



NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATION OF COLOMBIA ONIC

NIT. 860.521.808-1

Press Release on the FTA

The National Authority of the Indigenous Government of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), in compliance with the Mandate in defense of the rights of indigenous communities and the national and international advocacy related to VII Congress of Indigenous Peoples, expresses its profound concern regarding the recent events that have surrounded the political discussion on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Colombia and the United States.

In our country, this Free Trade Agreement translates into a series of risks and threats for small agricultural producers and manufacturers, small industries, and the most vulnerable populations. In indigenous communities for example, food security and relationships with ancestral territories will be seriously compromised. Both of which are at stake in the context of a free market economy and large-scale extraction of natural resources which is reinforced and intensified by agreements such as the FTA.

During the negotiation process between the governments of Colombia and the United States, there have never been democratic forums where citizens could participate. Despite measures requiring previous consultation, the FTA was never submitted to previous consultation with ethnic groups since it will directly affect Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples. The previous consultation process must abide by national standards (Law 21/91, Constitutional Court sentence) and international ones (C-169/OIT, UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights).

It is public knowledge that even though Colombian state has already done what is necessary to make the FTA law, the situation in the United States is different. There have been many efforts to correct the Agreement in regards to the situation related to labor rights and the human rights situation of Colombian union leaders. It is important to advance the defense of union and labor rights; however, at ONIC we believe that opposition to this agreement, or the conditions for its ratification, should not focus solely on this aspect because it is a complex agreement that is a clear and concrete threat to other rights and other populations. We believe that the FTA involves profound risks for ethnic groups, and solely focusing on labor and union issues leads to the incorrect conclusion that there are no other problematic aspects of the FTA.



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We the indigenous communities view the FTA as a threat to our individual and collective survival. The FTA will reinforce and extend the concessions of our territories for extensive single-crop farming and extractive economic activities. Food insecurity situations will become more acute due to the loss of sovereignty of the Colombian state. Issues related to ancestral knowledge, medicinal plants, and intellectual property are additional causes for concern. These have become the subject of voracious trade, in spite of the fact that for indigenous communities it is related to our sacred spiritual practices.

The indigenous movement is concerned by recent acts that intend to bring about the ratification of the FTA by the U.S. Congress, particularly the intense advocacy and lobbying of the Colombian government in the United States and the creation of the “action plan” or “agreement” by Presidents Juan Manuel Santos and Barack Obama. These recent acts concern the indigenous movement because the agreements that are reached can be reduced to issues related to labor and union rights without tackling structural problems, such as the Colombian human rights situation in general and of indigenous communities in particular.

In solidarity, we call on U.S. civil society organizations, unions, friendly congressmen, etc. to continue their commendable efforts to oppose and propose alternatives to this trade agreement. The FTA represents a threat to the rights of the most vulnerable populations, including indigenous communities. Therefore, we hope that you will enrich your work beyond labor and union rights by broadening your perspective to include the human rights situation of ethnic groups.

Bogota D.C. April 11, 2011

**HIGH GOVERNMENT COUNCIL
National Authority of the Indigenous Government**