

## **Regarding the Imminent Signature of the US-Colombia FTA**

### ***Statement by the Communities Who Form Part of the Alternative Network Communities***

Tuesday, September 13, 2011

We believe that international cooperation is important and that it is a key to coexistence and political relations between peoples and States. We have also increasingly understood the diversity of cultures on our planet.

We would like to reiterate that, in regards to solidarity, justice, and respect for human life, that trade agreements are an important means of dealing with current and future problems.

Crises including the financial, food, energy and environmental ones (including climate change, water shortages and deforestation), as well as the weapons problem and drug trafficking are all problems that need to be addressed. Both old and new social and political conflicts can be faced with creativity, bold plans and innovative thinking. They require looking for other ways of relating to the environment, economic production so that actions are sustainable and we can fulfill unmet basic human needs. Using alternative approaches we can demonstrate that it is possible for public policies to benefit all of the planet's inhabitants and every country's citizens. We have a wealth of experiences and initiatives along these lines.

The difficulties that we encounter in the manufacturing sector and citizen's services, the health and employment problems and the United States' dependency on certain energy sources are all expressions of these crises that feed the zeal for finding new markets. These issues can be settled with actions towards economic cooperation and fair trade agreements. Communities located in high biological and cultural biodiversity zones are the ones who have expressed the most concerns about the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Manufacturing on a small and medium scale in urban areas which sustains many Colombian families has deteriorated.

While the FTA will generate new jobs in the United States, in Colombia it will favor extractive industries. These industries operate throughout the country particularly in rural areas inhabited by rural mestizo, afrodescendent and indigenous communities. They operate in protected environmental areas and places where we grow our food. Some of these areas are unique because their inhabitants possess agricultural and ecological knowledge that is still unknown to the developed world. The FTA will also affect many in the urban sector. The FTA has not yet been approved by the US and already the situation for many is grave. If the FTA passes without any prior protections for vulnerable groups, the situation for these peoples will become worse.

The situation in Colombia is compounded by the fact that the country experiences grave inequality. Colombia is the fourth most unequal country in the hemisphere. While the FTA may initially generate wealth and jobs for some in the United States, in the long-run, its human, social and environmental costs will hurt everyone. Once it is approved in the US, the trade agreement will increase poverty and misery in Colombia. It will create new waves of violence, crime, accumulation of wealth, and increase the difficulty for basic survival of many.

For years, the FTA has been presented as an agreement that would serve as a foundation for which to respect for human rights. If this argument is valid, it would need to translate into actions that guarantee the right to life, the right to association, and stop the persecution against unions. During the FTA negotiations between Colombia and the US a Labor Action Plan was launched that contains provisional terms to fulfill these rights. When the Plan came out we raised concerns about the naïve steps included to address these substantive issues. Also we noted that the Plan excludes important sectors of society including ourselves. After the Labor Action Plan's release, armed actors have used violence in the countryside to block land titling and restitution efforts. While this occurred the Santos government did nothing. Rather we have seen a cover up take place and land titles funneled to interests that support agricultural businesses, infrastructure projects and extractive operations.

Given the current situation in Colombia whereby development takes place without any human rights conditions we ask what will become of the Plan of Action be once the FTA is passed? What will the US military aid package look like if there are no conditions? What will happen to the situation of rural and urban laborers? What will happen to victims who claim their rights? What about human rights organizations? What about the situation of the Constitutional Court? What about the judges in the Criminal Division of the Supreme Court of Justice? What will happen to the situation of certain journalists?

Various sources indicate that the trade union sector's rights situation has not improved and that the attacks against their members continue. The recent student and teacher union protests are evidence of the decline healthcare quality and coverage in the education sector. Although the number of extrajudicial executions has dropped in number, they continue to take place. Certain structures of the paramilitary network have developed new forms of elimination that are more selective. Paramilitary groups maintain their operations in a number of areas throughout the country. They act with the complicity and tolerance of the armed forces. Due to these relationships, the military and police are partially part responsible for continued human rights violations committed by the paramilitary groups.

