

Sign on to this letter calling for border justice and fair trade.

- Leer en Español -

This letter explains the relationship between 'free' trade agreements and militarization of the border. The struggle for immigrant rights includes opening borders, not locking them down, and creating fair trade for people and the planet, not corporate trade for profit with impunity. Please consider signing on to this letter (fill out the form below). Then also share this letter with individuals and organizations in your community that work for immigrant rights or that also might be willing to sign on, and encourage them to add their names. We can stop the TPP! The first step is to educate more people about the effects the TPP will have on our communities. Then together, we will flush the TPP.

July, 2013

Stopping the TPP *is* Immigrant Rights

We write this letter out of concern regarding a looming humanitarian crisis. The prospect of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) along with a surge in border militarization will leave in its wake a trail of displacement and death. The TPP will continue destroying rural economies and uprooting workers in Mexico and elsewhere. More border militarization and criminalization will leave yet more bodies of the undocumented and their families abandoned and lifeless in the desert. We call on fair trade and immigrant rights activists to join together to stop the TPP and to demand real, just immigration reform.

Over 6,000 undocumented workers and their family members have died crossing the US-Mexico border since 1994, the year that the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was passed. It was also when construction of the border wall began. NAFTA led to a 60% increase in migration across the Southern border—a forced migration of people desperately looking for jobs to feed their families. Because of border militarization the undocumented generally enter the US via its most sparsely populated and harshest desert terrains to avoid apprehension. Those who don't make it die from dysentery, dehydration and exposure.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership has been called "NAFTA on Steroids". If it passes, it will be the largest FTA in the world, including not only Mexico, the United States and Canada, but also Peru, Chile, Vietnam, Brunei, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The Obama administration is asking for "Fast Track" authority to negotiate the TPP. Fast Track would enable the President to circumvent Congress' constitutional power to establish the parameters of US trade policy. It allows the President to sign an agreement before a Congressional vote, which must take place within 90 days of the signature and which prohibits the addition of amendments.

Immigration reform legislation is also moving forward. The proposed reform includes a "border surge" of militarization and related benchmarks that must go into effect before road to citizenship provisions kick in. This surge would include between \$30 and \$50 billion for "security", including the construction of 350 to 700 more miles of the border

wall. The number of agents on the border would be doubled to 40,000. The US-Mexico border would become one of the most militarized borders in the world.

It is no coincidence that the year 1994 saw not only passage of NAFTA, but the beginning of border wall construction. And it is no coincidence that the border surge is being considered at the same time the TPP is being negotiated. Also closely related is the proliferation of private prisons, especially immigration detention centers. Militarized borders and new prisons help manage social disruptions as well as political dissent resulting from FTAs. Criminalization of the undocumented creates a sub-class of workers denied basic labor rights while forced to work long hours for low wages. The ones who benefit are transnational corporations and agribusinesses.

If things were already bad under NAFTA and the current level of border militarization, a border surge and the TPP will make them worse. When NAFTA went into effect, Mexico was importing 30,000 tons of pork. By 2010, that had gone up to 811,000 tons. Mexico lost 4,000 hog farms and 20,000 farm jobs as a result. If we include indirect jobs dependent on the pork industry, as many as 120,000 jobs were lost. Likewise, corn imports rose from 2 million tons in 1992 to 10.3 million tons in 2008 and the cost of corn tortillas rose by 50%. This scenario was repeated in different sectors, such as wheat and sorghum production. By 2006, NAFTA had forced two million Mexicans out of farm work and some 28,000 small and medium sized businesses had been eliminated. Wages in maquiladora zones along the border had been driven down by 25%. A 2005 study for the Mexican government by the World Bank showed that rural poverty had risen from 35% between 1992 and 1994, to 55% between 1996 and 1998. By 2010, 53 million Mexicans were living in poverty, or half the population, and 20%, mostly in rural areas, lived in extreme poverty.

The TPP is being negotiated in secrecy. Only a few insistent Congress persons have seen it. However, some 600 corporate lobbyists have read the text and made comments on it. What few details have been leaked to the public reveal a document that guards the interests of big corporations even more than NAFTA, which at least includes a provision allowing countries to withdraw with only six months notice. Investor-State provisions will be strengthened letting foreign corporations sue a government over policies that provide environmental and community protection but curb private profits. Suits would be decided by a special court comprised from a rotating pool of corporate lawyers.

What will it mean if passage of the TPP is coupled with a border surge? We have already seen significant growth in border militarization. Whether it be because of this, or because the US is recovering from its own economic crisis, apprehensions by the border patrol have dropped by 50% since 2008. But at the same time, deaths in the desert of border crossers has risen by 27%. The National Foundation for American Policy has found that an undocumented immigrant is eight times more likely to die crossing the border today than ten years ago. With the TPP and a border surge, deaths will increase.

The fight to defeat the TPP is advocacy for immigrant rights, or better put, for the rights of Mexican and other workers and farming families to not be forcibly displaced. One of the central rights of any potential immigrant is the choice whether or not to migrate. Even more central is the right not to die crossing the desert in search of jobs. We must tell Congress: End border militarization, deny fast track authority and reject the TPP.

What we need, what we require, is fair trade, not free trade, and border justice, not militarization and criminalization.

Signers,

<http://www.flushthetpp.org/the-tpp-and-immigrant-rights/>

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