



August 6, 2009

An Open Letter To Prime Minister Stephen Harper  
Re: North American Leaders Summit

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

On behalf of Canadian civil society organizations we urge you to take North American relations in a new direction when you meet Presidents Barack Obama and Felipe Calderon on August 9 and 10 in Guadalajara, Mexico. While this meeting is no longer described as a continuation of the Security and Prosperity Partnership initiated by President George W. Bush, President Vicente Fox and Prime Minister Paul Martin, we have yet to see any evidence concerning how it will differ from the secretive SPP process.

While campaigning in February of 2008, President Obama wrote in a *Dallas Morning News* op-ed, that if he were President, North American leaders' summits would "be conducted with a level of transparency that represents the close ties among our three countries." He promised to "seek the active and open involvement of citizens, labor, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in setting the agenda and making progress."

Are you willing to enter into a direct dialogue with civil society organizations to revise completely the summit format transforming it the same way Obama suggests it?

While campaigning President Obama also promised to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement to strengthen labour and environmental provisions and eliminate the Chapter 11 dispute mechanism that allows companies to sue governments for lost profits.

So far you have resisted the renegotiation of NAFTA even though a subcommittee of the House of Commons International Trade Committee has called for a profound revision of NAFTA's Chapter 11 on investment and Chapter 19 on the resolution of trade disputes.

Meanwhile through the secretive SPP process a deepening of continental integration has occurred without public or parliamentary involvement. Numerous studies, including the latest Canadian census data showing stagnant or decreasing incomes for the middle class and poor, but large increases for the rich, between 1980 and 2006, prove that NAFTA has been, on balance, injurious for the majority.

Furthermore, much has changed since Presidents Bush and Calderon met with you in New Orleans in April 2008. Crashes in the U.S. financial and real estate markets have sparked a global recession, leading to the loss of over seven million jobs in Canada, Mexico and the United States since the beginning of last year. Calls for major cuts in greenhouse gas emissions have increased in the lead up to the international climate talks in Copenhagen this year. The Swine Flu virus outbreak has uncovered serious flaws in North American regulatory practises.

Prime Minister Harper, given this new economic context, as well as worsening drug-related violence in Mexico, your decision that all Mexicans wishing to visit Canada must have visas is misguided and should be withdrawn immediately. Instead we urge you to recognize how NAFTA's failure to provide good jobs in Mexico has caused half a million Mexicans to look for a better life in the United States and Canada each year. The removal of import restrictions on agricultural products has been disastrous for Mexican farmers forced off their land by the dumping of cheap American products. The new Canadian visa requirement is an unwarranted obstacle for genuine refugees fleeing the recent explosion in violence and human rights abuses that are a consequence of the militarization of the war against drug traffickers.

The Security and Prosperity Partnership dialogue has failed to deal with the systemic failures of the neoliberal NAFTA model that empowers capital at the expense of workers and the environment. Under the SPP's logic stricter financial controls or food safety standards are deemed barriers to trade and prohibited, as are most conditions requiring companies to source jobs or reinvest a portion of profits locally. Regulatory harmonization also reduces standards to the lowest common denominator, as in the case of increased allowances for pesticide residue levels and a switch to industry self-regulation.

The elimination of export controls on Canadian energy and NAFTA's proportionality clause could force Canada to go on exporting non-renewable oil and gas to the United States even if those exports result in domestic shortages. These provisions have tied the continent to dependence on dirty oil from the tar sands and hampered real cooperation on renewable energy.

The SPP's security agenda has been equally disastrous. Faced with U.S. pressure to "thicken" its borders with new security measures, Canada and Mexico have subordinated independent security and, to some extent, foreign policies to align themselves with the so-called war on terrorism and ongoing war on drugs. Mexico cannot go on being the place where people die in a war against those who traffic drugs to the biggest consumer – the United States. And U.S. co-responsibility cannot end with financial and technical support for the war on trafficking (through the Merida Initiative), which closes its eyes to human rights abuses by the Mexican army. The SPP-based solution is quickly leading to the militarization of crime prevention and enforcement, including efforts to contain social protest and criminalize dissent.

We object to Canada's pursuit of a policy of security and military integration with the United States that has led to a loss of Canadian sovereignty. This has included the signing of bilateral agreements that allow the U.S. military to cross the border in case of a vaguely defined "civil emergency," and U.S. security officials able to operate and make arrests in Canadian waters and on Canadian soil. The merging of terrorist risk assessment procedures, sharing of "no-fly" lists, and creation of joint biometric forms of citizenship identification (NEXUS, "enhanced" drivers' licences), despite widespread concern from privacy commissioners and civil liberties organizations, have also weakened Canadian control over the use and abuse of personal information in an increasingly networked maze of U.S. security databases.

The North American business sector has championed these security measures in return for access to the SPP dialogue. At the 2006 summit in Cancun, you along with Presidents Fox and Bush created a North American Competitiveness Council comprised of 30 companies which were tasked to "prioritize the priorities" and drive the SPP process through changes in regulations. The exclusion of all other voices in setting the North American agenda is made worse by the fact that none of its priorities have been brought before any parliament or congress for debate and vote. The North American Competitiveness Council should be abolished.

The most recent opinion polls in Mexico and Canada indicate that the majority do favour renegotiating NAFTA. In Mexico, millions of people have joined popular displays of protest against NAFTA such as the "The Countryside Can't Take it Anymore" movement ("El campo no aguanta más"), which ended with an agreement signed by then President Vicente Fox to renegotiate NAFTA. A majority in Canada (61 per cent in September 2008, according to an Environics poll commissioned by the Council of Canadians), with strong support within Quebec, favour renegotiation. And In the U.S., more than a hundred Members of Congress support the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment Act (TRADE Act) that would delay approval of any new free trade agreement until the U.S. government has reviewed, with public participation, existing trade agreements and renegotiated them.

We social organizations agree on a need to deepen and make more effective labour and environmental agreements but this is not enough. The best labour clause possible would be only a piece of paper unless the economic model that has been incapable of generating sufficient jobs is completely changed. Similarly, NAFTA's environment protections will remain weak as long as the agreement treats nature as though it were only a source of natural resources and private profits. Labour and environmental protections must take precedence over international trade regimes. 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.

To sum up, 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.

Sincerely,

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Copies

**President Barack Obama,  
President Felipe Calderon**

**Gilles Duceppe, leader, Bloc Quebecois**

**Jack Layton, leader, New Democratic Party**

**Michael Ignatieff, leader, Liberal Party of Canada**

Common Frontiers and le Réseau québécois sur l'Intégration continentale (RQIC) are members of the Hemispheric Social Alliance (Alliance Sociale Continentale), a network that has played a central role in opposing 'free trade' negotiations throughout the Americas. We represent a range of organizations including church groups, labour, student unions, women's groups, environmental organizations, international development agencies, human rights and other social justice advocates.