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ORIT OF THE CIOSL

INTERAMERICAN REGIONAL ORGANIZATION OF WORKERS

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE UNION ORGANIZATIONS

PRESIDENT DICK MARTIN, CLC – CANADA  
SECRETARY GENERAL LUIS ANDERSON, CTRP – PANAMA

Our Ref.:

[rubber stamp in English]

Caracas, February 8, 1999

To the Chairman of the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the Participation of the Civil Society  
C/o Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society)  
1825 K Street NW, Suite 1120  
Washington, DC 20006  
Fax (202) 2960826  
Email: [eclac@tmn.com](mailto:eclac@tmn.com)

Dear Sir or Madam:

On behalf and representation of more than 45 million male and female workers of the Americas, which comprise the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers of the International Confederation of Free Union Organizations (ORIT of the CIOSL), we are writing to you for the purpose of presenting our comments on the public invitation to the components of the civil society for presentation of the documents related to the FTAA process, which should be referred to trade elements.

It is lamentable that certain governments of the countries of the Americas oppose the real participation of civil society in the FTAA process. For several years, ORIT and its affiliated and fraternal organizations have been insisting, among other things, on the recognition of the Union Court that has been operating since 1995. The governments have in fact recognized the Business Court, in an exclusionary attitude that does not comport with democratic posturing.

Since last year, however, civil society had some hope that that exclusionary phase would be overcome, with the establishment of the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society.

Said hope did not last long, when in Buenos Aires, in the Meeting of Vice Ministers of the FTAA, some governments openly opposed said Committee having a truly participatory and democratic nature.

Suspecting that that would be the position, we went ahead and presented to the governments our proposal for operation of the referenced Committee, consisting of:

1-That the Committee's operations should be continental in scope.

2-That the participation of the governments in the Committee should be such that it guarantees that its decisions are duly implemented.

3-That the governments provide the information necessary and sufficient regarding all issues discussed in the negotiations among the countries, in order to enable effective participation.

4-That public hearings be held, both to request and receive the points of view of the male and female participants.

5-That the Committee conveys these viewpoints precisely and impartially.

6-That the reports of the Committee be public and be the subject of comments and contributions of the sectors of civil society that participate in the process.

7-That the Committee progresses towards negotiation groups for considering specific issues, as would be the case with normal labor and environmental rules.

8-That the Business Court approach the Committee, in order not to have a privileged position, which is unacceptable discrimination against other sectors of the civil society.

None of these points has been taken into account, much less those that relate to the capacity of participation of the civil society. To be honest, we think that the Committee of Governmental Representatives on the participation of Civil Society in the FTAA has been reduced to a kind of suggestion box, where the organizations of civil society do not have the slightest opportunity to follow-up on the proposals presented, much less have sufficient and timely information about the negotiations among the countries.

More serious still, the invitation restricts us to presenting our points of view regarding "commercial elements related to the FTAA process," when we all know that those "commercial elements" have profound implications on social and labor issues and matters pertaining to the environment.

The obdurate commercialism of the FTAA is contradicted by the presidential initiative of the MERCOSUR countries, which in December of last year produced a Social-Labor Declaration which, although it does not meet the requirements that we aspire to, starts to recognize a social-labor dimension. Various sub-regional processes already rely on entities such as the Economic and Social Consultation Forum or the Andean Labor Council.

For our part, given the situation of impediments to the real participation of civil society in the FTAA process, we shall continue using the resources that are within our reach, together with the other democratic sectors of our societies, so that the FTAA process may be transparent, participatory and democratic. We are not going to be accomplices to the negative consequences that the exclusively commercial vision of the elites in the FTAA countries can entail.

Without other matters to discuss, we send you our regards with all due respect.

/s/ [illegible]  
LUIS ANDERSON  
SECRETARY GENERAL/CIOSL/ORIT

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