

NAFTA and International Public Health: An Interfaith Call for Access to Medicines

Recognizing the inherent dignity of the human person, our faith traditions call us to care for the sick and respond to the needs of the poor in our societies. Trade agreements can have enormous impacts on the ability of the sick and the poor to access the medicines they need for healing and even survival.

Therefore, we agree with the provisions of the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), currently in effect in all NAFTA countries. The TRIPS agreement calls for respect of intellectual property rights, including those for medicines. Crucially, as was underscored by the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health, it also recognizes each nation's right to take necessary steps to ensure that medicines are available to all of their residents.

We would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Administration's defense of sovereignty on the issue of investor-state arbitration; each state has not only the right but the obligation to safeguard the common good within their nations.

At this time, we recall the Bipartisan Agreement on Trade Policy espoused by President George W. Bush and leaders of both parties in Congress in May 2007. This "May 10th Agreement" recognizes the flexibility in intellectual property rights provisions with regard to pharmaceuticals that developing countries sometimes need in order to serve the public health needs of their people. We hope our political leaders can come together once again on these principles in support of the most vulnerable.

We call on you to ensure that no terms of a renegotiated NAFTA go beyond the TRIPS agreement mandates, and avoid enhanced and extended monopolies on life-essential medicines. Instead, we ask that a renegotiated NAFTA reaffirm the TRIPS public health protections that enable the United States and other countries to promote the human right to health and access to medicines for all.

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