

U.S.-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)

WHAT IS FREE TRADE?

Free trade is the elimination and/or lowering of taxes and other trade regulations between countries with the purpose of increasing exports and in theory, promoting economic growth and creating market access for all signing countries. **Proponents suggest that the FTA will create jobs and economic stability for Colombians, yet experience in the U.S. and abroad has shown that free-market policies lead to more poverty for the majority and increased wealth for a few multinational corporations.**

WHY COLOMBIAN AND US GROUPS OPPOSE THE FTA



FARMERS AND FOOD SECURITY: Colombian farmers are not able to compete with U.S. agricultural goods due to, among other factors, U.S. government subsidies. The U.S. government subsidizes farmers to the tune of \$24 billion a year, meaning that they can produce at below the cost of production, thus making it impossible for Colombian agricultural to compete on a level playing field. Colombian farmers also often lack technology, infrastructure, and/or physical access to markets. Without protections against U.S. agricultural goods, many Colombians will lose their livelihood. Without alternatives for feeding their families, many Colombian farmers have no choice but to grow illicit crops, such as coca (the raw material for cocaine), join an illegal armed group, or leave their farm and become another of Colombia's already nearly four million internally displaced individuals.



WORKERS: Colombia is able to compete well in the global race to the bottom of wages and labor rights since Colombia is the number one killer of trade unionists. **Since 1991, over 2,200 Colombian union members have been murdered.** The FTA would give incentives to multinational corporations to take advantage of the extremely violent situation for Colombian workers in order to continue to prioritize their own profits over worker rights. **U.S. companies such as Coca-Cola, Chiquita, and Drummond Coal have already been accused of and/or sued for hiring paramilitaries who kill, threaten, torture, and kidnap Colombian union members.** The FTA would push Colombia to lower already low wages, to weaken already poor labor standards, and to remove or reduce laws that once guaranteed workers the right to receive overtime pay, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to worker's compensation.



PRIVATIZATION: The privatization requirements of the FTA could grant multinationals corporations the right to further buy and control sectors of the economy, such as Colombian judicial systems, water supplies, telecommunications, energy, healthcare, transportation, education, the postal service, or even police departments. Corporations would then be able to decide what areas to serve and not serve based on profitability—not need or right.



AFRO AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES: The FTA jeopardizes self-determination, autonomy, and economic, socio-cultural, and environmental rights of Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations. These communities have fought hard to have their ancestral communities, territories, and their own governing structures respected. The FTA would require changes to the Colombian Constitution that would result in the denial of these populations' communal landholding status and allow for the sale of their territories.

While the FTA is sold as a trade agreement, in reality, it serves to encourage and protect U.S. investments that benefit large corporations, not Colombian citizens.

Rather than encouraging social investment in Colombia that would help the millions living in extreme poverty, the FTA will create more misery by paving the way for the growth of large multinational extractive industries, such as coal and oil production, oil palm plantations, logging operations, and maritime port expansion.

Most of the current and planned U.S. investments is focused in resource-rich regions where paramilitary and military violence has opened the way for export-oriented mega-projects by displacing local populations of Afro-Colombian, indigenous, and small-scale farmers from their ancestral lands. Neither these communities nor the Colombian population as a whole would receive any significant percentage of the profits being reaped from their lands.



Organize to STOP the U.S.-Colombian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and its prioritization of corporate profits over people!

COLOMBIA: WHERE U.S. POLICY KILLS



ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE: The FTA puts the interests of large U.S. companies over the health of Colombians. The FTA includes strengthening intellectual property rights (governing patent law) which will allow U.S. companies to extend patents on medicines, thus taking away millions of people's access to generic medicine. According to the Pan-American Health Organization, the FTA will result in an increase of approximately \$900 million in annual medicinal costs for Colombians. Intellectual property rights provisions would place patents on traditional medicinal knowledge and natural resources (water, plants, wind etc.) without prior agreement or community consent. This means that the traditional medicinal practices will then be rendered illegal for the communities from which it comes and that natural resources of Colombia, one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world, could become property of and controlled by U.S. companies.



THE ENVIRONMENT: The FTA proposes reforms that give national and transnational corporations greatly increased access to exploit natural resources such as biodiversity, fisheries, water, and minerals. They would also have the right to challenge environmental protection laws in Colombia as "barriers to trade."

What's Different About Colombia?

While all free trade agreements are harmful, the US-Colombia FTA *is especially critical to oppose due to Colombia's atrocious human rights record*. Colombia's government and military have been implicated in many human rights violations due to direct contact with paramilitary death squads that appear on the U.S.'s list of designated terrorists. **As of March 2008, over 85 Colombian political leaders have been detained for their involvement with paramilitaries**, including current and past members of Congress, council members, governors, mayors, state legislators, and the former director of DAS—Colombia's FBI.

What does the FTA mean for the US? What do FTA's have to do with Immigration?

The vast majority of profits made from FTAs benefit multinational corporations, not the majority of the people in the U.S. or Colombia. As we've seen with NAFTA in Mexico, the FTA model has not had many benefits for the people who need them the most:

- NAFTA has destroyed the Mexican countryside, resulting in the loss of 2 million jobs.
- Mexicans, having to choose between migration and starvation, have migrated to the US. The number of Mexicans living in the US has nearly doubled since NAFTA was passed to about 11.2 million, approximately 10% of the Mexican population. 2/3 of Mexicans living in the US have come since the passage of NAFTA.
- Since NAFTA was ratified the average cost of food in Mexico has gone up 257% while average purchasing power has decreased by 50%.
- One third of the 800,000 manufacturing jobs in Mexico that were created after the passage of NAFTA have disappeared while the Mexican minimum wage has dropped by 20%.

In addition, since the passage of NAFTA over an estimated one million US manufacturing jobs have been lost as corporations search for the country with cheapest wages and the poorest labor rights.

**Is this the form of economic trade
we want to promote?**

JOIN WITNESS FOR PEACE IN THE STRUGGLE TO STOP THE U.S.-COLOMBIA FTA!!

President Bush is pushing for a vote in 2008. **Colombians across the country are mobilizing to oppose this FTA which prioritizes corporate profits over people.** Small farmers, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, women, students, workers and churches recognize that the FTA would exacerbate the current human rights crisis in Colombia and cause long-term regional instability. **They need the support of the U.S. grassroots community to stop this disastrous and un-fair trade agreement.**

- ◆ **Call Your Congressperson and Senator!** Tell them to vote "NO" on the U.S.-Colombia FTA and other FTA's with Latin American countries. Speak out against further U.S. military aid and training to the Colombian government.
- ◆ **Educate Your Community!** Organize a discussion group on free trade, violence in Colombia, and the impacts of free trade and militarization in your own community. Submit op-eds and letters to the editor that address FTA's and Colombia's internal conflict to your local newspaper. **Read "Forced from Home"** (found at www.witnessforpeace.org) to learn more about how free trade has caused massive migration into the U.S. from Mexico and Central America.
- ◆ **Participate in a Witness for Peace Delegation to Colombia!** Travel schedules are on our website.
- ◆ **Join Witness for Peace!** Find your local WfP regional organizer on the WfP website.