

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMENTS OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MACHINISTS  
AND AEROSPACE WORKERS, AFL-CIO, CLC  
IN RESPONSE TO THE  
"OPEN INVITATION TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN FTAA PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES"

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) represents over half a million workers in the United States and Canada. IAM members work in a variety of industries including manufacturing, aerospace, transportation, shipbuilding and repair, woodworking, and automotive, just to name a few. Our members have been directly and indirectly affected by trade agreements and as a result, pursuant to the "Open Invitation to Civil Society in FTAA Participating Countries," we welcome the opportunity to submit our comments on what we believe to be some of the fundamental procedural and substantive flaws of the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the FTAA negotiating process.

Like many other organizations, the IAM has raised several objections when past trade agreements have been negotiated. Among our many concerns is the continual refusal to adequately recognize and incorporate what is commonly referred to as effective and enforceable "internationally recognized labor standards" into the core provisions of these trade agreements. For example, against our protest, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented without adequate provisions to ensure that signatories to the agreement recognize, adopt, and effectively enforce internationally recognized labor standards. Sadly, instead of incorporating core labor standards into NAFTA, "side agreements" were executed. At the time we argued in various public forums that the side agreements represented woefully inadequate mechanisms for ensuring the recognition and effective enforcement of internationally accepted labor standards.

If anything can be learned from the experience of NAFTA, it is that treating labor standards as separate issues from those considered in the core of such an agreement will create fundamental flaws. Indeed, the notion that the fundamental issues raised by labor and other similarly situated groups are reviewed by a committee separated from the core aspects of negotiations is entirely inadequate. It represents that those negotiating the FTAA have learned little, if anything, from the failures of NAFTA.

Given the inadequacies based on the ineffectiveness of NAFTA, the IAM agrees with other organizations that such important rights cannot be relegated to separate committees on "civil society." It is time that the negotiating parties begin to recognize, understand and implement, real labor clauses calling for effective enforcement of internationally recognized core labor standards. Such provisions must be contained in the basic agreement.

Universal adherence to these standards is not only a moral and ethical issue, it is also an economic issue that goes to the very heart of the world's trade policies. The fact that one country does not recognize or enforce rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, organizing, a livable wage, safe and healthy workplace, and does not honor international prohibitions against child labor and forced labor is unquestionably a major factor in a company's decision to engage in various trade activities. These trade activities include transferring work out of a country where these international standards are recognized and enforced, and importing goods produced in other countries by exploited workers who have no right to form their own union and no choice but to work for low pay and under despicable conditions. Without universal enforcement of these and other rights, the world will engage in the infamous "race to the bottom" as stiff competition in the global trading economy forces workers to sacrifice their rights in the so-called name of "flexibility." Effective and enforceable internationally recognized labor standards are trade issues.

The IAM objects to the current FTAA negotiating process that addresses concerns of civil society in a separate committee. Moreover, until the negotiators from all potential signatory countries recognize that effective and enforceable internationally recognized labor standards must be included in the core provisions of any proposed agreement, the FTAA negotiation process -- as well as any document that ultimately comes out of the process -- will be flawed.