

# ***INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT***

June 11, 2015

Dear Representative:

As faith-based organizations and religious bodies, we urge you to oppose all three trade bills currently being considered in Congress: the Customs bill, the Trade Adjustment Assistance and the Trade Promotion Authority bills.

Our unique faith traditions share common values that call us to serve and care for impoverished communities, be stewards of God's creation, and to promote broad community participation that welcomes everyone to the table. Many of our organizations and faith bodies have people who serve in countries where we have trade agreements or where we are considering trade agreements. We share a vision and understanding that trade and development can help lift communities out of poverty when done right. However, we have also witnessed how trade agreements have failed to contribute positively to the economy or society. When development weakens local economies and ecosystems that is when people often feel the need to migrate.

**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 and unwillingness to make meaningful improvements to the text that we witness in the current trade negotiations is deeply disturbing. Even with the promise that the text will be made public two months before a vote, it is very difficult to give meaningful input at the end of the negotiations or to certify that the text reflects Congress's vision of the negotiations.

**We are also disappointed to have to oppose both the Customs and the Trade Adjustment Assistance bills.** Enforcement is critical to ensure that trading partners meet commitments that can protect human rights and safeguard God's creation. While the May 10, 2007 agreement created stronger standards around human rights for workers and environmental protection, the lack of enforcement has made both pieces ineffective. In Colombia, less people are joining unions out of fear that they could be killed. In fact, the numbers of people killed for their association with unions in Colombia still remains one of the highest rates in the world. In Peru, a new report by the Environmental Investigation Agency found that illegal logging is still a very active industry with little to no enforcement. Not only does illegal logging destroy unique and fragile ecosystems, but it is also linked to human rights abuses, including human trafficking. Trade adjustment assistance is also critical to help workers transition to new jobs when their jobs are displaced by trade agreements.

It is unacceptable that the TAA and Customs bills are being undermined by amendments to remove critical piece of the Senate bill or that add amendments that are not germane to these bills including:

- **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. We urge you NOT to strip or amend the “No Fast Track for Human Traffickers” amendment.
- **Climate change** – Please don’t include amendments 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. As Pope Francis prepares to launch an encyclical on the environment, our faith traditions stand together to call for moral action on climate change. An amendment to the trade bill opposing any action on climate change 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.
- **TAA** – 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.

We urge Congress to reject TPA, TAA, and the Customs bill. Congress should allow an open process to debate and develop trade agreements. At the minimum Congress should have an opportunity to certify that the negotiating objectives they lay out have been met before a trade deal is finalized. We also urge Congress to ensure that the negotiating objects reflect a development model that is at the service of the common good. This version of TPA does not pass the test.

Sincerely,

Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness  
 Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
 Franciscan Action Network  
 Friends Committee on National Legislation  
 NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Washington Office  
 Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
 Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice  
 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

*The Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment is a group committed to asserting a stronger presence of communities of faith in public policy discussions on trade and investment. Contact Chloe Schwabe (Chair) at 202-841-1780 or [cschwabe@maryknoll.org](mailto:cschwabe@maryknoll.org)*