

Joint Labor Declaration on the Proposed Korea-US FTA

**June 6, 2006
Washington, D.C.**

1. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the Change to Win Federation, representing trade unions in the USA; and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), representing trade unions in the Republic of Korea, are united in our deep concerns over this week's launch of negotiations toward a free trade agreement between our countries (KORUS FTA).
2. It is clear from the preliminary negotiations, as well as statements by our governments, that the KORUS FTA is on the same track as the failed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) model: weak protections for workers' rights and the environment; undermining of the government's ability to regulate in the public interest and provide public services; and strong protections for multinational corporate investment and profits. We are also concerned that the decision to launch these negotiations and the preliminary negotiation process have been pushed forward without an adequate consultation process with civil society, including labor unions.
3. Over the last twelve years, NAFTA has accelerated and deepened corporate mobility and flexibility, while costing more than 1 million jobs and job opportunities in the U.S., putting increased downward pressure on U.S. wages, and undermining environmental and public health protections. In Mexico, workers' wages have fallen or stagnated in real terms, while inequality has worsened, and the number of people in poverty has grown. Despite the arguments of U.S. workers that any FTA must include strong and enforceable provisions to safeguard workers' rights, environmental standards and protections for public services, the Bush administration has not adequately addressed these concerns in the many FTAs it has negotiated.
4. Likewise, in Korean society, the economic crisis and the IMF bailout precipitated a neoliberal "reform" process that heightened speculative investment and generated an economic order based on "jobless growth." Even though this "reform" process has led to massive casualization of workers and the privatization and commercialization of public services, the Korean government has ignored the views of labor unions and civil society, and instead unilaterally promoted a trade policy that would accelerate and deepen these trends.
5. As trade union organizations representing workers in the two countries, we voice our deep concern about the current state of fundamental worker rights and labor standards in the two countries. We share concerns that violations of workers' human rights have reached crisis levels, while secure and well-paying jobs have been replaced with casual and irregular work in both countries. In addition, migrant workers' human rights and worker rights are not adequately protected. We call on both of our governments to respect the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and to ratify all the core conventions, including conventions 87 and

98, which are crucial to workers' rights and lives, as well as to immediately implement the recommendations issued by the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association. In particular, we voice grave concern that the Korean government has ignored repeated recommendations from the ILO for substantive improvements, such as halting the application of criminal obstruction of business charges to union activity, the abuse of compulsory arbitration and the repression of the Korean Government Employees' Union, and we call on the Korean government to undertake immediate action to rectify this situation.

6. Trade and economic cooperation talks between the two countries should be accompanied by a process for protecting and strengthening core workers' rights, public and social services, food safety and food security, the environment, and public health and education. However, after the preliminary negotiations, the KORUS FTA as it currently stands falls far short of these standards. It is clear that the failures of NAFTA will be repeated and reproduced, unless the negotiators drastically change course.

7. We note that the two governments have agreed that the materials relating to the KORUS FTA process will not be released to the general public for three years after the conclusion of the agreement. The governments have stated that this is for the "efficiency" of the negotiations and to prevent revealing the negotiating strategy to third countries. We call on our governments to make these materials public.

8. The labor organizations in the two countries have agreed to continue coordinating our joint responses and following the substance of the negotiations closely. We call on our governments to do the following:

First, we ask our governments to carry out a full assessment, with adequate participation by labor unions and civil society groups, of the economic and social impact of the standard FTA on workers in both countries. In particular, the evaluation must assess the impacts a "standard FTA" would have on worker rights; employment; wages; public services, including health care and education; cultural diversity; and food security. The assessment report should be submitted to the U.S. Congress and the Korean National Assembly, and should be released to the public in the two countries.

Second, both governments should rescind their agreement to keep the documents relating to FTA negotiations secret for 3 years after conclusion of the FTA, and instead adopt a transparent and democratic process.

Third, the governments should ensure that the trade and economic cooperation process between the two countries does not follow the negative model of NAFTA, the Korea-Chile FTA, and other existing FTAs. In particular, trade rules should not undermine public health and safety, workers' rights, the environment, essential public services and fair economic development in order to protect the rights of corporations.

Fourth, a precondition to deepened trade and economic cooperation between the U.S. and Korea must be the ratification of the core ILO conventions, beginning with conventions 87 and 98, and the immediate implementation of the ILO Freedom of Association Committee recommendations to the two countries.

Fifth, we ask our governments to call a moratorium on the current FTA talks and work to create a labor-friendly model of trade and economic cooperation through adequate consultations with labor unions and civil society groups.

9. Unless our governments adequately address the urgent concerns we have laid out above, we will strongly oppose the continued negotiation of the KORUS FTA and will work together to ensure that this agreement is not implemented.

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