

April 24, 2023

The Honorable Katherine Tai  
Office of the United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20508  
USA

Dear Ambassador Tai:

As religious bodies with constituencies in the United States, and close partners and mission representatives serving in many regions around the world, we write to you with shared recommendations for the ongoing Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) negotiations and other ongoing and potential trade talks. Now is the time for profound change in global trade rules that prioritize the planet, human rights, and dignity over profit.

We share a vision and understanding that trade and development can help lift communities out of poverty when done right. However, we have witnessed far too often how trade agreements have failed to distribute these gains proportionately and fairly, exacerbating economic inequality and increasing forced migration and hunger. Previous trade agreements put good paying jobs, nutritious food, and the right to live in a safe and healthy environment out of reach for people on the margins- especially for low-wealth communities, people of color, and ethnic minorities in the United States and in developing countries with whom the U.S. has trading relationships.

We very much support President Biden's intention of creating a new worker-centered, climate-friendly trade model, and hope that your continued leadership on the following issues will ensure that any final IPEF pact and other trade deals will advance a more just and sustainable global economy for the most vulnerable among us both at home and abroad.

Our shared priorities in this area include the following:

- **Promote the Dignity of Work and Put People Over Profit:** As you testified before Congress this March, your office's diligent use of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement's (USMCA's) Rapid Response Mechanism for labor enforcement is delivering tangible results in the defense of Mexican workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. With severe, ongoing labor rights violations — including child labor, forced labor, trade unionist assassinations and more — well documented in multiple IPEF partner nations, it is crucial that any IPEF deal or other trade pact build off the USMCA's facility-specific, rapid-response labor enforcement tools and include real penalties for labor rights violations. We know from decades of hard experience that commitments to uphold labor standards, without swift and certain enforcement mechanisms attached, often go unfulfilled. With IPEF poised to set labor rules governing roughly 40% of the world's economy, and also to become a template for subsequent trade pacts in Asia, Africa and the Americas, IPEF's labor enforcement mechanisms must take a step forward, not

backwards, relative to the existing best practices you helped create in the USMCA. This is important not just to prevent further job loss, wage suppression, and inequality in the United States, but to ensure that U.S. trade policy becomes a tool for uplifting working-class communities throughout the world and ending modern-day slavery.

- **Uphold Environmental Protections as Faithful Stewards of the Earth:** The Biden administration's commitment to creating a climate-friendly model for trade and international cooperation via IPEF is both timely and necessary. The impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world, including in the United States, and all trade agreements must effectively incorporate binding requirements for countries to meet their Paris climate obligations. As with IPEF's labor provisions, any IPEF agreement or other trade deal should be backed with facility-specific enforcement tools. Given the United States' disproportional responsibility for creating the climate crisis, justice also dictates that the U.S. provide special assistance to other IPEF nations — such as technical assistance, financing, technology transfer and more — to help nations both exceed their Paris climate goals and better mitigate climate disruptions. Additional steps should be taken to ensure that the dispute resolution mechanisms of trade pacts are no longer used to attack and undermine clean energy and climate initiatives in any nation. Overall, we urge you to please be as ambitious as possible in advancing climate terms in this pact that aid in our collective goal of enabling a livable future for current and future generations.
- **Promote Policies to End Hunger:** Our faith traditions offer important values and principles in assessing policies and programs related to agriculture. Our sacred texts call us to care for the powerless and those on the margins of society; starvation and widespread hunger indict us as believers. Hungry children, farmworkers, and farmers in distress are not abstract issues. Our care and concern extend in a special way to those who work in agriculture here and abroad. While some are doing well, others are vulnerable or struggling and living in poverty. Current agriculture rules in trade agreements reinforce a corporate model of large-scale, monocrop agriculture heavily dependent on fossil fuels and toxic chemicals. Rules should instead favor people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and local inputs. Rules on intellectual property rights that prevent farmers from saving and sharing seeds should be removed from agreements. Solidarity and subsidiarity lead us to support and promote smaller, family-run farms not only to produce food, but also to provide a livelihood for families and to form the foundation for thriving rural communities.
- **Protect Human Rights in Digital Trade:** IPEF and other future trade deals must not include secrecy guarantees that restrict pre-screening or general review of algorithms or source code for racial biases, gender biases, labor law violations, and other potential abuses. Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds significant promise for advancing a wide range of human endeavors, including science, medicine, engineering, communication, transportation, finance, education, and more. Unfortunately, recent experience shows that many of the algorithms behind this technology are replicating and amplifying existing racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination found throughout society. The

rapid advances of AI systems like ChatGPT highlight the potential for even more dangerous computer-created discriminatory actions in addition to documented discrimination in AI-aided hiring practices, criminal justice applications, provision of public services, search engines, facial recognition, self-driving cars, and multiple other areas. To prevent ongoing and future abuses against communities of color, ethnic and religious minorities, women and others, governments must be able to adopt proactive policy measures to address algorithm biases and other AI abuses without worry that new public interest policies will run afoul of international trade obligations. This is a critical civil rights and human rights matter with deep moral implications.

We welcome any opportunity to dialogue further to work towards a trade policy centered around values that protect our common home and improve the lives of all people—especially those who historically benefit the least from international trade. We look forward to being a resource for you and your staff, and welcome any suggestions you may have in how we can assist you in these areas.

Sincerely,

American Hindu World Service  
Benedictine Sisters of Chicago  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Dominican Sisters of Hope  
Dominican Sisters of Houston  
Faiths for Safe Water  
Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office  
Holy Cross International Justice Office  
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA  
Hope Border Institute  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Medical Mission Sisters - Justice Office  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness  
School Sisters of Notre Dame - JPIC Office  
Sisters of Charity of New York  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team  
Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia  
Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, MA  
Sisters of the Precious Blood - Dayton, Ohio  
United Church of Christ, Justice, and Local Church Ministries