

INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT

June 22, 2015

Dear Senator:

As faith-based organizations and religious bodies with a presence in the United States and in countries overseas, we urge you to oppose the cloture vote on the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill that the Senate will consider as early as this week. We strongly object to this bill, which mirrors the one that narrowly passed the House of Representatives last week. It includes significant changes relative to the TPA package passed by the Senate passed last month. It will create an even less desirable framework for negotiating trade agreements that promote broad community participation, uphold human dignity of workers and impoverished communities, and respects God's creation.

The House Customs bill included a number of amendments to the TPA title of the Senate-passed package that go against the values held by our faith traditions. If this version of TPA in the Senate passes this week before a conference on the Customs bill, the final version of TPA will not be known and these harmful provisions could become law. We wish to highlight the following issues close to the heart of the faith community that are affected by harmful provisions from the House bills that if voted on this week could be included in final Fast Track legislation.

- **Human trafficking** – The uncovering of hidden graves of human trafficking victims and the lack of action from the Malaysian government on addressing human trafficking is horrific. We should not trade with countries that condone human trafficking and the violation of human dignity, especially if they do not show significant efforts to combat modern day slavery as indicated by the U.S. State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report. The Customs bill from the House weakened the "No Fast Track for Human Traffickers" amendment from the previous Senate bill.
- **Climate change** – The House Customs bill included an amendment to the TPA's negotiating objectives that would undermine efforts to address global climate change. We are called to be stewards of creation. As the world negotiates a climate agreement to protect impoverished and vulnerable communities and ecosystems from climate change, the United States must demonstrate moral leadership. In the wake of Pope Francis's recent encyclical on the environment, our faith traditions stand together to call for moral action on climate change. The amendment from the House bill forbids consideration or negotiation of climate-related policies in trade agreements, and thus sends a negative message to the world that the United States is not willing to assist or prevent refugees and other victims from climate-related natural disasters. These disasters may also destroy small businesses and other local development that can anchor and stabilize communities.
- **Immigration** – Welcoming our immigrant sisters and brothers and promoting comprehensive immigration reform is a key priority for our community. The House Customs bill inserts an amendment to the TPA's negotiating objectives meant to restrict trade policies from allowing for better immigration policies.
- **TAA** – **There is now no guarantee that Congress will pass TAA if it is part of a separate package.** Trade adjustment assistance is critical to help workers transition to new jobs when their jobs are displaced by trade agreements. It is too important to be left to be dealt with later, and we strongly believe that TAA must be fully funded and cover the full scope of workers included in the robust TAA program enacted in the Stimulus bill. Furthermore, TAA should not be funded through other programs meant to serve low-income and vulnerable communities. We oppose efforts to fund the TAA through Medicare or any other program meant to uphold the social safety net for our most marginalized brothers and sisters.

We share a vision and understanding that trade and development can help lift communities out of poverty when done right. However, we have witnessed far too often how trade agreements such as the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Peru FTA have failed to contribute positively to the economy or society, and indeed in some instance done damage. Harmful development weakens local economies and ecosystems and that is when people often feel the need to migrate.

The record of past trade agreements demonstrate that lack enforceability and inadequate enforcement of terms that are binding has meant that trading partners often have not met commitments to protect human rights and safeguard God's creation. While the May 10, 2007 framework for trade agreements created stronger standards around human rights for workers and environmental protection, the lack of enforcement has made both pieces ineffective. In Colombia, fewer people are joining unions out of fear that doing so could make them vulnerable to harassment or murder.

In fact, the numbers of people killed for their association with unions in Colombia still remains one of the highest rates in the world three years after the Labor Action Plan that was to supplement the Colombia trade agreement's May 10, 2007 Labor Chapter. In Peru, a new report by the Environmental Investigation Agency found that illegal logging remains rampant with little to no enforcement of the Peru FTA Forestry Agreement or core Environmental Chapter. Not only does illegal logging destroy unique and fragile ecosystems, but it is also linked to human rights abuses, including human trafficking.

We oppose the TPA because it undermines the principle of democratic participation that is a central value of this nation and to our faith traditions. The level of secrecy that we have witnessed during the current trade negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is deeply disturbing. The TPA bill would only require the text of the TPP to be made public 30 days after negotiations are completed, the text has been initialed and notice has been given to Congress of the formal signing ceremony. That this would occur 60 days before the formal signing makes it too late to make any changes as the negotiations will be closed.

Moreover, Congress should allow an open process to help develop and then debate trade agreements. At a minimum, Congress should have an opportunity to certify that the negotiating objectives it lays out have been met before a trade deal that will be subject to expedited consideration is finalized.

Given these concerns with TPA in general, we especially urge you not to support cloture on a "Fast Track" process that will additionally undermine programs and policies that support the common good and the few gains, such as respect to human trafficking, that were made in the Senate's version of TPA. We ask you to oppose cloture on the version of TPA that comes before you this week.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Washington Office
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Justice and Peace Office
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society