

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

JAMES P. HOFFA
General President

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C. THOMAS KEEGEL
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June 15, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.4 million men and women of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, I am writing to urge you to oppose the three pending so-called free trade agreements (FTAs)—South Korea, Colombia, and Panama—when they reach the floor of the House for a vote. All three agreements are modeled after the job-killing North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Trade agreements based on the NAFTA model have resulted in nearly two million job losses in the U.S. The three pending FTAs continue this trend. With the unemployment rate at a record high of more than nine percent, we must focus on job creation and growth in the U.S. Not only will these trade agreements result in job losses, they will further exploit workers and deny basic human rights.

The South Korea FTA is projected by the Economic Policy Institute to cause job losses of 159,000 in the U.S. and the International Trade Commission estimates the trade deficit will increase in seven high-paying sectors. In addition, the South Korea FTA forbids reference to the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions.

The South Korea FTA's investment chapter would give South Korean investors rights to challenge U.S. laws, regulations, and even court decisions in international tribunals that circumvent the U.S. judicial system. Any potential benefit from reduced tariffs would be mitigated, as South Korea is one of the three countries that the U.S. Department of Treasury lists as a currency manipulator.

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Even more troubling is that the South Korea FTA lacks assurances that products assembled in South Korea will not contain parts from North Korea's Kaesong Industrial Complex.

These three pending agreements insult basic human rights. The country of Colombia remains the global capital for violence against workers; more unionists are killed every year in this country than any other country. Most recently, a lawyer representing sugarcane workers was gunned down in May – only five weeks after a so-called U.S.-Colombia Labor Action Plan was released.

Nearly 2,680 unionists have been murdered in the country. Only six percent of the murders have been prosecuted. Most are never even investigated. In June, a Colombian rights leader campaigning for the return of land snatched by illegal militias was gunned down. While the Action Plan is a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough to ensure enforcement and compliance. We must see real improvement in labor laws and a stop to the killing of unionists in Colombia, before any trade agreement is approved. Simple public relations gimmicks and laws that go unenforced are not enough.

The Colombia FTA will result in the further displacement of the country's Afro-Colombian population. The country has the highest population of displaced people, an estimated 5.2 million. The agreement will only accelerate the displacement of impoverished Afro-Colombians and farmers.

Panama remains one of the world's top tax havens. The country is home to approximately 400,000 corporations, including U.S. firms, which incorporate in the country to avoid paying taxes. The pending Panama FTA does not require U.S. construction and other firms' equal access to work on the Panama Canal improvement project. In addition, Panama continues to be a main site for drug money laundering by Mexican and Colombian drug kingpins.

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Each of these three pending trade agreements remains flawed. None will further U.S. job growth, which should be our nation's top priority. Ensuring basic human rights and dignity is a moral imperative. For economic and moral reasons, we urge you to vote against these agreements. If you have any questions, please contact Lisa P. Kinard, Director, Department of Federal Legislation and Regulation, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, at (202) 624-6890.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Hoffa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

James P. Hoffa
General President