

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

*Information and Action Addressing Public Policy
for an Ecologically Sustainable World*

Volume 3, Number 4

July/August 2003

The Real Costs of “Free” Trade

*An Epistle from
Friends Committee on Unity with Nature*

To Friends Everywhere:

Those of us who are U.S. citizens have witnessed with horror and shame as our government has undermined international treaties and institutions, used an endless “War on Terror” as a pretext for permanently enlarging its powers, embraced a doctrine of preemptive war, and invaded Iraq. We are now faced with the prospect of another U.S. initiative, the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), that we believe will intensify social injustice and institutional and ecological violence, and lead to more physical violence.

Human activities damaging to the earth’s ecosystems continue to expand, and wealth increases for the already wealthy while conditions of life steadily worsen for many impoverished people worldwide. U.S. government policies and the international trade agreements they have promoted, instead of remedying these inequities, seem to be intensifying them.

In truth, these agreements have primarily promoted the productivity and profitability of large corporations by reducing legal constraints on their activities. Although the agreements are promoted in terms of creating jobs and reducing poverty, there are now more unemployed and impoverished people. In addition, more land and resources have been diverted to the corporate industrial process, wealth and power are more concentrated, the biosphere is more polluted, and the ability of governments to promote general welfare has progressively weakened.

FCUN Vision and Witness

We are called to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. We work to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God’s Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the Earth’s ecological integrity. We promote these Truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship with the Earth.

Expanding international trade already taxes the environment by increasing the use of fossil fuels and the rate at which fragile ecosystems are exploited. Treaties like the earlier NAFTA and the proposed FTAA exacerbate this stress by granting “rights” to corporations which supercede and can even nullify national and local laws intended to protect people and the environment. The proposed FTAA would impose in this hemisphere additional “rights” for global corporate and financial interests that the community of nations has previously refused to grant through the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Friends Committee on Unity with Nature is concerned that the U.S. media do not provide full and accurate information about the effects of current trade and investment policies on working people, on the impoverished, and on local ecosystems in other nations and in our own. We are further concerned that the secrecy of the FTAA negotiations has severely limited public knowledge of and consultation on its process.

On a finite planet, policies that give priority to assuring high returns on the speculative financial investments of the already wealthy cannot lead to either conservation or right sharing of the Earth’s resources. Right sharing, conservation, and restoring the Earth’s ecological integrity must become the priorities of public policy.

We believe this issue is as urgent as the new doctrine of preemptive war, and one that Friends cannot in good conscience ignore. We are grateful for the leadership of the American Friends Service Committee in the Interfaith Working Group on International Trade and Investment and support the principles advanced in the statement, “An Interfaith Statement on International Trade and Investment.” (*excerpts follow*)

We ask monthly meetings and individual Friends to inform themselves as fully as possible about the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, and to seek Divine Guidance in considering how to fulfill our obligations, as citizens of the United States and the world, to promote peace, justice, and the restoration of the earth’s ecological integrity.

Kim Carlyle, Steering Committee Clerk

Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly as an insert in *BeFriending Creation* by **Quaker Eco-Witness**, a project of **Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN)**.

Quaker Eco-Witness (QEW) promotes government and corporate policies to help restore and protect Earth's biological integrity. It works within and through the Religious Society of Friends for policies that enable human communities to relate in mutually enhancing ways to the ecosystems of which they are a part. This witness seeks to be guided by the Spirit and grounded in reverence for Earth's communities of life as God's creation.

QEB's purpose is to inform the **QEW** network to advance Friends' witness on government and corporate policy as it relates to the ecosystems that sustains us. Each issue is an article about timely legislative or corporate policy issues affecting our society's relationship to the earth.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for *QEB*. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Provide background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Explain why the issue is a Friends' concern.
- Describe the positions of other faith-based and secular environmental groups on the issue.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- Provide sources for additional information.

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via mail, write to QEW c/o FCUN

Projects of Quaker Eco-Witness, such as *QEB*, are funded by contributions to QEW.

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Excerpts from AN INTERFAITH STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT*

INTRODUCTION:

In an age of increasing economic integration and interdependence between the nations and peoples of the world, mounting global inequities have come into sharp focus. While technological and other advances have made it possible for segments of humanity to achieve unprecedented material prosperity, large numbers of people have become mired in poverty, hunger, and disease. In the midst of growing disparities and injustices between and within countries, governments and international economic institutions have increasingly sought market-driven policies, particularly the expansion of international trade and investment. This limited approach has too often served to aggravate the problem. We see the need for a broader, more holistic understanding of human economic activity.

It is our belief, as members of diverse faith communities, that moral and spiritual principles can provide guidance in the search for practical measures to address the profound ethical issues raised by international trade and investment. In this spirit, we offer the following five principles, each accompanied by our observations and visions for the future. These principles apply to all actors, public and private, engaged in international trade and investment. We believe that adoption of these principles will assist people everywhere to shape international trade and investment so that they advance the goal of a more just, more sustainable, and more prosperous human society.

PRINCIPLES:

1. International trade and investment systems should respect and support the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation, and our common humanity.
2. International trade and investment activities should advance the common good and be evaluated in the light of their impact on those who are most vulnerable.
3. International trade and investment policies and decisions should be transparent and should involve the meaningful participation of the most vulnerable stakeholders.
4. International trade and investment systems should respect the legitimate role of government, in collaboration with civil society, to set policies regarding the development and welfare of its people.
5. International trade and investment systems should safeguard the global commons and respect the right of local communities to protect and sustainably develop their natural resources.

** Approved by the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment 05/16/01 and endorsed by more than 40 religious organizations. The entire Interfaith Statement can be downloaded at <<http://www.mcc.org/us/globalization/partners/interfaith.html>>.*

**Editor's Note: The next issue of Quaker Eco-Bulletin
will provide additional information on the FTAA.**