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Korean Alliance against KorUS FTA Newsletter

Five-Thousand Rally against Free Trade amidst Strong Police Violence in Korea

Anti-FTA Sentiment Growing in U.S. Civil Society

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In the Newsletter

Solidarity Statements

Five-Thousand Rally against Free Trade amidst Strong Police Violence

Monday, March 12, 2007. As the 8th round of Korea-U.S. FTA negotiations entered its third day, a peaceful mass rally was held on Saturday in protest of the talks. Police violence was heavy, but the protesters stood strong until the end, even when sticks came down and water cannon was fired on them. At the end of the day, ten were arrested, and as of today, five from labor and student groups are still held in jail.

The 8th round of talks is to be the last because an agreement must be reached by the end of March. The agreement then would be submitted to the U.S. Congress for an up or down vote by the end of June when Bush's trade promotion authority expires. For South Korea, the 8th round of talks, which ends today, has been especially troubling. Except for automobile and agriculture, most issues have reached an agreement, including pharmaceuticals, procurement, textiles, and trade remedies. In order to bring the talks to conclusion, which has had strong pressures from U.S. lawmakers and presidents of both countries, South Korea is quickly giving in to the demands of capital and the USTR. A high-level talks will be held at the end of the month to finalize the deal.

On the morning of March 10, about five-thousand farmers, workers, students, and activists, marching from various locations, first gathered together near Ewha Woman's University. The traffic at this busy junction was stopped for an hour. Then the mass dispersed and regrouped near the U.S. Embassy in Jongno. It was here that the police brought out the sticks and shields, which are used to strike at the protesters. Water cannon was fired despite the freezing temperature, but the five-thousand stood their ground and delivered their message. "Fellow countrymen and women," shouted Jung Dae-hwan, Organizing Director of the Korean Alliance against Korea-U.S. FTA (KoA), "our spirit and struggle will not be stopped by police violence."

The campaign to stop the FTA, which began in April 2006, has been a long battle. The farmers and workers' groups have been weakening since November 2006 when the South Korean government declared all anti-FTA activities as illegal and arrested dozens of protesters. However, on Saturday, mobilization and militancy were back to the level necessary for the struggle to continue.

Jong-hoon Kim, South Korea's chief negotiator, said that automobile and agriculture remain as deal-breakers. Especially sensitive is the beef issue. Although South Korea announced that it would accept U.S. beef except for the boxes that contain bone fragments, the U.S. has judged this to be inadequate and is demanding an unexceptional import of all U.S. beef.

Strong actions are being planned by KoA until early April. A relay hunger strike begins today, and by the end of the month, a thousand is expected to participate. South Korea has not seen a hunger strike at this scale since the protest against the National Security Law in 2003. Police suppression has not been this strong in decades.

Anti-FTA Sentiment Growing in U.S. Civil Society

Over the last month U.S. religious, labor and civil society leaders have shown and organized and determine face opposing to the Korea-U.S. FTA, current with the last push in the FTA negotiations. This opposition was seen clearly during the 7th round of talks held in D.C. from February 11 to 14, when close to 50 organizations (including such groups as the AFL-CIO, Change to Win and Alliance for Fair Trade) adopted a "U.S. Civil Society Declaration on the Kor-US FTA." This statement reads in part: "We believe that the current model agreement, which so far has provided enormous benefits for a disproportionate few, will not likely generate widely shared economic prosperity for the majority of persons in the U.S. and South Korea. Indeed, some of the provisions under negotiation could jeopardize important public interest gains or narrow the policy space of governments to respond to the needs or wants of their citizens." It concludes, "We stand in solidarity with the Korean people, and are resolved to press our government to reverse its course on trade. We call on our government to reject the failed NAFTA-style free trade model, and strengthen economic and trade relations with other countries based on the principles of mutual benefit, respect for democratic rights, and national sovereignty." (The full text of the declaration is published below.)

