

December 20, 2002

The Honourable Pierre S. Pettigrew
Minister for International Trade
Ottawa K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Pettigrew,

I write in response to your request for advice and views on the agreement between Canada and the Andean countries to begin exploratory discussions towards a proposed free trade agreement. I also note that the Government of Canada has agreed to commence similar talks towards a separate agreement with the Dominican Republic. The discussion is important to us because Canadian churches maintain many long-standing relationships with partners and civil society movements in those countries.

I appreciate the detail with which you outlined the dollar value of our relationships with those countries but I would certainly want to say strongly that dollar value is not the only thing to consider in relationships between countries. While I also appreciate the fact that on page 2 of your letter you outline the perceived benefits of such an agreement for both Canada and the other countries involved, I do have some significant priorities and considerations to raise. As we stated in our April 9, 2001 letter on the occasion of the Summit of the Americas, what is important is not just a trade agreement but the ethical implications of those agreements and promoting values that inform building a more neighbourly economy.

We believe that any new agreements conform with the principles of justice generally accepted or promoted in our dealings with other countries and therefore economic integration agreements should adhere to the following policies:

1. That any new agreements conform to the human rights standards in UN covenants.
2. That the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas be protected and promoted.
3. That paralysing national debts be cancelled.
4. That food security and the security of agricultural communities be enhanced.
5. That the integrity of publicly funded health and education services be preserved.
6. That patents or trade-related intellectual property rights not block access to public goods like life-saving medicines.

As well as these most important priorities, I also point out the fact that you mention that free trade agreements with these countries would further advance Canada's foreign policy objectives in the region. What exactly does that mean? Specifically, how would Canada's foreign policy objectives complement the foreign policy objectives of the Andean countries and the Dominican Republic in our region?

I appreciate very much your sense of the importance of these initiatives to Canadians and believe that all the issues raised in our response to you are of great significance to both Canadians and the peoples of the Andean countries and the Dominican Republic.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments. We are beginning a long-term international consultation with our US, European and Latin American counterparts on free trade in the context of economic globalization, so we look forward to discussing these matters further with you in the months to come.

Sincerely,

Bishop André Vallée
President
The Canadian Council of Churches