

In Support of International Fair Trade
A Resolution approved by General Synod XIX (1993)

WHEREAS, the emerging structures of global trade and exchange provide unparalleled opportunities for all people to find sustainable relationships of commerce and business, to share in abundance of God's creation and to appreciate the benefits and diversity of cultures, skills, knowledge and heritages of all peoples of the world whom our Creator's love has called into being;

WHEREAS, in its pronouncement "Christian Faith and Economic Justice," the United Church of Christ has declared that "We establish as a goal the just transformation of the global economy into an economic order that fundamentally ensures economic, racial, and social justice for all of God's people throughout the world;"

WHEREAS, the North American Free Trade Agreement, if ratified by the United States Congress, would link the United States, Canada and Mexico into the world's largest trading block;

WHEREAS, numerous public interest groups concerned with economic and social justice have examined the NAFTA and determined that the terms of the proposed NAFTA would:

- expose numerous existing U.S. federal, state and local environmental and consumer laws to challenge and create downward pressure on industrial and agricultural worker safety standards;
- promote environmentally unsound commercial activity in the areas of agriculture and energy;
- create incentives for manufacturers to relocate to avoid strict enforcement of environmental regulations and exploit poor workers;
- intensify these problems through omission of enforcement and funding provisions for environmental protection;
- establish highly secretive negotiation and dispute resolution processes that deny citizen oversight of NAFTA on vital concerns such as food safety, consumer product standards, and environmental regulations on hazardous substances; and
- encourage the concentration of land, wealth and means of production in the hands of small groups of individuals and transnational corporations;

WHEREAS, Canadian, Mexican, and American environmental, citizen, and labor leaders, including Manuel Garcia, leader of Mexico's largest independent labor federation, have denounced NAFTA, calling it "an instrument to allow multinational corporations to take advantage of Mexican labor,"

WHEREAS, the delegates from education organizations and unions of Canada, Mexico and the United States who attended the tri-national conference have declared that they "believe that the continuation of accessible, democratic, universal, free, quality public education is endangered by the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement' and that the US-Canada Free Trade

Agreement and the proposed NAFTA have already caused serious negative impacts on public education on the continent and will continue to have serious negative impacts unless amended;

WHEREAS, a large group of female U.S. lawmakers have criticized NAFTA for failing to address the needs of women workers and their families, pointing out that “one of the most neglected aspects of the proposed treaty is the impact it will have on women” who traditionally suffer the most immediate and dramatic impacts of rapid industrialization such as degraded health and restricted access to health care, reduced access to potable water and subsistence farm land;

WHEREAS, groups gathered at the “Latino NAFTA Summit” issued a joint statement insisting that the trade pact be revised to include provisions regarding border infrastructure, job retraining and displaced worker assistance, the environment, labor standards, targeted economic development in Mexico and the U.S. small businesses, immigration, and Caribbean issues, and called for the three countries to agree to a set of basic worker rights, including: “the right of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively, prohibitions on forced labor, restrictions on the use of child labor, minimum acceptable conditions regarding minimum wages, hours of work, and workplace health and safety;”

WHEREAS, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its 1993 report on Free Trade reported that “unregulated market economics threaten democracy by economic increasing inequality and poverty, as well as large-scale unemployment;”

WHEREAS, the Economic and Environmental Justice/Hunger Concerns Working Group of the National Council of Churches has expressed its “deep concern that the secretive nature of the negotiations and approval of NAFTA...endangered the democratic process and public scrutiny,” and has called upon the United States Congress and President Clinton to reject the NAFTA; and

WHEREAS, the Eighteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ “condemned ‘Free Trade’ agreements which fail to address environmental, workplace and labor standards.”

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NINETEENTH GENERAL SYNOD of the United Church of Christ concludes that the NAFTA, as currently negotiated, is inadequate in protection for workers rights and the environment, compensatory support for those displaced as a result of the agreement, and protection of health and safety standards for workers; and that provisions on investment and taxation will further encourage the concentration of land holdings and the means of production in the hands of a few individuals and large transnational corporations and financial institutions to the detriment of the vast majority of the Mexican, American and Canadian people; and calls on the Congress and our administration to reject NAFTA.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NINETEENTH GENERAL SYNOD calls on the Congress and the President to renegotiate hemispheric trade agreements that:

1. Require the total costs to environment, of labor and for resource depletion be accounted for when setting the price for raw materials;

2. Provide financing mechanisms for environmental monitoring and enforcement, and cleanup, starting with the U.S. – Mexico border;
3. Require labor standards and worker rights, including the guarantee to organize freely and bargain collectively;
4. Require environmental, consumer and worker health and safety standards;
5. Require enforcement mechanisms and standards to be harmonized to the highest, rather than the lowest existing standards among signatories;
6. Require full public dispute resolution mechanisms which are available to all sectors and that provide for visibility, accountability, and sanctions for those who violate the provisions;
7. Discourage concentration of land and means of production in the hands of a few individuals and transnational corporations and encourage the preservations of small and family-owned farms and businesses; and
8. Provide for fair taxation of transborder movement of capital, goods and services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NINETEENTH GENERAL SYNOD calls on all United Church of Christ churches, committees, and offices to initiate programs of prayer, study and action to inform the members of the UCC of the issues and options, and to encourage members to write, telephone and visit their elected representatives to communicate the substance and recommendations contained in this resolution.

Subject to the availability of funds.