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NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

March 31, 1999

Chairman of the Committee of Government Representatives
on Civil Society Participation
c/o Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society)
United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America
and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
1825 K St. N.W., Suite 1120
Washington, D.C. 20006

By Hand Delivery and Electronic Mail

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RE: **Committee of Government Representatives for the Participation of Civil Society's (CGR) "Open Invitation to Civil Society in FTAA Participating Countries" (October 1998)**

Dear Madam Chairman:

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is pleased to provide the following comments in response to the Committee of Government Representatives for the Participation of Civil Society's (CGR) "Open Invitation to Civil Society in FTAA Participating Countries" (October 1998) requesting a presentation of views on trade matters related to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

The National Wildlife Federation is the United States' largest not-for-profit conservation education and advocacy organization with over 4 million members and supporters. We appreciate this important opportunity to present our comments on the critical relationship between trade and the environment in the FTAA and its constructive role in future negotiations.

The FTAA partners and the members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) recognize the reality and the importance of the trade and environment linkage. The San Jose Fourth Ministerial Declaration (March 1998) states as a General Objective "To strive to make our trade liberalization and environmental policies mutually supportive, taking into account work undertaken by the WTO and other international organizations."

In light of these objectives and the discussions regarding trade and environment at the recent WTO High-Level Symposium on Trade and Environment and in other international fora, we must note with concern the relative lack of progress in addressing environmental issues within the FTAA process that has occurred since the creation of the CGR one year ago. The absence of a specific work agenda and lack of precisely defined role for the CGR within the FTAA process raises serious questions regarding the current and future impact of the CGR as an effective vehicle for public input in the FTAA negotiations.

Despite these significant reservations regarding the current CGR process, we proffer our comments as part of our effort to contribute to the advancement of a constructive agenda for sustainable trade

and investment in the FTAA negotiations. We respectfully request that these comments be viewed as the beginning of an ongoing open process in which public input will be considered at later junctures and we look forward to discussing these issues and others in greater detail with all FTAA government officials as the negotiations progress.

We believe that the FTAA negotiations have the potential to support a hemispheric integration process consistent with the vision articulated by the **1994 Miami Summit** to link the advancement of human prosperity to three fundamental principles: *social progress, economic prosperity, and a healthy environment*. While we agree strongly with these goals, we remain concerned that the initial principles and negotiating objectives articulated in the San Jose Declaration fail to encourage the kind of trading relationship that promotes healthy economies and cleaner environments.

Regrettably, to date, few concrete steps have been taken to ensure that environmental issues are addressed by the FTAA. Specific opportunities for raising environmental concerns *directly* in negotiating sectors have yet to be identified. We note that a fundamental tenet of the FTAA negotiations is to turn "words into action." In the interest of building essential broad-based public support for the FTAA negotiations, we urge the FTAA negotiators to take concrete actions towards assigning meaningful value to environmental concerns by fully integrating the following environmental protection goals in the FTAA negotiating agenda. Specifically, we seek immediate attention in efforts to:

- incorporate **environmental impact assessments (EIAs)** into FTAA negotiations --- a broad and comprehensive assessment of trade-related environmental effects, initiated immediately, is necessary to assess the positive and negative environmental implications of trade liberalization. The feasibility of working with the Tripartite Committee and other intergovernmental institutions to develop appropriate grant mechanisms to offset the costs associated with these reviews should be considered;
- clarify the relationship between **Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)** and future FTAA rules by acknowledging that the rules established by the FTAA agreement should not interfere unnecessarily with the environmental objectives of MEAs;
- eliminate **environmentally damaging subsidies** in natural resource sectors such as fisheries and forest products to reduce both environmental degradation and distortions in trade flows;
- promote **public participation and transparency** as a cornerstone of the FTAA process to ensure dissemination of important information and instill public confidence in FTAA negotiations;
- preserve the right of FTAA countries to determine their own acceptable levels of risk in an FTAA **sanitary and phytosanitary agreement**;
- negotiate **environmentally responsible investment rules**;
- assist in the development of **Hemispheric cooperation in trade and environment** as an integral component of the FTAA process.

For more information, please contact: Atziri Ibanez (tel. 202-797-6669; email: ibanez@nwf.org) and Jake Caldwell (tel. 202-939-3302; email: caldwell@nwf.org), National Wildlife Federation, 1400 16th St. NW #501, Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.