

The Rt. Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. K1A 0A2

February 13, 2009

Dear Prime Minister,

Canadians are looking forward to the February 19th visit to Canada by US President Barack Obama. The new US administration, despite the financial and economic crisis, has shown a singular determination to steer the US ship of state in a new direction. The Obama visit provides both Ottawa and Washington with a unique opportunity to do some fresh thinking about relations spanning the 49th parallel – and those that go beyond.

President Obama has publicly stated that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) based on the NAFTA model, are flawed, "I voted against CAFTA and never supported NAFTA. NAFTA's shortcomings were evident when signed and we must now amend the agreement to fix them. While NAFTA gave broad rights to investors, it paid only lip service to the rights of labour and the importance of environmental protection." [1]

We the undersigned call on the Canadian government to announce during Obama's visit that our country is prepared to renegotiate NAFTA. We also call on the Prime Minister to simultaneously notify the public that Canada is declaring an immediate moratorium on the negotiation and ratification of all bilateral free trade agreements currently under consideration – most notably those with Colombia, Peru, and the four Central American nations.

We note that Obama's position on revisiting FTAs is backed up by the August 25th 2008 Democratic National Platform statement, " We will not negotiate bilateral trade agreements that stop the government from protecting the environment, food safety, or the health of its citizens; give greater rights to foreign investors than US investors; require privatization of our vital public services; or prevent developing countries from adopting humanitarian licensing policies to improve access to life-saving medications. We will stand firm against bilateral agreements that fail to live up to these important benchmarks, and will strive to achieve them in the multilateral framework. We will work with Canada and Mexico to amend the North American Free trade Agreement so that it works better for all three countries." [2]

We also bring to the Prime Minister's attention that Canadian public opinion is solidly behind the need to renegotiate NAFTA as evidenced by the results of the September 2008 Environics poll where 61% of the people contacted were in favour of renegotiation. In a February 9, 2009 poll carried out by Environics, over 70% of respondents in both Canada and the US agreed that energy corporations should not be allowed to sue governments (NAFTA Chapter 11) for policy changes that aim to protect the environment or otherwise safeguard the public interest.

In 2008 Canadian, Mexican and US organizations launched a statement entitled "NAFTA Must be Renegotiated: A Proposal from North American Civil Society Networks." [3] It calls for the renegotiation of NAFTA in ten major areas so as to establish economic relations based on social justice within a framework of sustainable development.

For example under Employment this tri-national proposal states, "Governments should have the right to use procurement to promote national development and job creation by giving preference to national suppliers within limits that respect the need to purchase goods and services that are economical and of high quality as well as to reduce environmentally damaging transportation of locally available goods". And under Energy the proposal calls for elimination of "Article 605 that obligates Canada to continue exporting non-renewable resources, such as petroleum and natural gas to the United States even if these exports cause a domestic shortage in Canada."

We support President Obama's statement "Starting my first year in office, I will convene annual meetings with Mr. Calderon and the Prime Minister of Canada. Unlike similar summits under President Bush, these will be conducted with a level of transparency that represents the close ties among our three countries. We will seek the active and open involvement of citizens, labor, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in setting the agenda and making progress." [4] The first order of business at such a meeting should be to call a halt to the undemocratic and corporate-led SPP (Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America). Ever since its inception in 2005 the SPP program has excluded Parliamentary oversight, lacked any consultation with civil society, and led to further deregulation that has benefited only corporations.

We the under signed call on the Prime Minister on the occasion of the visit to Canada of US President Obama, to demonstrate a positive change in course for Canada's trade policy by committing to a transparent and thorough renegotiation of NAFTA, an immediate moratorium on all other FTAs, and a promise to call on President Obama and President Calderon to shut down the SPP.

Sincerely,

Canadian Auto Workers
Canadian Environmental Law Association
Canadian Federation of Students
Canadian Labour Congress Ontario Region
Canadian Union of Postal Workers
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Centre for Research on Latin American and the Caribbean- York University
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists – Ontario Chapter
CoDevelopment Canada
Common Frontiers
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada
Council of Canadians
Labour Education Centre

National Union of Public and General Employees
Ontario Federation of Labour
Ontario Public Service Employees Union
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation
OXFAM Canada
Polaris Institute
Public Service Alliance of Canada
Quebec Network on Continental Integration (RQIC)
Rideau Institute
Sierra Club of Canada
Social Justice Committee – Montreal
Toronto and York Region Labour Council
United Steelworkers Union

FOOTNOTES

[1] [http://campaignwindow.com/portal/uploads/wisconsinfairtradecoalition/WFTC -
_BHO_Questionnaire_WFTC_021808_FINAL.pdf](http://campaignwindow.com/portal/uploads/wisconsinfairtradecoalition/WFTC_-_BHO_Questionnaire_WFTC_021808_FINAL.pdf)

[2] <http://www.scribd.com/doc/5580817/2008-Democratic-Party-Platform-Renewing-Americas-Promise>

[3] www.commonfrontiers.ca/Single_Page_Docs/SinglePage_1col_docs/Mar03_08_NAFTA_declaration.html

[4] [www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/viewpoints/stories/DN-
obama_20edi.ART.State.Edition1.464da8e.html](http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/viewpoints/stories/DN-obama_20edi.ART.State.Edition1.464da8e.html)