U.S.-based religious organizations followed suit with a letter to congressional representatives and U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab on March 8, which criticizes the "flawed and rushed" process carried out in negotiating the Korea-U.S. FTA and disrespect for healthcare and public services, workers, farmers and food sovereignty in the content of the agreement. Taking particular note of the situation of migrant workers in South Korea, the letter states, "In May 2006, the National Labor Committee documented widespread and grievous abuse of migrant workers under the auspices of the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement. Amnesty International has documented similar patterns of serious rights violations in South Korea, including verbal and physical abuse, the withholding of wages and the repression of attempts at organizing... Given migrant workers'

significant contributions to the economies of both South Korea and the U.S., as trade increases between our two nations, the rights of all migrant workers must be respected, and they should share in the benefits of rising national prosperity.”

Most recently, U.S. civil society and labor groups including Americans for Democratic Action, Public Citizen and several labor unions, have initiated a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry, which strongly opposes the renewal of the Trade Promotion Authority (Fast Track), set to expire on June 30, 2007. Fast Track gives the U.S. president the right to sign FTAs before they are seen by Congress and requires Congress to vote them up or down without amendment. The letter states in part, “In recent history, Fast Track has only resulted in saddling the United States with destructive and widely unpopular trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO)... We urge you to take all possible actions to ensure that the Bush Administration is not provided with the authority to determine the direction and terms of our nation’s engagement with the global economy... Fast Track’s expiration provides an opportunity for the new Democratic Congress to end the Administration’s disastrous trade agenda, and set a new course for trade policy based on our shared commitment to justice, fairness, and democracy.” In conclusion, the letter also states, “our organizations and membership are very opposed to any future NAFTA/CAFTA type trade agreements, such as those proposed or being negotiated with Colombia, Peru, Panama and Korea.”

As the 8th round of negotiations draws to a close, we are keenly aware that the strong positions shown in these letters and statements are vital to our success in defeating the Korea U.S. FTA. We thank U.S. groups for their partnership in this struggle and ask for continued support and solidarity in the weeks to come.

U.S. Civil Society Declaration on the KOR-US FTA

We, the undersigned U.S. civil society organizations, express our deep concerns over the proposed U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). We believe that the current model agreement, which so far has provided enormous benefits for a disproportionate few, will not likely generate widely shared economic prosperity for the majority of persons in the U.S. and South Korea. Indeed, some of the provisions under negotiation could jeopardize important public interest gains or narrow the policy space of governments to respond to the needs or wants of their citizens. We wholly embrace economic and cultural relations with South Korea, but wish to make certain that the terms of that relationship are equitable to all. In evaluating any trade agreement, we will be guided by the following principles.

Democracy, Transparency, and Accountability: Trade agreements must be negotiated under democratic mechanisms with broad-based citizen participation including workers, women, and indigenous and ethnic groups. The draft text, member country proposals, and negotiating agendas should be made available to civil society at regular and timely intervals in order for civil society participation to be meaningful. Negotiators should also meet with civil-society groups before each negotiating session, in order to discuss the proposals being advanced, and afterwards in order to report back on the results of those talks. Trade agreements must be subject to regularly scheduled environmental and social reviews by an independent body, which include an evaluation of the agreement’s impact on workers, women, people of color and indigenous communities. Any dispute arising under the agreement must be resolved in an accountable and transparent manner, with due deference to domestic laws and court systems. Trade disputes must be open to the public, and accept submissions from interested outside parties.

Workers' Rights: Any trade agreement with Korea must ensure that all workers can freely exercise their basic rights as laid out by the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively, to refuse forced labor, to reject child labor, and to work free from discrimination. These rights must be recognized and protected in trade agreements and covered by dispute resolution and effective enforcement mechanisms. Any trade agreement with the region must also ensure that immigrant workers' rights are protected fully regardless of their status. Technical assistance to improve labor standards in Korea can complement, but not substitute for, enforceable rules on workers' rights. Finally, a trade agreement with Korea must include adequate protections and transitional assistance for rural and urban workers and farmers in Korea and the United States who are adversely affected by increased trade.

