



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Thousands Expected to Protest Korea-US Free Trade Agreement *Labor and Community Advocates Say KORUS-FTA Another Bad Backroom Deal*

(Seattle) An international coalition of labor and community organizations gathered today to express their deep concern about the proposed Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), which is being negotiated in Seattle September 6 – 9.

Thousands of activists from both the U.S. and South Korea will gather to hold a march and rally to protest the KORUS FTA Wednesday.

At today's press conference, advocates from the U.S. and Korea said that the KORUS FTA -- like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) -- lacks adequate protections for workers' rights and the environment while creating extensive rights for corporations.

Given the profound impact the KORUS-FTA could have on millions of workers in South Korea and the U.S., trade union organizations in both countries expressed their outrage at being locked out of the negotiations.

"These negotiations are fundamentally undemocratic", said Dave Freiboth, Executive Secretary Treasurer for the King County Labor Council. "Nobody representing the public, workers or sound environmental policy are represented here. In fact, the notes from the meeting won't even be released until 2009."

“This agreement is modeled on failed policy,” said Thea Lee, Policy Director for the AFL-CIO. “Using a trade agreement model that consistently lowers wages and exports American jobs is not the way to build a better world-wide community. Congress must reject any free trade agreement that doesn’t offer full protection to American workers and workers in the countries of our trading partners.”

Since 1998, the U.S. has exported more than 3 million manufacturing jobs overseas and average wages have not kept pace with inflation despite healthy productivity growth. Additionally, real wages for workers in Canada and Mexico have fallen since NAFTA took effect. The KORUS FTA is modeled after NAFTA.

“This is also a bad deal for South Korea,” said Mi-Sook Lee, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Union delegation. “In South Korea, workers have a tough time. If they act to make their jobs better, businesses can sue the worker, their friends and family into bankruptcy and take all their property. This agreement will give even more power to business.”

“These deals give too much power to business to weaken environmental protections in the U.S. and South Korea,” said Marina Skumanich, Executive Director for Washington Fair Trade Coalition. “Anytime a foreign business doesn’t like a regulation, they can say it hurts their bottom line. Governments will either have to change the law or pay money to business. It’s a win for business and a loss for our public health.”

Advocates said that trade can be good for business and communities. They outlined their demands for a fair and equitable KORUS FTA agreement. The coalition demanded that the negotiations for any U.S. and Korean Free Trade Agreement must be open to the public, and that the agreement not weaken labor or environmental laws or negatively impact local communities.

“If the Bush and South Korean administrations stay true to the principles of freedom and democracy, we can work out an agreement that is good for everyone,” said Freiboth.