



MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS

Peace, Social Justice and Integrity of Creation

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For Immediate Release

May 18, 2017

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Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns calls for a NAFTA renegotiation that puts people and creation at the center

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, the Trump administration notified Congress that it plans to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a trade deal which has prioritized corporate interests and disregarded the most affected—impoverished and vulnerable communities, ordinary workers and their families, and the environment—since its establishment more than twenty-five years ago.

Since the free-trade zone between Canada, Mexico, and the United States began, Maryknoll missionaries—Fathers and Brothers, Sisters, and Lay Missioners—have been particularly concerned about the imbalance in power between the U.S. and developing countries in all trade negotiations. We have seen how trade agreements have undermined policies and programs to protect the common good in both the United States and in the countries with which we trade. In particular, in keeping with the Catholic principle subsidiarity, we reject the inclusion of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), a system which undermines the ability of governments to develop and enforce regulations in the best interest of their sovereign nations.

We call for a trade model that serves the common good. This includes strong and enforceable environmental and labor standards, access to affordable medicines, and respect for small scale, locally-driven economic development that encourages people to buy local. These measures will reduce economic inequality and some of the push factors of migration.

“In his letter, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis warns us of a globalization of indifference. Our NAFTA trade model has been indifferent to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Maryknoll missionaries have witnessed an increase in hunger, income inequality, and environmental degradation in Mexico since NAFTA went into force. We need a new trade model that prioritizes human dignity and God’s creation over corporate profits,” said Gerry Lee, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

“In Mexico, trade policies and domestic economic policies have opened up communal indigenous lands that were protected in the Constitution of 1917 to open pit mining, fracking, hydroelectric dams, and wind farms by the government and private corporations. Over 30 percent of Mexico’s land mass is now concessioned to such private enterprises,” remarked Phil Dahl-Bredine, a returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner now based in Mexico. “These activities have contaminated water sources and diminished the amount of productive farmland available for indigenous communities to feed themselves.”

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Dahl Bredine works with the Indigenous Territories Defense Collective (Colectivo para la defensa de los Territorios Indigenas) in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. The collective unites statewide struggles against mines, hydroelectric dams and wind farms on indigenous lands with a defense of native seeds and agricultural wisdom.

“No one I know here realistically expects that a renegotiation of NAFTA will solve any of Mexico’s problems. The hope is that it will not exacerbate them.”

We call for the NAFTA renegotiations to focus on the moral and human dimensions of trade—enhancing the life and dignity of people in all three countries and protecting the environment. We call for a special concern for those living in poverty and ordinary workers who we know from the experience of the last twenty-five years experience the impact of this agreement most directly.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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