



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development ***Committee on International Justice and Peace***

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

April 4, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

Be assured of our prayers as you begin your service in this role that impacts the lives of so many people in our nation and around the world. History provides evidence that increased trade and investment can be truly beneficial, provided they are structured in a way that helps to reduce, not exacerbate, inequality or injustice. If trade promotion authority is given, the negotiation process should be transparent and should ensure vital protections.

Although the United States Conference of Bishops (USCCB) has not historically taken positions for or against particular trade agreements, we were prepared to oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) due to grave concerns regarding access to medicines, the vulnerability of small agricultural producers, and the troubling requirement that sovereign parties to international treaties agree to binding international arbitration as the forum for dispute resolution. The President's decision to withdraw the United States from further consideration of the TPP is to be commended, therefore, and we look forward with hope to negotiations of future trade deals that promote integral human development and offer fundamental protections of human life and dignity.

Our moral tradition articulates principles to evaluate any proposed trade deal:

- **Migration.** Our Church has long defended the right of people to migrate when conditions in their home countries prevent them from providing for themselves and their families. If migration is to be reduced, we believe that it must be done through alleviation of the conditions that impel people to leave their homelands. Any trade or investment agreement should be designed in a way that would aim to reduce the need to emigrate.
- **Labor Protections.** The Church teaches work has inherent dignity. We support the protection of worker rights, including the right to organize, as well as compliance with internationally-agreed worker standards. Our concern with job loss in our own urban and rural communities requires that any agreement be accompanied by firm commitments to help U.S. workers, as well as their families and communities, cope with both the social and financial strain of dislocation that free trade might bring about. Similarly, our concern extends to the human rights implications that any U.S. action can have for the people of other countries, especially developing nations. In particular, this requires that special attention be devoted to safe working conditions, reasonable work hours, time off, living family wages, and other recognized social benefits. This also demands commitments to provide aid, either directly or through international institutions, to displaced workers and their families in countries affected by the agreements.
- **Indigenous People.** Catholic bishops throughout the world minister extensively among indigenous groups. Out of respect for their cultural heritages and in view of their need for economic

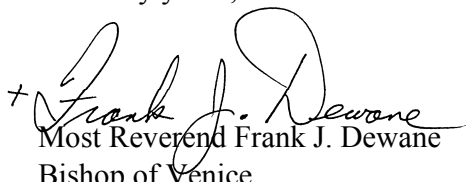
development, we hope that the United States will ensure that commercial agreements honor the patrimony of these indigenous communities, and that the communities share equitably in the benefits of any commerce which uses their traditional knowledge or natural resources.

- **Agriculture.** Our brother bishops at home and abroad, along with other partners with whom we work, have expressed grave fears about the vulnerability of small agricultural producers when confronted with competition by large-scale agricultural producers that enjoy a notable advantage due to U.S. government policies. Any agreement should promote the agricultural sector of developing countries and protect those who live in rural areas in our own nation.
- **Sustainable Development and Care for Creation.** Increasing global economic integration holds potential benefits for all participants, but it should do more than simply regulate trade and investment. The essential link between preservation of the environment and sustainable human development requires prioritizing attention to the environment and health of communities, including assistance to poor countries that often lack sufficient technical knowledge or resources to maintain a safe environment. Agreements should include relieving the crushing burden of external debt held by poor countries and should support development that increases self-reliance and broad participation in economic decision-making.
- **Intellectual Property Rights.** We are also concerned about intellectual property rights provisions regarding pharmaceuticals and agriculture. The Church locates intellectual property rights within the broader framework of the common good and believes these rights should be balanced with the needs of the poor for access to medicines and to food.
- **Dispute Resolution Mechanisms.** We question the merits of requiring sovereign parties to international treaties to agree to binding international arbitration as the forum for dispute resolution. Such a path may lead to unfair advantages for commercial interests willing to exploit the rules of the arbitral system and may result in the weakening of important environmental, labor, and human rights standards.
- **Participation.** It is critical the people have a voice in decisions that touch their lives. Human dignity demands transparency and the right of people to participate in decisions that impact them.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis notes: “The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption” (no. 55). Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, stated: “*The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly--not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centered*” (no. 45). Our teaching puts people--especially the poorest and most vulnerable--first.

As pastors and teachers in a global Church, our experience of the impact of trade and other aspects of economic integration, their possibilities and perils, is both broad and deep. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that policies are informed by these criteria.

Sincerely yours,

+ 
Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane

Bishop of Venice

Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development

+ 

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú

Bishop of Las Cruces

Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace