

Tell Congress and President Obama to Say NO! to Bush's Free Trade Agreement with Colombia!



In 2008, President Obama and many Democratic challengers ran with the message that NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, was a failure. Candidate Obama pledged his opposition to the free trade agreement that the Bush administration had negotiated with Colombia, an agreement that has yet to be voted on by Congress. Unfortunately, since his election, President Obama has changed his tune. Over the objections of human rights activists, environmentalists, labor unions, AIDS activists, and many Democratic Congressmembers, Obama has pledged to pass the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Meanwhile, Colombian President Santos is continuing his prede Alvaro Uribe's aggressive campaign to build support for the agreement in the US. Six official U.S. Congressional delegations were sent to Colombia during the Uribe administration to experience carefully staged tours highlighting the efforts supposedly undertaken to end the systematic assassination of Colombia labor leaders, and five more are scheduled.

These delegations clearly did not see:

- * the 3.8 million displaced people forced from their homes, a disproportionate number are Afro-Colombian and Indigenous people;
 - * the systematic extermination of the Colombian labor movement, with 3000 union members since the 1980s, several attempted murders, hundreds of death threats, active complicity from US corporations like Coca-Cola and a routine and systematic failure of the government to guarantee the exercise of fundamental labor rights ;
 - * purportedly demobilized paramilitaries resurfacing with new names and intimidating those in the act of defending human rights; and
 - * increased extrajudicial executions of civilians by members of the Colombian armed forces.
- * Approving the FTA in a country engaged in a five decade conflict will perpetuate these abuses and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis lived out every day. Neither we nor the people of Colombia can afford another "free" trade agreement that will cause more displacement and suffering.
- * People all over the world are calling for international trade and investment systems that respect and promote the dignity of the human person, ensure the development and well-being of people in all nations, foster gender and racial equity and lead to environmental sustainability. However, the U.S.-Colombia FTA takes us far away from this goal.



President Obama and US Trade Representative Kirk need to stop pushing for an agreement that will contribute to human rights and environmental atrocities!

What You Can Do:

Use the arguments on the back of this flyer to write to your elected officials.

Contact your US House Representative and your Senators. Urge them to publicly commit to opposing the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. You can find their names and contact info at <http://snipurl.com/LegLookup>. Also urge them to support the TRADE Act, which will require US trade agreements to include new environmental and labor safeguards.

Write to President Obama at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact> and remind him of his campaign commitment to oppose the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Remind him of his March 2008 pledge to oppose the US-Colombia FTA because "the violence against unions in Colombia would make a mockery of the very labor protections that we have insisted be included in these kinds of agreements."

You can also contact Vice President Joe Biden at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact-vp>. Remind him that as a Senator he opposed free trade agreements with Chile, Singapore, the Dominican Republic and Central America because of their lack of effective provisions to ensure enforcement of labor and environmental standards and tell him that the Colombia FTA is no different in this regard.



U.S.-Colombia FTA talking points

If Passed the U.S.-Colombia FTA will:

Undermine human rights and fuel the fires of conflict. Colombia is still a country at war. Its record on human rights is dismal. Attacks on civil society, union leaders, Afro-Colombians and Indigenous people continue with impunity. The FTA will deepen the economic disparity, which is a root cause of the conflict, and diminish human rights.



Destroy small farmers. The agreement will favor only a small sector of Colombian farmers who export to the U.S. The Colombian Ministry of Agriculture estimates that if tariffs on agricultural imports from the U.S. were eliminated, overall income for farmers would drop by more than fifty percent. [this report assumed a zero tariff on all products immediately, so its not entirely accurate to say this][the basic point holds though] This would wipe out local farmers-as happened to the 1.3 million who have been displaced in Mexico since NAFTA passed 12 years ago. This will only add to Colombia's 3.8 million internally displaced people.



Increase drug trafficking. Colombia is already the world's largest producer of cocaine. The FTA will threaten livelihoods and displace small farmers leaving, for some, no other alternative than to join the drug trade. [its not all that lucrative for the small farmers, the traffickers are the big winners]

Harm Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians. The internal conflict has disproportionately displaced Afro-Colombian and Indigenous peoples from their resource-rich, ancestral territories, ignoring their constitutional and legal rights. Laws put in place in anticipation of the FTA to attract investment dismantle the legal rights related to territory, mineral and forest resources of these communities. Once the FTA is in place, under its investment rules, multinational corporations benefiting from these legal reforms will be able to sue the Colombian government for compensation for future lost profits if the laws are revoked.



Hinder access to life-saving medicines. While the amended text of the Colombia FTA removes the most egregious, CAFTA-based, provisions limiting the access to affordable medicines, it still includes NAFTA provisions that undermine the right to affordable medicines. This will further exacerbate a failing system in Colombia that only covers ten percent of Afro-Colombians.

Harm workers and environment. Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for union and labor organizers. There is little that the labor chapter can do to address the continued violence and impunity in the country. Moreover, the government has demonstrated little will to promote the labor laws and policies that are necessary for the full exercise of the international core labor rights.

Increase the burden on women, children, and the poor. Provisions promoting the privatization and deregulation of essential services such as water, healthcare and education are written into this trade agreement. As these services become less accessible, women and the poor would have to suffer the consequences of increases in prices of these services.



Undermine U.S. and Colombian sovereignty. The Colombia FTA contains a NAFTA-style foreign investor chapter that allows corporations to sue governments that pass environmental and public health laws that might reduce corporate profits.

Threaten the Amazon and wildlife. The FTA will stimulate an increase in logging and other extraction projects in the Colombian Amazon rain forest that mostly reside in Afro-Colombian and Indigenous territories. This will further endanger the lungs of the globe and precious species and will be reinforced by investor rules that allow corporations to sue the Colombian government when enforcement of environmental laws results in lost corporate profits.

Pirate traditional knowledge. The FTA will pave the way for large pharmaceutical and agribusiness corporations to patent traditional knowledge, seeds, and life forms. This opens the door to bio-piracy of the Andean-Amazon region and threatens the ecological, medicinal and cultural heritage of Afro-Colombians and Indigenous peoples.