

October 24, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

We are faith-based organizations and religious bodies with constituencies in the United States, and close partners and mission representatives serving in many regions around the world. We write out of deep concern about the current negotiations for the new NAFTA agreement. There appears to be a new sense of urgency to pass an agreement without first ensuring the agreement is worthy of support. We urge Congress to ensure that the current flaws in the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) are fixed and to resist passing an imperfect deal that fails to produce a transformative new pact based on an arbitrary deadline.

As faith-based organizations, we believe the global economy should serve the poor and vulnerable with care and respect for all creation. Based on the experiences and witness of our mission partners we see how NAFTA and other trade agreements disproportionately benefit a small number of individuals, governments, and corporations while leaving the majority of people on the margins. Such agreements favor the interests of transnational corporations above the quality of life of working people and other vulnerable populations such as small farmers, women, and indigenous communities. As a result, these agreements drive migration and exacerbate poverty and hunger by undermining local economies and decreasing access to essential services, such as clean water, adequate housing, nutritious food, education and basic health care. **The final agreement must create a new economic model for trade that reflects our values of protecting human health and dignity as well as the health of the planet.**

Justice demands the agreement be fixed. Congress should not pass any agreement that fails to:

Ensure just labor practices

Trade rules should enhance workers' rights in the U.S. and abroad by supporting stable jobs with decent wages, protecting workers' freedom to organize, join unions, and negotiate with their employers in accordance with internationally-agreed worker standards, including those of the ILO. Strong and clear labor standards with swift and certain enforcement tools should be requisite in any trade agreement. The current enforcement tools are underutilized and inadequate to ensure the health and safety of workers.

By improving standards and enforcement abroad, it will also benefit workers in the United States, making it more difficult for corporations seeking lower standards and wages to outsource jobs abroad.

Faithfully steward God's earth and uphold environmental protections

Our faith traditions call us to protect God's creation. We witness how the effects of climate change disproportionately fall hardest on the poorest, especially in developing countries. We cannot afford to implement trade agreements that will continue to contribute to climate change and its disastrous effects. Additionally, weak environmental laws and enforcement have allowed corporations to contaminate water, air, and soil. This contamination harms ecosystems and human health, including children's health. Similar to the labor standards, the environmental enforcement mechanism is woefully inadequate, underutilized, and unacceptable. The final agreement must include strong, binding, and enforceable environmental standards in addition to a commitment to curb climate change, thus prioritizing long-term ecological sustainability and human health.

Ensure access to affordable medicines

Our faith traditions call us to care for and heal the sick. The prioritization of pharmaceutical corporations' profits over patients through monopoly protections in trade agreements can put life-saving drugs out of reach for many. New USMCA rules related to intellectual property will make access to life-saving medicines, especially in low-income communities, more difficult. This is a step backward from the original NAFTA agreement. Any monopoly protections that go beyond the terms of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) should be eliminated.

At its core, the goal of U.S. trade policy should be to promote sustainable development and livelihoods through environmental, economic, and social well-being that benefits all members of society.

This is a once in a generation chance to stop ongoing problems related to the original NAFTA. We respectfully ask that Congress continue to insist that the Trump Administration make changes to the current USMCA agreement that benefit working families and the earth rather than rush through a compromise agreement that continues ongoing harm to people and the planet.

Respectfully,

American Friends Service Committee

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Faith in Healthcare

Franciscan Action Network

Holy Cross International Justice Office

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Pax Christi International

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Sisters of the Holy Cross

Sisters of Mercy's Institute Justice Team

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society