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Renegotiate the North American agenda, civil society groups ask in letter to Prime minister Harper

Action urged at North American Leaders Summit

Ottawa - Stephen Harper must reconsider his opposition to NAFTA renegotiation and seek a new foundation for North American relations when he meets the U.S. and Mexican presidents in Guadalajara this week, says a letter to the Prime Minister from Common Frontiers, a broad network of church, labour, environmental and civil society groups

The letter, co-written with the Réseau québécois sur l'Intégration continentale (RQIC), was sent to Prime Minister Harper in advance of the fifth annual North American Leaders summit. The summits have been used to set new priorities for expanding NAFTA through the secretive and heavily criticized Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP).

Common Frontiers and RQIC note that while campaigning for U.S. President, Barack Obama promised he would seek the active and open involvement of citizens, labour, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in setting the North American agenda and making progress.

"Are you willing to enter into a direct dialogue with civil society organizations to revise completely the summit format as President Obama suggested?," asks the letter, while noting that NAFTA has increased the wealth gap between rich and poor across the continent, failed to protect jobs and perpetuated an environmentally harmful economic model.

In addition, Common Frontiers and RQIC are asking the Prime Minister to acknowledge that increased violence in Mexico is the result of militarizing the war on drug traffickers. The recent increases in refugee applications from Mexico is the result of human rights abuses and continuing economic hardship forcing half a million Mexicans each year to seek a better life in Canada and the U.S. The groups ask the Prime Minister to reverse the decision to require visas for Mexicans travelling to Canada.

"Labour and environmental protections must take precedence over international trade regimes," concludes the letter. "Therefore, we propose a profound renegotiation of the whole of NAFTA and an end to the Security and Prosperity Partnership, which simply aims to extend a failed economic model."

"We demand that you undertake a new dialogue based on open and democratic consultation, as promised by President Obama, and as clearly supported by majorities in all three North American countries."