



## Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

### **Presentation of the International Solidarity Letter in support of initiatives by Mexican indigenous and peasant farmer organizations for food sovereignty and the revitalization of rural Mexico**

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On behalf of the more than 70 organizations and 15 individuals signing on to the letter

Angel de la Independencia

Mexico City

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The solidarity letter read out here today has its origins in a decision taken in a strategy workshop following the "Lessons from NAFTA" conference held October 22-23 in Minneapolis, MN (U.S.A.). This letter is part of a modest trilateral work program. On December 7, the letter was sent electronically in English and Spanish versions to the Heads of State, the chief trade negotiators, legislative leaders and to other high level officials in the three member countries of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The letter's content is brief and simple. It gives witness to some of the damage suffered in the three countries due to the agricultural chapter of NAFTA. The letter urges governments to renegotiate this chapter and to suspend immediately the removal of tariffs on all the foods in the Mexican "basic basket." It declares our support for the initiatives undertaken in Mexico to achieve food sovereignty and to revitalize rural Mexico.

The letter's signatories constitute a wide range of Canadian, U.S. and international civil society. They include individuals affiliated with academic and religious institutions; local NGOs, such as the Greater Kansas City Coalition for Fair Trade; international solidarity NGOs such as the Committee for Social Justice in Colombia; research centers, such as the Institute for Policy Studies and my own Institute; national farmer organizations, such as the National Farmers Union of Canada; the National Family Farm Coalition and the American Corn Growers Association; national membership organizations such as the National Lawyers Guild (U.S.), the Council of Canadians and Pesticide Action Network (North America); and networks of NGOs, such as the Hemispheric Social Alliance, the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (U.S.) and the Alliance for Responsible Trade (U.S.).

This letter is not an isolated effort. A bill has just been presented in the U.S. House of Representatives to either profoundly reform NAFTA or withdraw the United States from the agreement. In 2008, this bill will be revised as a legislative instrument and will also become a political leverage tool

in the fall U.S. election campaigns. Representative Marcy Kaptur (D- OH) is drafting a “Dear Colleague” letter to gain support for this bill, which has at the moment the support of eight legislators, including one presidential candidate, Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-OH).

In my own view, despite the defeat in the U.S. Congress of the campaign against the U.S. Peru Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the U.S. electoral outlook regarding trade policy is not desolate. In 2006, the winners of contested seats in the Congress were “free” trade critics of damage caused by FTAs abroad, as well in the United States. Although presidential candidates Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are strong supporters of the transnational corporation trade agenda, there will be a strong fair trade movement in the elections for nine U.S. Senate seats, so that the Democratic Party could gain a sufficient majority in the Senate to reject any unilateral agenda of a “free” trade President, whether Democrat or Republican.

Again, in my view, in the United States – contrary to Mexico or Canada – neither the press nor the public appreciates the extent of the militarization of trade policy that was formally incorporated into the U.S. National Security Doctrine of September 2002. For example, last year the government of Canada responded to U.S. claims that the Northwest Passage had become international waters open for exploitation as result of massive ice melting due to Climate Change, by sending troops to defend Canadian territory. Although the first application of this Security Doctrine was in the U.S. decrees to remake the Iraq economy as “free,” we can glimpse the broadening of this Doctrine in the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP).

The SPP has an agribusiness project, as Alejandro Villamar of RMALC has outlined, to control biological resources for agriculture. This project includes the North American Biotechnology Initiative (NABI). We hope to work trilaterally to halt the conquest of these resources, which characterizes itself as nothing more than a regulatory “harmonization” without need of legislative authorization, nor of the approval of those indigenous groups that have been the custodians of these resources for centuries. Of NABI and related themes we could speak at great length.

But here today, it is enough to say, on behalf of the signatories, that I have the honor of presenting this solidarity letter as a modest gesture in support of those who struggle here in the Angel de la Independencia and throughout Mexico for food sovereignty and for the revitalization of rural Mexico. We are deeply grateful for your leadership in this struggle.