

## Joint Statement on a Possible U.S. – Malaysia Free Trade Agreement

by

### **The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC)**

The AFL-CIO and MTUC share a common vision for the future based in terms of social and economic justice. In this light, any discussions aimed at deepening economic integration between our countries must result in broadly shared benefits for working people and communities, not simply extend and enforce corporate power and privilege.

We believe that a more just and humane integration, a system designed to eliminate the enormous social and economic inequities at both national and international levels, is possible and desirable if it incorporates, at minimum, the following concepts: strong and effective mechanisms to protect labor and social rights; compensation policies to correct inequities resulting from restructuring; mechanisms for transparency and participation; clear policies against corruption; fair rules for trade and investment, services, procurement, agriculture, and the environment; and a more humane migration regime.

It is clear from the negotiations to date, as well as statements by our governments, that the U.S.-Malaysia FTA is based on the same failed model as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): weak protections for workers' rights, undermining the government's ability to regulate in the public interest and to provide essential public services; and excessive protections for multinational corporate investment and profits.

Indeed, there is evidence that the Malaysian government continues to oppose any labor protections in the trade agreement, based on a misguided notion that that achieving economic growth and international competitiveness must be at the expense of core labor rights. We are also deeply concerned with the lack of transparency and the government's failure to consult trade unions and civil society organizations. We demand that the process leading to a trade agreement must be open to the public and incorporate the real and effective participation of social actors during the negotiations, ratification and subsequent evaluation and follow-up.

As trade union organizations representing workers in our two countries, we voice our deep concern about the current state of fundamental worker rights and labor standards. 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 and worker rights are routinely violated. We believe that if this situation is allowed to continue and is not rectified, it will result in dire consequences which will ultimately destabilize our societies. We call on both of our governments to respect the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and to ratify and enforce all the core conventions, especially Conventions 87 and 98, which are crucial to workers' rights and lives.

Unless our governments adequately address the urgent concerns we have laid out above, we will strongly oppose the continued negotiation of the U.S.-Malaysia FTA and will work together to ensure that it is not implemented.

Signed at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on January 18, 2007

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G. Rajasekaran, Secretary General, MTUC

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John Sweeney, President AFL-CIO