

**Red Colombiana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio y el Alca, Recalca
(Colombian Action Network in Opposition to Free Trade and FTAA, Recalca)**

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The Honorable
CHARLES RANGEL
House of Representatives

As a coalition of union, environmental, peasant, and small business organizations, communities of Afro-Colombians and indigenous people, and women's and human rights groups we realize that the Democratic Party victory in the November 7 elections affords an opportunity to prevent the damages inherent in the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Colombia. Many of these impending problems have been noted by leaders of the Democratic Party in the United States.

In this moment of reflection, we would like to give you our views about some of the impacts that the U.S.-Colombia FTA will have on Colombia.

In terms of labor, it is clear that the assassination of labor leaders in Colombia has been connected with the general deterioration of labor conditions, the increase in unemployment, and restrictions on the rights to organize unions. The violence is also related to the enactment of a series of labor laws which lower labor standards and diminish the ability of unions to stand for collective bargaining. The U.S.-Colombia FTA will not reverse this situation. On the contrary it will provide a flexible framework that supports the continuance of these types of labor policies with the same, or even worse, results.

In terms of the environment, the government of President Uribe has made efforts to make sure that market forces take over important natural resources such as forests, high desert ecosystems, water, etc. Many of the export crops envisioned in the FTA will have grave and serious environmental effects as is already the case with palm-oil, coal, flowers, etc.

With regards to agriculture, we predict that the U.S.-Colombia FTA will ruin the production of staples fundamental to the Colombian diet, such as cereals, milk, and beef and pork products, accelerate the break-up of the agricultural sector, and create an unstable social situation ripe for increased violence and narco-trafficking.

In terms of intellectual property, the agreement will virtually eliminate generic drugs, and will increase home expenditures in health, a grave matter indeed as 60% of the Colombian population lives in poverty.

Importantly, the United States Congress should be alarmed by the close association of the current Colombian administration with notorious cases of corruption and the links between leading government groups with narcotraffickers and paramilitary outfits.

As you will no doubt find out there are serious and well-documented critiques about each of the items in the FTA listed above. (See for example Garay, 2006; Holguin Zamorano, 2005; Umaña, 2004; Robledo, 2006, among others). The Uribe administration in Colombia assumed unconditionally the goals and criteria of the Bush administration which did not include representatives from the Democratic Party in the writing of the text of the agreement. Likewise, in Colombia, the government did not take into account the views of vast sectors of public opinion as it agreed to the contents of the document.

The pitfalls of the agreement cannot be remedied merely by the incorporation of “side letters” or by a partial renegotiation.

We have indicated, and continue to insist, that we oppose seeking competitiveness in world markets at the expense of the deterioration of labor standards and environmental degradation, as the Colombian government is proposing. We believe that important segments of the American people agree with these conditions.

At the same time we believe in strengthening economic and trade relations under the principles of mutual benefit, respect for democratic rights, progress and equality. To that end, we are willing to work closely with you and with members of our own congress.

Cordially,

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Género y Comercio, punto Focal Colombia; INDEPAZ; Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos, ILSA; Marcha Mundial de Mujeres; MENCOLDES; Mesa Mujer y Economía; Movimiento Comunal Comunitario; Movimiento Popular Artístico Colombiano, MOPAC; Organización Colombiana de Estudiantes, OCE; Periódico Desde Abajo; Planeta Paz; Plataforma de Derechos Humanos; Democracia y Desarrollo, capítulo Colombia; Colectivo Somos Sudacas; Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, Sinbienestar; Red de Veedurías Ciudadanas; Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía; Colectivo Libertario Banderas Negras; Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, ONIC; Coordinadora Nacional Agraria, CNA; Convergencia Nacional Indígena, Negra y Campesina; Acción Campesina Colombiana, ACC; Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear; Comisión Colombiana de Juristas; Fundación de Apoyo Comunitario, Fundac; Unidad Cafetera; Liga de Usuarios de Servicios Públicos Domiciliarios; Unión Nacional de Usuarios y Defensores de Servicios Públicos Domiciliarios.