



Gregory Meeks: Ethically Challenged Deathsquad Democrat

Congressman Meeks' "ethical challenges" are well known to New Yorkers. According to the Daily News, "Congressional investigators say Rep. Gregory Meeks appears to have violated federal law by hiding an illegal \$40,000 gift he got from a local businessman. The Office of Congressional Ethics released a 67-page report Friday detailing its investigation of the Queens Democrat." But New Yorkers may be less aware of Meeks' complicity in human rights abuses and job-killing free trade agreements.

Meeks is notorious for being the only Democrat in New York City to vote for both the Oman Free Trade Agreement, a NAFTA style deal with an absolute monarchy where labor unions are illegal, and the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), which is now letting a mining company sue El Salvador for hundreds of millions in an international for refusing to allow them to mine with cyanide and arsenic near the nation's primary river and drinking water source (In both cases another Democrat joined him -- Crowley on Oman and Towns on DR-CAFTA). This also gives him the distinction of being one of the CAFTA 15, one of only 15 Democrats in the US who voted for DR-CAFTA.

Meeks struck again in 2007 when he voted for the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement, despite warnings from human rights and environmental groups that the agreement would contribute to violence, instability, and ecological destruction. Peruvian President Garcia wasted no time in using the Agreement as a pretext to issue legislative decrees that amounted to a massive land grab -- turning indigenous lands over to extractive industry corporations by gaming the decisionmaking process by which decisions by indigenous communities are recognized. This resulted in an indigenous uprising that resulted in a massacre in Bagua, Peru in June 2007. The Washington Office on Latin America and Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch also warned that as tariff-free US agriculture exports entered the Peruvian market subsequent to the passage of the trade agreement, Peruvian farmers would be left with no choice but to grow coca, ramping up cocaine production for export. Sure enough, according to a June 2011 United Nations report, cocaine production has surged in Peru, and Peru will soon overtake Colombia as the world's largest cocaine exporter.

Unfazed, Meeks has continued to be one of Congress' strongest cheerleaders for the Bush-negotiated Panama, Colombia, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements. As co-chair of the House Colombia Caucus, he was apologist-in-chief in for years of human rights atrocities and corruption scandals under Colombia's Uribe administration and continues to cover for ongoing human rights abuses under the current Santos regime.

"Congressman Meeks may not like what authentic Afro-Colombian representatives are saying, but our legitimate governing bodies vigorously oppose the FTA, as well as other efforts by Uribe to impose natural resource exploitation projects in our territories without our consent." - Marino Cordoba, founder, Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES)

Meeks loves lavishing praise on Colombia's elected leaders. Perhaps he find them easy to relate to, for they, too -- are ethically challenged. 62 members of Colombia's Congress -- political allies of former President Uribe including the Congress' former President, Uribe's cousin Mario Uribe Escobar -- were deemed official suspects with 33 jailed for collusion with the right-wing paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). AUC is recognized by the US State department as a terrorist organization, controls the majority of the cocaine trade in Colombia, and is responsible for a large-scale campaign of civilian assassinations. Thousands have been killed -- union organizers, indigenous leaders, and journalists. In 2001 Colombia surpassed

the Sudan to become the nation with the highest rate of internal displacement on the planet, with 4.9 million displaced persons, mostly members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities displaced to repurpose their lands for oil palm plantations, often at the behest of foreign corporate interests. All of the Afro-Colombian legislators that were friends to Representative Uribe and supportive of the FTA and President Uribe are now behind bars for their complicity with the narco-terrorist paramilitaries responsible for displacing Afro-Colombian communities. Labor unions, human rights groups, and environmentalists in both the US and Colombia universally oppose the trade agreement, which will increase foreign direct investment and allow corporations to sue for lost profits over environmental and labor law enforcement, all factors that will exacerbate Colombia's present problems. The FTA will also eliminate tariffs on subsidized US agribusiness exports to Colombia, destroying the livelihoods of family farmers in Colombia and driving them into the coca and illegal wildlife trades to survive. Increased coca production will increase the supply of cocaine coming in the United States and provide a pretext to increase US-backed aerial fumigation program that is destroying critical endangered bird habitat in the Amazon rainforest.

For his willingness to put the profits of corporations that benefit from free trade agreements that undermine environmental laws while outsourcing well-paying union jobs to sweatshops to countries where union organizers face violence, intimidation, and death (Colombia has the highest rate of unionist killings on the planet and union organizers have also been killed in Panama), Meeks received the Chairman's Award from the Council of the Americas, a lobbying coalition of corporations who stand to benefit from the free trade attack on public interest law.

