

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Parliament Hill
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

August 14, 2007

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

We are representatives of Canada's churches, and members of MESA, a tri-national coalition of religious organizations from Canada, the United States and Mexico working for just trade.

We write you in advance of your summit with Presidents Bush and Calderón this August to urge you to use this opportunity to promote just trade relationships.

We welcome the renewed commitment that your government has made to strengthening ties with our continental neighbours. However, we are concerned that these new initiatives, including the Security and Prosperity Partnership, may replicate the harmful effects of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) model.

We are troubled that the Canadian government is seeking to emulate the NAFTA model with other continental trading partners without first conducting a thorough and adequate review of its impacts. We are further concerned that the Government of Canada is expanding economic integration with our Mexican and American neighbours into new and strategic domains through the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) without adequate Parliamentary participation or public input. Further harmonizing regulations in areas such as immigration, energy, natural resources and security under the present model has the potential to deepen the damaging effects of the current NAFTA model without increasing the human security or wellbeing of all people living in Canada.

Created in God's image, human beings are called to the care and keeping of creation for the benefit of all people, not just a privileged few. There is enough for everyone, if we but choose to enact just policies that keep the welfare of all people at their centre. Trade and exchange are basic engines of wellbeing, but must occur within the framework of democratic participation, commitment to the reduction of inequality, protection of the most vulnerable, and wise stewardship of the planet.

For that reason we urge your government to work for just trade relationships for all, and to refrain from signing additional free trade agreements until there has been a significant and participatory assessment of the benefits and negative effects of NAFTA, involving the legislatures and citizens of all three countries.

At a consultation on trade and investment agreements involving Canadian, Mexican and US churches, the following principles were identified by delegates: Drawing on these principles, we recommend that the Canadian government:

- Ensure that trade and investment agreements are subordinate to international law and agreements that guarantee universally recognized human rights. These include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; gender equity; labour rights; migrant worker rights; and rights of indigenous peoples.
- Negotiate trade and investment agreements, including the SPP, through transparent negotiations and provide for the participation by Parliament and citizens in the negotiation, implementation, and monitoring of their performance.
- Safeguard the ability of governments to protect the interest of their citizens and the environment. Trade and investment agreements should allow for mutually beneficial agricultural trade, protect the ability of small producers to survive and thrive, and ensure that subsidies, tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers do not harm agricultural producers in smaller economies.
- Preserve the integrity of publicly funded and administered health, education and other government services;
- Ensure corporate social responsibility and accountability through mandatory codes of conduct.
- Ensure that intellectual property rights restrictions, including data exclusivity and other provisions, do not hinder affordable access to life-saving medicines for people in developing countries.

We ask that you give serious consideration to the concerns and proposals we have raised in this letter. We believe that it is only by living up to our responsibility to care for one another that true security and abundance for all can be achieved.

Our American and Mexican colleagues are writing to Presidents Bush and Calderón respectively. We will be praying for wisdom and discernment for you and Presidents Bush and Calderón.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Michael Hogeterp
Chair, Commission on Justice and Peace
The Canadian Council of Churches

Maylanne Maybee
Coordinator, EcoJustice
The Anglican Church of Canada

Stephen Allen
Associate Secretary, Justice Ministries
The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Nelson Rosales
Program Coordinator, Caribbean, Central America and Colombia (acting)
Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit
The United Church of Canada

Cc: The Honourable David Emerson, Minister for International Trade.

The Honourable Stéphane Dion, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
The Honourable Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party