



Asociación de Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida

Dear Member of Congress in the United States and Central America:

We write to you as representatives of women's organizations and social movements in Central America and the United States to express our concerns about the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). We support fair trade and sustainable development policies. If trade is to succeed in reducing poverty, it must benefit women, who are the vast majority of the poor throughout the region, and enable them to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

CAFTA does not do this. Experience with NAFTA has demonstrated that this model of free trade does not benefit poor women. Ten years of NAFTA has resulted in increased poverty, job loss, and loss of affordable services for women in the United States, Canada and Mexico. A recent study showed that in Mexico, poverty for female-headed households increased by 50 percent since NAFTA was implemented.¹ We oppose the extension of that model to Central America. Furthermore, we understand that the process for negotiating CAFTA has been undemocratic. The CAFTA text was not released until it was completed and there has been no meaningful national debate on this agreement in the United States or in Central America. We are specifically concerned with the content of CAFTA that would:

- **Promote the privatization of essential public goods and services.** Privatization often leads to price hikes. Women would have to make up for increases in prices of these services in order to ensure adequate health, education and food conditions for themselves and their families, increasing their workday within and outside of the home.
- **Increase unemployment in both Central America and the United States, especially that of women.** It is not true that CAFTA would generate socially sustainable jobs for women. In the United States, the NAFTA experience shows that job losses were concentrated among industries employing women and minorities.² In Mexico, while women gained new jobs in export-agriculture, these jobs did not lift women and their families out of poverty.

In Central America, the reductions in the State and the bankruptcy of small and medium-scale companies that would result from CAFTA would mean that women are thrown out of the formal labor force and forced to join the informal sector without any kind of labor protections.

- **Lead to a decrease in respect for labor laws.** CAFTA would consolidate a model of maquiladora development in Central America that treats women as cheap labor, without ensuring decent working conditions or protecting women's rights.

¹ Women's Edge Coalition, 2003

² Breaking Boundaries II-Women and the Free Trade Area of the Americas: Understanding the Connections, USGTN, September 2003, p.5.

- **Not resolve the challenge of mass migration out of the region and the serious problems that immigrants face in host societies.** CAFTA deals exclusively with the free movement of goods and services, not persons. There is nothing in CAFTA that would resolve the grave labor conditions suffered by the hundreds of thousands of Central American women working in the United States.
- **Destroy local farm economies.** With its focus on production for export instead of farming for the local economy, CAFTA would destroy family farms, which supply domestic markets and which employ and support the majority of women throughout Central America. Poor farmers will also face an uphill battle competing with highly subsidized U.S. products.

We are not against trade or against development in Central America. The conditions and rules presented by CAFTA would, however, generate far-reaching negative impacts on economies and societies in both regions and further threaten the well being of women, families, and communities across the region. Given that there is no role for Congress to change the agreement, we urge you to oppose this agreement should it come before Congress for approval.

Sincerely,

This letter was written by the Asociación de Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, Las Dignas, together with members of the U.S. Gender and Trade Network (USGTN).

Additional Sign-ons in support of this letter:

U.S.

U.S. Gender and Trade Network (USGTN)

AFL-CIO

Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART)

California Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights

Center of Concern

CISPES

Citizens Trade Campaign

Code Pink: Women for Peace

Congregation Justice Committee, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Notre Dame, IN

Congregation of St. Joseph, Cleveland

Congregation of St. Joseph Justice Office, Cleveland

Development Group for Alternative Policies (DGAP)

Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA)

Global Exchange

Holy Cross International Justice Office

Institute Justice Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace

International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF)

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

OFM Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Council - English Speaking Conference (OFM-JPIC-ESC)

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Medical Mission Sisters: Alliance for Justice

Mexico Solidarity Network

Migration and Policy Resource Center, Occidental College

National Organization for Women (NOW)

NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Nicaragua Network

Quixote Center/Quest for Peace

SHARE

Sisters of Mercy Institute Team

STITCH

Sweatshop Watch

Tennessee Economic Renewal Network

United for a Fair Economy

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Women's Edge Coalition

El Salvador

Asociación de Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Las Dignas)

Asociación de Mujeres Mélida Anaya Montes (Las Mélidas)

Centro de Estudios sobre Inversión y Comercio de El Salvador (CEICOM)

Centro para la Defensa de Consumidores (CDC)

Concertación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas. Integrada por: FUNSALPRODESE, CRIPDES, Fundación Redes entre otras.

Instituto de Desarrollo de la Mujer (IMU)

Marcha Mundial capítulo El Salvador. Integrada por: Comité 25 de noviembre, MSM, CORAMS

Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres (MS)

Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres (MSM)

Red de Acción Ciudadana frente al Comercio e Inversión (Sinti Techan)

Tiempos Nuevos Teatros (TNT)

Unión Nacional Ecológica Salvadoreña (UNES)

Honduras

Bloque Popular de Honduras

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres - CDM

Centro de Estudios de la Mujer de Honduras - CEM-H

Guatemala

Agrupación de Mujeres Tierra Viva de Guatemala

Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas - CNOC - de Guatemala

Nicaragua

Centro de Estudios Internacionales (CEI)

Mujer y Comunidad (COMPA) de Nicaragua

Costa Rica

Agenda Cantonal de Mujeres Desamparadeñas (ACAMUDE)
Alianza de Mujeres Costarricenses
Asociación de Servicios de Promoción Laboral (ASEPROLA)
Consejo de los 12 Puntos de Costa Rica
Encuentro Popular

México

Coordinadora Diocesana de Mujeres (CODIMUJ)
Red Nacional de Género y Economía

Peru

Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE)
Grupo Genero y Economia- Peru