

CENTRAL AMERICAN UNIONS SPEAK OUT AGAINST CAFTA

Central America's independent trade unions have spoken out against CAFTA and called for an alternative model of economic integration in the region that improves workers' rights and promotes equitable and sustainable development.

Joint Declarations

Early in the CAFTA negotiating process, unions in Central America worked together with the American labor movement to articulate a shared vision for a regional economic integration. In a series of joint declarations, the unions called for any trade new agreement in the region to require adherence to the core labor standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and to enforce this obligation through trade sanctions. In the declarations, unions vowed to fight any agreement falling short of this standard. Unions also demanded that the current workers' rights tools in U.S. preference programs not be weakened in an eventual FTA. But these trade union proposals were ignored by negotiators. Instead, CAFTA allows countries to maintain their laws far below ILO standards and to weaken their labor laws even further in the future, thus retreating from the workers' rights conditions of our unilateral trade preference programs.

In a joint declaration with the AFL-CIO signed in San Jose, Costa Rica on November 18, 2002, trade union federations and confederations from the region stated:

... an economic integration agreement must require participating countries to ... comply with the basic standards established in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and the ILO Conventions ratified by the member countries. To encourage and promote effective compliance with these standards, these commitments must be included in the core text of any trade agreement. Likewise, *it is necessary to include mechanisms to sanction violations of these core standards* in order to insure that the basic rights of workers are respected. To attain this, it would be desirable to subject compliance with these rights to the same dispute resolution mechanism that applies to the rest of the agreement.

The joint declaration concludes, "***We will fight against any trade agreement that does not achieve this vision*** of equitable, sustainable and democratic development for Central America."

The San Jose declaration was reaffirmed in another joint declaration signed by Central American union confederations in Guatemala in March of 2003. The Guatemala declaration also states, "A common denominator in these negotiating processes is exclusion, secretiveness, and a lack of social protection ***The minimal [labor] rights contained in GSP and CBI run the risk of being eliminated.***"

All four major trade union confederations in the Dominican Republic signed a similar declaration regarding the bilateral negotiations between their country and the U.S. in Santo Domingo in December of 2003. The Santo Domingo declaration draws heavily on the San Jose declaration, and states:

With the signing of an FTA that does not contain ... effective guarantees for fundamental workers' rights, Dominican workers will lose a tool that, though it has its deficiencies, has been useful in demanding and obtaining some level of respect for fundamental workers' rights – the labor clauses of the unilateral trade systems of the U.S. such as the Generalized System of Preferences and the

Caribbean Basin Initiative. *Only with effective labor rights guarantees can economic integration facilitate the type of economic growth that guarantees social and economic development for all.*

The November declaration and opposition to CAFTA was again affirmed by unions from all five CAFTA countries and the Dominican Republic in a regional conference in late January, and by 22 Central American unions in another joint meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica at the end of January.

Altogether, eighteen major labor federations and confederations in the region have demanded stronger workers' rights in CAFTA and pledged to fight an agreement that does not include enforceable guarantees for the ILO's core labor standards. These unions represent workers in the private and public sector, including in export-oriented manufacturing and agriculture. These major labor groups are the most democratic, independent, and representative unions in the region, and they represent workers in each of the five CAFTA countries and in the Dominican Republic. They are listed below.

Country	Union Federations and Confederations Speaking Out on CAFTA
Costa Rica	Asociación Nacional de Empleados Públicos y Privados de Costa Rica (ANEP) Confederación de Trabajadores Rerum Novarum (CTRN) Federación Nacional de Trabajadores en Servicios Públicos (FNTSP)
Dominican Republic	Confederación Autónoma Sindical Clasista (CASC) Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Dominicanos (CNTD) Confederación de Trabajadores Unitaria (CTU) Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT)
El Salvador	Central de Trabajadores Democráticos de El Salvador (CTD) Coordinadora Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (CSTS)
Guatemala	Confederación de Trabajadores del Campo (CTC) Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala (CUSG) Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Alimentación, Agro Industrias y Similares (FESTRAS) Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Salud de Guatemala (SNTSG)
Honduras	Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras (CTH) Confederación Únitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (CUTH)
Nicaragua	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (CST) Confederación de Unificación Syndical (CUS) Federación Nacional de Trabajadores (FNT)

Other Central America Union Activities Against CAFTA

Central America unions participate in broad civil society coalitions against CAFTA – including the Bloque Popular in Honduras, the Encuentro Popular in Costa Rica and the Red Sinti-Techan in El Salvador – which include campesino organizations, consumer groups, development and human rights advocates, environmental organizations and women's groups. Together with these groups, *unions have participated in mass protests against CAFTA in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.* Many of the protests have been organized to coincide with CAFTA's negotiating rounds, and included thousands of people. Unions have also worked with other civil society groups to issue letters and statements against CAFTA, to organize forums and seminars on the impacts of the agreement, to lobby their governments on CAFTA, and to collect thousands of signatures against the agreement. More mobilizations are being planned for the coming months in each of the Central American countries.