



PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2005

June 27,

NAFTA-plus Ministerial: Civil society condemns closed-door talks in Ottawa

OTTAWA and MONTREAL – Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan and Ministers from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. met in Ottawa on Monday, June 27 to discuss progress on the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). The SPP was originally launched on March 23 following a meeting of the 'three amigos', Martin, Bush, and Fox in Waco, Texas. This Partnership is a key component of the push by large corporate interests to press forward on deep integration plans for North America.

As was the case in March, this current round of talks in Ottawa has been held well away from the public eye with none of the major proposals on the negotiating table having been subjected to prior public debate. This despite a promise in the SPP Fact Sheet posted in March on the White House web site, of an immediate process of consultations with stakeholders that was to include non-governmental organizations, and state/provincial and local governments, as well as the business sector.

"It is astounding that year after year and despite repeated efforts by civil society networks like ours to suggest an array of alternatives for integration, the Canadian government and the governments of the other two NAFTA signatory countries continue to take decisions behind their own peoples' backs" said Pierre-Yves Serinet, the coordinator of the Quebec Network on Continental Integration (RQIC).

This lack of transparency ignores the fact that an increasing number of Canadian Members of Parliament are supporting a fundamental review of NAFTA, especially the chapters on investment and dispute resolution settlement (Chapters 11 and 19). On February 16, 2005, following testimony from RQIC and Common Frontiers, the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on International Trade requested that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade undertake a thorough review of NAFTA.

"The ultimate goal of the June 27 NAFTA-plus talks in Ottawa includes the creation of a North American energy pact and common security policies under the guise of protecting citizens against terrorism.

"It's unthinkable to start negotiating a "NAFTA-plus" without first addressing the social damage done by the current NAFTA. There should be an exhaustive review of the accord that would include civil society's inputs. It is undeniable that promises made by our governments on the benefits of NAFTA for the citizens of the three countries have not been kept" said Rick Arnold, the coordinator for Common Frontiers.

Common Frontiers and RQIC have joined forces with civil society networks in the United States and Mexico to fight the three leaders' deep integration plans for North America. Last March these networks adopted a common statement that was sent to the three heads of state prior to their Waco meeting. It called on Canada, Mexico and the U.S. to move beyond 'homeland security' and focus on the damage done by NAFTA to 'human security' in our continent.

Common Frontiers and RQIC will continue to pressure the Canadian government to ensure that social, cultural, and environmental as well as economic rights are respected in any trade discussions, so that the living and working conditions of all citizens will be improved - to prioritize social and human rights over private sector interests.

Common Frontiers and RQIC were co-organizers of the People's Summit in April 2001 in Quebec City, and are members of the Hemispheric Social Alliance that has played a central role in challenging 'free trade' negotiations throughout the Americas. In Canada and Quebec these two networks are representative of a range of organizations including church, labour, students, women, environment, international development, human rights and other social justice sectors.