Protecting Family Farms: No free trade agreement should prevent countries from establishing their own domestic agricultural policies that promote food sovereignty, appropriate for their particular economic conditions, geographic characteristics and cultural practices and beliefs. Trade agreements must not interfere with the ability of countries to prohibit dumping of agricultural products that undermine the well being of family farmers and rural communities. Farmer's livelihoods will be left at the whim of large agribusiness interests unless exporting countries of major commodities take the lead in establishing price floors to assure fair commodity prices worldwide and establish strategic international reserves to ensure food security. These mechanisms are necessary to prevent the pricing and export of commodities by agribusiness corporations at below a farmer's cost of production. Countries must be allowed the flexibility to establish tariffs and appropriate types of subsidies to prevent a total collapse of rural economies and mass migration.

Environmental Protection and Natural Resources: Trade agreements must not undermine any environmental standards but strengthen and enforce them. Trade rules must ensure that private investors cannot challenge domestic environmental and other public interest laws and regulations before international tribunals. Agreements should also reinforce governments' responsibility to protect and promote farmer rights regarding plant genetic resources for food and agriculture as stated in the Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, including not limiting any rights that farmers have to save, use, exchange or sell seeds and other propagating material as afforded to them by national laws.

Protecting Basic Services: Services that help meet people's right to food, education, health and basic utilities should be exempt from trade rules. In Korea there is deep concern that applying trade rules to these services, especially public services, would make it harder for governments to adequately support and regulate these services, resulting in price increases that are prohibitive to consumers, reduced access and compromised quality.

Foreign Investment and National Development: Investment rules must allow governments the leeway to implement legitimate economic development strategies for domestically oriented growth, especially to promote decent employment, to support domestic industries and investment, and to encourage the emergence of new and infant industries. Investors must have binding responsibilities ? including compliance with international and national labor and environmental standards ? not just rights. Governments must have the authority to regulate capital flows in order to prevent and redress financial crises. Finally, investor-to-state lawsuits must not be part of trade agreements.

Intellectual Property Rights: A trade agreement with Korea should not include rules that go beyond the existing intellectual property rights agreement of the WTO that may adversely impact women, farmers' rights, food security, traditional knowledge and the protection of public health. Trade agreement's rules should comply with the Doha declaration on access to medicines and with the Convention on Biological Diversity. Intellectual property rules must not limit countries' ability to

prohibit patents on genetic plant resources for food and agriculture.

Procurement: Procurement rules must not prevent governments from using tax dollars to support responsible purchasing and contracting practices that favor local suppliers or contain other non-commercial criteria. National and sub-national governments must retain the ability to use government procurement policies to promote local employment, assist small and medium-sized businesses, safeguard workers' rights and human rights, and achieve other legitimate social and environmental goals.

Therefore, we the undersigned U.S. civil society organizations, declare our opposition to any trade agreement, including the Korea-U.S. FTA, should it fail to protect workers' rights, human rights, food security, and environmental standards, and undermine the ability of governments to regulate corporations to protect the common good. We stand in solidarity with the Korean people, and are resolved to press our government to reverse its course on trade. We call on our government to reject the failed NAFTA-style free trade model, and strengthen economic and trade relations with other countries based on the principles of mutual benefit, respect for democratic rights, and national sovereignty.

February 14, 2007, Washington D.C.

Signed,

ActionAid USA

Alliance for Democracy

Alliance for Responsible Trade

American Federation of Labor ? Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance

Border Agricultural Workers Project

California Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights

Campaign for Labor Rights

Casa Baltimore/Limay

Change to Win

Citizens Trade Campaign

Columban Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office

Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

Congress for Korea Reunification

Corean Action Network for Unification

Essential Action

Fifty Years is Enough Network

Grassroots Global Justice

Green Delaware

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

Health GAP

Institute for Policy Studies, Global Economy Project

International Labor Rights Fund

International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Jobs with Justice

Korean Americans against War and Neoliberalism

Korean Americans for Fair Trade

Koreatown Immigrant Workers Advocates

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement-NYC Chapter

Laborers' International Union of North America

Mobilization for Global Justice

Movement for Peace in Colombia

National Association of Korean Americans

National Family Farm Coalition

Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala

New York City People's Referendum on Free Trade

Nicaragua Center for Community Action

Nodutdol for Korean Community Development

The Oakland Institute

Polo Democratico Alternativo

Project South

Sierra Club

Stop CAFTA Coalition

Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville

Sweat Free Communities

UNITE HERE

United Auto Workers

United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE)

Vermont Workers' Center