

April 21, 2008

Dear Member of Congress,

On the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Leaders Summit of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), to be held in New Orleans on April 21-22, we take this opportunity to call on all members of Congress to educate themselves on the SPP, which was never brought to Congress for debate or vote. Our concerns include the opaque and undemocratic nature of the SPP, its definition of “prosperity” as the expansion of a failed trade model, and its definition of “security” as the expansion of military force and the restricting of civil liberties.

Congress has been entrusted with oversight on such issues of trade and security. It is imperative that they exercise their responsibility on this matter by examining what prosperity and security really mean. Rather than proceeding along the failed path of NAFTA, all efforts should be made to implement a trade agenda that focuses on the needs of communities and people. That agenda should include the voices of those populations most affected, as well as their advocates in civil society.

Therefore, as civil society advocates, we call upon the U.S. Congress to:

- Require the Bush administration to immediately halt SPP implementation and submit the process to Congressional oversight.
- Hold congressional hearings in which the process and goals of the SPP are thoroughly aired and input is invited from a broad cross-section of the public.
- Make subject to congressional vote the decision of whether SPP implementation should proceed.

The SPP is an executive-level, tri-national pact between Mexico, the United States and Canada, agreed upon in 2005 by the chief executives of the three countries. According to the official website, the SPP seeks to “provide the framework to ensure that North America is the safest and best place to live and do business. It includes ambitious security and prosperity programs to keep our borders closed to terrorism yet open to trade.” What differentiates the SPP from other security and trade agreements is that it is not subject to Congressional oversight or approval. The SPP establishes a corporate/government bureaucracy for implementation that excludes civil society participation.

As at past SPP summits the New Orleans meetings will be open only to government officials and representatives of the corporate sector. Civil society will be kept on the other side of the fence, their voice silenced. The leaders will hear reports from the various SPP working groups and receive advice and input from the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC). The NACC is made up of 30 large corporations, 10 from each of the three countries. Their interest is in maximizing profit and removing all impediments to such profit by lowering or removing “non-tariff barriers to trade.” In common language this includes local and state regulations such as food safety and environmental laws, labor rights and other measures designed to protect and enhance quality of life.

The SPP aims to reach its goal of economic growth by facilitating the flow of goods and capital, while ignoring the needs of people and communities. This translates to a further expansion of the neo-liberal agenda manifested through free trade agreements such as NAFTA and DR-CAFTA, except that approval from Congress is neither sought nor required. These trade agreements, while boosting investment and exports, have failed the vast majority of citizens in participating countries. NAFTA's impacts have been well documented: the loss of over a million decent US manufacturing jobs to exploitative Mexican factories, the decimation of Mexico's small-scale agriculture and subsequent rise in migration, the subordination of environmental law to investment rules, and the annulling of consumer protections in the name of corporate protections. After 14 years of such devastating legacy, the SPP now proposes to move even further in the same direction.

Meanwhile, the security side of the agreement seeks to "develop a common security strategy" and to create a common security perimeter for North America. The recent agreement between the U.S. and Canadian militaries (without Congressional approval) to allow cross-border, domestic military action can be viewed as integral to the SPP. In addition, the announcement last fall of the Merida Initiative, a U.S. program to provide \$1.4 billion in training, intelligence and military aircraft to Mexico has been linked to SPP by critics of the agreement. Though not officially a part of SPP, it is a manifestation of the "deep integration" that is the core of the SPP strategy. Through implementation of the SPP, the U.S. is also exporting its War on Terror to Canada and Mexico through agreements on the sharing of intelligence, airline passenger lists, border surveillance programs and the further militarization of the border between the U.S. and Mexico—leading to erosion of civil liberties.

As New Orleans prepares to host the SPP summit, recent changes in the city foretell the SPP's security objectives. In a move that could only be described as opportunistic the disaster resulting from Katrina is being used to alter the character and demographic makeup of New Orleans. The city has been highly militarized, with both National Guard and private military firms providing "security." Documented cases of abuse and violence directed at residents of the city by these "security" providers show that the interest is not in protecting the residents, but in "securing" the city for developers. In this respect New Orleans is the perfect backdrop for the SPP summit, put forth as a model for the future of North America.

Facing a worrisome pact pushed forward in secrecy, it is time for Congress to halt this undemocratic approach and establish a process based on openness, accountability, and the participation of civil society. While civil society may be kept away from the SPP summit, their voices will still be heard in New Orleans at the People's Summit. This gathering of residents, activists and other concerned people will link the Gulf Coast struggle to the fight for the survival of communities in Mexico, Canada and the rest of the United States.

Signed by the following members of U.S. civil society,

Alliance for Democracy  
Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART)  
APEN (Asian Pacific Environmental Network)

ASOCOL (Association for the Sovereignty  
of Colombia)  
Campaign for Labor Rights

Center of Concern  
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on  
Latin America  
CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the  
People of El Salvador)  
Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras  
Democratic Socialists of America  
Fellowship of Reconciliation Task Force on Latin  
American and the Caribbean  
Global Exchange  
Global Ministries of the Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ); United Church of Christ  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)  
Institute for Policy Studies, Global  
Economy Project

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC)  
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee  
Rights (NNIRR)  
New York CISPES (New York Committee in  
Solidarity with the People of El Salvador)  
NYC People's Referendum on Free Trade  
Nicaragua Network  
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee  
Portland Jobs with Justice  
Quixote Center  
SHARE Foundation: Building a New  
El Salvador Today  
Vermont Workers' Center  
Witness for Peace

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