

Letter to Our Congressional Delegation Opposing Fast Track and TPP

Dear Representative Engle;
Representative Gibson;
Representative Lowey;
Representative Maloney;
Senator Schumer; and
Senator Gillibrand,

I write as a member of the Presbytery of Hudson River, a regional judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (USA) just north of New York city with 82 congregations and more than 13,500 members. At its July 2014 meeting, Hudson River Presbytery (HRP) unanimously approved a resolution to officially oppose the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the massive global trade agreement currently under negotiation between the United States and eleven other countries. The resolution represents over four years of work on issues of fair trade, extractive industries and environmental justice which began with our mission partners in the small mountain community of La Oroya, Peru where a lead smelting plant has caused severe environmental and health damages and is now suing the Peruvian government for \$800 million for loss of potential future profits.

Trade agreements like the Peruvian Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have impacted our mission partners in Peru and elsewhere in the world by allowing corporations to directly challenge government laws and regulations in international arbitration courts. In our mission work abroad, the PCUSA is repeatedly encountering transnational corporations who are using international arbitration tribunals to resolve disputes – a process established in the State-Investor Clause. This emerging pattern is a concern. In 2000, the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) had three cases related to oil, mining and gas. As of March, 2013, there were 169 cases pending. The huge sums of money involved are a potential disincentive for developing countries to regulate policies tied to public health and safety, as well as the environment, in order to avoid lawsuits and open up their countries to foreign investment.

The TPP will be the largest Free Trade Agreement in U.S. history, covering approximately 40% of the global economy, affecting not only tariffs and quotas, but also government procurement decisions, financial regulations, medicine patents, food safety standards, telecommunications policy, energy exports, Internet protocols, state sovereignty and more.

In the Presbyterian Church, we have seen first-hand the devastating effects these free trade agreements have on real people and their communities. We are seeing these problems all over the world with our mission partners. As the church has developed relationships with people in Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, India and elsewhere, our eyes have been opened to grave injustices of environmental degradation, food scarcity brought about by corporate dominance of patents on seeds; water shortages and corporate privatization of natural resources, contamination from oil and gas exploration and mining; and loss of income and displaced communities from corporate land grabs.

The bounties of the earth are no longer free to all – they have become commodities to be traded on the open market. We have seen the destruction of whole economies because some big corporation comes in and decides to appropriate the resources of a community for themselves.

The truly alarming thing is that the Trans Pacific Partnership would allow foreign corporations to do the same thing here in the U.S. It puts our communities in danger of bankruptcy for passing laws to protect our water, our environment and our jobs. When corporations are allowed to sue governments, overriding their national sovereignty – whether those be foreign corporations operating here in the US or US corporations operating on foreign soil, the right of people to self-determination is in jeopardy. A community should not be in danger of losing its land, having its water, air, or soil poisoned or contaminated and having the natural resources of its country extracted out from under it with no compensation and no power to determine how and in what manner these agreements are made. We believe that– the TPP would allow corporations to undermine our democracy.

As a person of faith, I urge you to oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and to oppose Trade Promotion Authority, or Fast Track, that delegates the Congress' constitutional authority in trade matters to the executive branch. If you have already voiced your opposition to these devastating trade deals, I thank you and ask you to continue speaking out and urging your colleagues in Congress to vote against them.

Sincerely,

Members of the Presbytery of Hudson River