

INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT

*A WASHINGTON-BASED WORKING GROUP WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM A RANGE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTED TO ASSERTING
A STRONGER PRESENCE OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN PUBLIC POLICY DISCUSSIONS ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT*

Faith communities express opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement

For Immediate Release

February 3, 2016

Contact: Chloe Schwabe, Maryknoll Office for Global Concern
Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment co-chair
(202) 549-1696, Email: cschwabe@maryknoll.org

As trade ministers gather in Auckland, New Zealand to sign the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, U.S. faith-based organizations expressed opposition to the agreement. The Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment has worked since 2000 to bring to the trade debate the experiences of people of faith in mission and in service with vulnerable communities around the world.

Kathryn Johnson, policy impact coordinator with the American Friends Service Committee, said: “It’s little wonder that the TPP is practically an investor wish list. Over 600 corporate advisors participated in the negotiations shaping the agreement to benefit themselves while the public was kept in the dark. This pact put corporations firmly in the driver’s seat shaping health, environmental and economic policies around the globe. It also allows investors to bypass a country’s judicial system to challenge environmental and public health laws.”

Scott Wright, director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, said: “Columban missionaries live and serve in six of the twelve countries participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). We know from past experience that free trade agreements tend to favor the interests of transnational corporations over the needs of the poor and the environment. Based on this firsthand knowledge, we know the TPP is not in the best interests of the communities we serve. The global economy must work in service to the people, not threaten their human dignity or destroy our common home.”

Emily Wirzba, policy associate for Sustainable Energy and Environment of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, said: “The Friends Committee on National Legislation is committed to protecting ‘the world, and they that dwell therein’ (Psalm 24:1), so that every person’s potential may be fulfilled. These aspirations are threatened by the TPP. The TPP weakens or excludes major environmental commitments that have been in all trade agreements since 2007, including efforts to protect whales, tuna, and other marine life. By expediting natural gas exports, the TPP will encourage the use of dirty fossil fuels which drive climate change. Climate change – the greatest environment challenge of our time, threatening the well-being and potential of present and future generations – is not even mentioned in the agreement. Finally, under the investor state dispute settlement provisions, the TPP threatens our democracy by enabling fossil fuel corporations to challenge national, state, and local laws which protect our public health and the environment, in international tribunals beyond U.S. jurisdiction, which have the power to make binding decisions upon our nation. The TPP falls far short of promoting a healthy and diverse environment, of addressing climate change, and of protecting our democracy, for the benefit of all people and our Earth.”

Chloe Schwabe, director of the Faith Ecology Economy project of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said: “Maryknoll missionaries have witnessed the devastating impacts that trade agreements have had on the livelihoods of small farmers and rural economies in Central America and Mexico after the implementation of CAFTA and NAFTA. The TPP, which favors the large-scale industrial, agricultural model, will yet again hurt the livelihoods of small farmers and threaten their ability to feed their families their daily bread. Our faith calls us to ensure that the economy serves God's most vulnerable people – not the other way around.”

Susan Thompson, associate director of the Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice, said: “The Medical Mission Sisters are a religious congregation of women dedicated to providing the poor of the world better access to health care. We work in 17 countries and we have seen first-hand that access to generic drugs has dramatically reduced the price of important medicines used to treat AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, for example. This reduced cost has substantially increased the number of patients who are able to receive treatment. Access to affordable, lifesaving medicines will be threatened where they are needed most – in parts of the developing world – if the U.S. insists on implementing restrictive intellectual property policies in the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. For millions of people throughout the world, delaying access to generic medications means delaying access to treatment.”

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, director of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness, said: “Any trade agreement that only focuses on increasing profits for international corporate interests while ignoring fundamental issues like human rights, environmental protection and access to affordable medication is immoral and shows a blatant disregard for human life. We must be a better nation by choosing trade policies that uplift humanity rather than endanger the lives of women, men, boys, and girls.”

Jean Stokan, director of the Institute Justice Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, said: “The deal threatens international labor standards and domestic industrial markets, pushing more people into forced migration and making them vulnerable to human trafficking. Eradicating human trafficking is a chief concern for the Sisters of Mercy, and this trade deal undermines international efforts to end trafficking.”

Dr. Edith Rasell, minister for economic justice, of the United Church of Christ, said: “The TPP is quite similar to previous trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Like the earlier treaties, it will boost unemployment in the U.S. and worsen economic inequality in all the TPP countries – any economic gains will flow primarily to the wealthy. Congress must oppose this harmful agreement.”

Additional contacts for media:

Catherine Gordon, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment co-chair, catherine.gordon@pcusa.org, (202) 543 1126.

Paul Marchione (to contact Sister Simone Campbell), NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, pmarchione@networklobby.org, (202) 601-7869.

###