult for nations to focus on other vital ways of promoting social development. The path of trade integration laid down by the free trade agreement between the United States and Central America has been presented as wide avenue along which all can travel towards greater prosperity. In reality it is a narrow path across a deep gorge that only the strongest and most capable can travel. It offers hope only to a few, and I fear no hope to those whom the Pope calls the "weakest, the most powerless and the poorest." You are perhaps aware that Guatemala ranked among the 10 worst nations in Latin America in the level of income inequality. These nations desperately need a growing middle class. Industrial workers, equipped with the basic rights to have a say in the workplace, were key to the growth of a middle class in our nation. It was a key element in making the United States the economic powerhouse it is today. This is not happening in Central America and it will not happen as long as hundreds of thousands of workers are suppressed, not empowered, at the workplace.

Mr. Chairman, I echo fear that we are taking enormous risks with these trade agreements, ones that have profound consequences for our peoples, and we have not even begun to have an adequate conversation on the risks and opportunities. Up-beat predictions regarding the positive impact of these trade agreements must be evaluated carefully. During my meeting with Assistant United States Trade Representative Padilla, in June, 2004, we both recognized that attempts at developing a broad consultative process about trade in Guatemala – ones envisaged by the USTR – were unsuccessful. This experience of exclusion does nothing to further democratic reforms in my country and across the region.

Many voices, including some we have heard today, address the limits of any trade agreement. They highlight the fact that a trade agreement is only a part of the solution to poverty,

exclusion, lack of education and integral development. "Trade is not a panacea," we are told, and that is correct. For that very reason, trade policies need to be complemented by institutional reform and a broader development framework that affords each person their right to participate in a market that is fair and compassionate. However, in my experience, trade agreements run the risk of further entrenching inequality in our societies. Surely the people of the United States want no part in a trade regime that may push people further apart. To date, there has been no serious effort on the part of negotiators to ensure the type of reforms necessary for the people who need them the most. With such reforms, we could tap so much potential, unlock that capacity and enable the poor to be protagonists in their own development.

During my last visit, I was encouraged by the efforts of Ranking Member Menendez and others to complement the steps being proposed in the area of trade agreements with a plan to provide resources for a broader social development plan. Such cooperation is akin to the more comprehensive development program undertaken by our European neighbors when they recently admitted new members to the European Union. If I may add, any plan to seek closer integration throughout the hemisphere, as promised by discussion about the Free Trade Area of the Americas, should learn from the benefits that regional integration has brought to the poorer countries of the European Union.

We are also assured by proponents of current trade policies that these agreements will lead to transparency, participation and a strengthening of democracy in a region that has seen significant unrest. And here I would like to tell you of the large public demonstrations that have been taking place across the hemisphere against ratification of current trade agreements. Mr. Chairman, the people, who are exercising their fundamental rights in a democracy to have their voices heard. They are ordinary people. They understand their livelihoods and what it means to daily struggle to support themselves and their families. They are not a privileged group afraid of losing what they have come to expect. If they were, then the rich elites in our country would be

marching. Instead the elites are in Washington, DC trying to hurry this process along. I bring those people before this hearing today, I hope that my words reflect their hopes and aspirations. In our Joint Statement with the U.S. Bishops we expressed our concern about the growing tide of discontent in our countries around the impact of trade integration.

Currently, trade discussions begin by asking how policies will be good for business and economic growth. We need to ask how trade policies will be good for those who live in situations of poverty. It is not enough to rush ahead with so-called "state of the art" trade agreements, while our development policies languish behind. Financial assistance to the region has been steadily decreasing and will fall by another again by 10 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. Without a concerted effort to complement trade and development in a serious way, by putting our most talented trade experts with our most talented development experts in the same room, to solve the same problems with contributions from their own specific field of competence – then the rights of workers to decent wages, small farmers to a fair price, access to health care and education for the young will be cruelly denied and the promise of democratic reforms and a just participation in the global market will be frustrated. We can do better, and we must do better, in shaping a bold, comprehensive and integrated trade and development agenda that will guarantee positive results for the poor among us.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.