

April 9, 2003

The Honorable George Bush  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

Tomorrow you will be meeting with the Presidents of Central America to discuss a Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that you have stated will bring prosperity to the region. As organizations that have closely followed Central America through its recent history of civil wars, reconstruction, and a succession of natural disasters, we share a strong hope for democratic, equitable and sustainable development in the region. In this spirit, we would like to raise serious concerns related to civil society participation and transparency in the CAFTA negotiation process.

The negotiations have been conducted with limited participation on the part of civil society representatives, outside of the business sector. The U.S. Agency for International Development is planning public hearings regarding the advantages and disadvantages of CAFTA in each country but in our view, this does not constitute meaningful participation in the negotiating process. The Central American governments made some advances in transparency and civil-society participation in the reconstruction efforts after Hurricane Mitch and in the elaboration of the Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nicaragua and Honduras. The current CAFTA negotiations, however, represent a major step backwards. There are seven months before the target date for finalizing the text of the agreement, yet no meaningful process for civil society input in Central America has been established. Further, meaningful participation has been frustrated by the failure to make the negotiating text available to the public (unlike the two drafts of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which were partially published on the official FTAA website in July 2001 and November 2002).

Effective mechanisms for broad and representative civil-society participation that includes workers, women, and indigenous and ethnic groups in both the United States and Central America should be established and implemented before negotiations move forward. For this to happen, the timeline of the negotiations must be extended. We are very concerned to learn, for instance, that the language on labor issues will be put on the table in May without input from labor unions in Central America. The negotiating of this language should be postponed along with the overall deadline.

Many of the undersigned also have concerns relating to the substantive issues in the CAFTA negotiations, namely agriculture and sustainable development, guaranteeing worker rights, investment rules, protecting traditional knowledge and access to medicines, and safeguarding essential public services. What we have learned so far about the negotiations indicates that important rights in these areas may be threatened, and we view this situation with grave concern.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further and look forward to learning about the steps you will take to extend the CAFTA deadline, and guarantee greater transparency and civil society participation in the negotiation process. Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

1. Agricultural Missions, Inc.
2. American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
3. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
4. American Federation of Teachers
5. Boston Global Action Network FTAA Task Force
6. The Campaign for Labor Rights
7. CARECEN, Los Angeles
8. Center of Concern
9. The Center for International Environmental Law
10. Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health
11. Central Conference of American Rabbis
12. Centro Presente, Incorporated
13. Church of the Brethren Washington Office
14. Citizens Trade Campaign
15. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador
16. Communication Workers of America
17. Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle
18. Concern America
19. Congressional Hunger Center
20. The Development Gap
21. Episcopal Relief and Development
22. Fundación Salvadoreña de Florida
23. Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, USA
24. Guatemalan Unity Information Agency
25. International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
26. International Brotherhood of Teamsters
27. International Environmental Policy and Development
28. International Labor Rights Fund
29. Katalysis Partnership, Incorporated
30. Latin America and the Caribbean Non-violence International
31. League of United Latin American Citizens
32. Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
33. Marin Interfaith Task Force on Central America
34. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
35. Mennonite Central Committee, U.S. Washington Office

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| 36. Mexico Solidarity Network                          | 52. Sierra Club  |
| 37. National Family Farm Coalition                     | 53. Sweatshop Watch, Oakland, California                                       |
| 38. Nicaragua Center for Global Action                 | 54. Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees                    |
| 39. Nicaragua Network                                  | 55. United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America |
| 40. Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala | 56. United Food and Commercial Workers   |
| 41. Oblates Justice and Peace Office                   | 57. United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society               |
| 42. Organización Hondureña Integrada Francisco Morázan | 58. United Steel Workers of America  |
| 43. Oxfam America                                      | 59. U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project                               |
| 44. PACE   | 60. Voices on the Border   |
| 45. Public Citizen                                     | 61. Washington Office on Latin America   |
| 46. Quest for Peace/Quixote Center                     | 62. Witness for Peace  |
| 47. Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico | 63. World Vision   |
| 48. Resource Center of the Americas                    |  |
| 49. RESULTS  |  |
| 50. Salvadoran American National Network               |  |
| 51. Share Foundation, Washington D.C.                  |  |

Cc: The Honorable Abel Pacheco, President of the Republic of Costa Rica  
The Honorable Francisco Flores, President of the Republic of El Salvador  
The Honorable Alfonso Portillo, President of the Republic of Guatemala  
The Honorable Ricardo Maduro, President of the Republic of Honduras  
The Honorable Enrique Bolaños, President of the Republic of Nicaragua  
Alberto Trejos, Minister of Foreign Trade, Republic of Costa Rica  
Miguel Ernesto Lacayo, Minister of Economy, Republic of El Salvador  
Patricia Ramírez Ceberg, Minister of Economy, Republic of Guatemala  
Norman García, Minister of Industry and Trade, Republic of Honduras  
Mario Arana Sevilla, Minister of Industry and Trade, Republic of Nicaragua  
Enrique Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank  
Robert Zoellick, United States Trade Representative