Fed Ex, Meeks' second biggest campaign contributor in the 2010 election cycle is one of the strongest backers of free trade agreement and a member of the Latin American Trade Coalition (LATC) and U.S.-Korea Business Coalition (US-KBC) member corporate coalitions set up to lobby for the passage of the free trade agreements. Fed Ex, which contributed \$15,000 to his campaign. In fact Meeks' Top 10 contributors read like a roll call of LATC and US-Korea Business Coalition members: AT&T (#4 -- \$12,500), Bank of America (#7 -- \$11,300), Wal-Mart and UPS (tied at #8 -- \$10,000 each) are all members of both.

Why Afro-Colombians Oppose the Colombia FTA

By Marino Cordoba, founder, Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) - 02/07/08 07:58 AM ET

The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is considered a non-starter in the U.S. Congress because the country is the world's deadliest for union activists. Less known, but equally disturbing is the systematic violence now confronting Afro-Colombians. African descendants comprise 26% of Colombia's population. As with other African descendants, we face racial discrimination which results in economic hardships far worse than those experienced by the average Colombian. However in Colombia, a vibrant 1980s civil rights movement won full recognition of our cultural rights and collective ownership and community control of our territories and natural resources. The 1991 Colombian Constitution and the landmark Law 70 explicitly enshrine these rights and recognize official democratic Afro-Colombian governance structures, similar to those of your Indian tribes.

The administration of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has worked consistently to undermine our hard-won civil rights and our control of our territories. Systematic violence against our people and assassinations of our leaders continue unabated to this day. At the end of 2007, angered by the strong opposition of the majority of Afro-Colombian communities to the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA,) Uribe created a new Commission in Colombia that directly challenges our legal governance structure. Cynically dubbed the *Commission for the Advancement of Afro-Colombian People*, it would undermine our communities' ability to advance development strategies chosen by our people that comport with our needs and that help even the economic playing field. Obviously, our official governance structure and our grassroots organizations oppose this new Commission. Despite this, President George Bush and other U.S. Uribe allies, such as Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY), and the vast array of lobbying firms hired by the Uribe government are now trying to tout this outrageous Commission as evidence that Afro-Colombian concerns are being addressed as they push to pass the FTA.

Don't be fooled. President Uribe, the Bush Administration and Congressman Meeks may not like what authentic Afro-Colombian representatives are saying, but our legitimate governing bodies vigorously oppose the FTA, as well as other efforts by Uribe to impose natural resource exploitation projects in our territories without our consent.

Because the Colombian law is on our side, wealthy interests have employed illegal means to physically remove us. Joint operations between the Colombian military and illegal terrorist paramilitary organizations like the "Operation Genesis" in the Afro-Colombian Chocó region have targeted our leaders with assassinations while the Colombian military has aerielly bombarded our communities.

Tens of thousands of us have been forced to flee. These attacks clear the way for the entry of oil palm plantations, logging operations, and mining projects advanced by allies of the Uribe Administration. Colombia has more than 3 million internally displaced people. This kind of forced displacement is now occurring in port communities and other regions supporters of the FTA seek to develop. None of our lands have been returned to our control.

Accompanying these physical attacks has been a legal assault aimed at formalizing the theft of our land. The Uribe government passed new Forestry and Rural Development Laws and has amended the Mining Law to extinguish our rights and empower oil palm, logging and other companies that have utilized the services of paramilitaries to occupy our territories. Our communities have vehemently opposed these laws as unconstitutional. Recently the Colombian Supreme Court ruled against the Forestry Law, which would have removed our control of the forests on our land. Our Supreme Court ruled that under international and Colombian law, the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities that strongly opposed the law should have been consulted * which they were not.

The Colombia FTA is the same situation. It is a proposal that our communities oppose, about which our traditional authorities were not consulted, and which would lock in the paramilitary-financiers control of our land. Specifically, the FTA's expansive foreign investor rights would empower multinational corporations investing in these projects with protections that would make restoration of our lands extremely difficult, even when we win in our courts. Recognizing our opposition, Uribe and his allies devised this new Commission, which is stacked with Uribe supporters and individuals known to support the FTA, to feign "consultation" with Afro-Colombian communities and issue a determination that the FTA is good for us despite our communities' contrary conclusions. Rather than a positive development, this new Commission is a sophisticated ploy to undermine Afro-Colombian rights and is a part of a broader strategy to elevate unrepresentative and illegitimate pro-FTA individuals against the stated interest of Afro-Colombian communities themselves.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Learn more about the Colombia, Panama, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements at <http://tradejustice.net>
- Contact your Representatives, Senators, and President Obama to urge them to OPPOSE the Colombia, Panama, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements. You can find their contact information at <http://contactingthecongress.org> or by calling (718) 218-4523.
- Email, call, fax, and write to Sophia King, Congressman Meeks's legislative assistant on trade and let her know that you are disgusted by his support for these free trade agreements. Let him know that it's not too late to develop a conscience and vote against them. Gregory W. Meeks, 2234 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515 Phone (202) 225-3461 Fax 202/226-4169 Email: sophia.king@mail.house.gov
- Volunteer with TradeJustice NY Metro! To find out how you can take action against these trade agreements, contact us:

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