The perception that there are advances in the justice system is mainly due to the lack of media coverage of abuses that continue to take place. Multiple murders, disappearances, new displacements and death threats take place. The internal armed conflict continues and despite the search for political dialogue, the asymmetrical war continues with increasing human, social and political costs. These costs include serious human rights

infractions and rampant impunity. Illegally gotten wealth continues to be protected and the conflict favors the enrichment of a chosen few.

According to Colombia's human rights ombudsman, 61 land title applicants were murdered with 25 killed during Santos' government. Persecution of the political opposition, journalists, judges, human rights defenders and those who engage in civil disobediences against public policies has not stopped despite the fact that the government uses different rhetoric. The Attorney General's office's actions have been selective, inquisitive and persecutory. The Office is known for disregarding due process, breaking with official court decisions, and overstepping its mandate to deal with those who have political differences. It provides insufficient protection for human rights defenders, rural, afrocolombian and indigenous leaders. The office does not answer demands nor have an efficient mechanism in place to do so.

On behalf of our people, the people of the United States and of the future of humanity, we want to express great regret over the imminent approval of the FTA that will take place between the governments of President Juan Manuel Santos and President Barack Obama. We regret that the majority of the United States Senate and House of Representatives and powerful Colombian factions insist on making a decision that will hurt us all in the short and long-term.

This agreement is a sad event for our democracies. The FTA will further weaken any chance of Colombia becoming an inclusive democracy. Such a democracy would include real justice, a democratic environment, respect for human rights and the absence of social-political violence. With the FTA we will continue to have a limited democracy without rights. However, we still hold out hope that one day it will be possible to create and build another form of cooperation between our people. We still hope for international cooperation where there is respect for the lives and dignities of all our people and where there is no fear of dying by bullets or hunger or silence because it is better to keep quiet before such impunity.

### **Comunidades de la Red de Alternativas**

Consejo Comunitario De La Comunidad Negra Del Rio Naya- Valle del Cauca

Comunidad Indígena Nonan - Resguardo Santarosa De Guayacan - Valle del Cauca

Jóvenes Unidos Por El Bienestar Del Calima Jubca - Valle del Cauca

Asociación Agroecológica Esther Cayapu – Trujillo

Asociación Agroecologica Koinonía – Trujillo

Asociación Agroecológica Asavip - Trujillo

Asociación Consejo Regional del Pueblo Nasa del Putumayo "KWE'SX KSXA'W"

Asociación de Desarrollo Integral Sostenible Perla Amazónica - ADISPA Putumayo

Zona de Reserva Campesina Perla Amazónica-Putumayo

Asociación de Productores y Procesadores Semillas de Paz - ASPROSEPAZ-Putumayo

Asociación de Productores y Procesadores Camino al Futuro - ASPROCAF-Putumayo

Asociación Campesina de Desarrollo Sostenible - ASCADES

Zona de Biodiversidad "El Triunfo"-Putumayo

Zona de Biodiversidad "Buena Vista"-Putumayo

Zona de Biodiversidad "La Gurrera"-Putumayo Pueblo Kamëntsä Alto Putumayo Grupo Porvenir.

Grupo de Jóvenes Raíces de Dignidad Perla Amazónica – JURADIPA Asociación Campesina Bienandante Sucre Cauca

Asociación Campesina Huerto Renacer Sucre Cauca

Escuela de Derechos Humanos Ullucos, Resguardo san Francisco Toribio- Cauca

Asociación familiar de víctimas de ejecuciones extrajudicial "sembradores de paz"

Asociación familias desplazadas del municipio de Argelia Cauca

Comunidad de Autodeterminación Vida y Dignidad (CAVIDA)

Consejos comunitarios asociados en ZH y ZB de Curbaradó y Jiguamiandó

Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo la Balsita- DABEIBA – Antioquia

Comunidades Indígenas Embera del Resguardo Urada Jiguamiandó