

Member Groups of the Hemispheric Social Alliance  
C/o  
Timi Gerson  
Organizer/FTAA Coordinator  
Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch  
215 Pennsylvania Ave, SE, Washington DC, 20003 USA

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for your letter of May 31 concerning the forum being developed in connection with the November 2003 Miami FTAA trade ministerial (America's Forum for Trade and Sustainable Development – ATSDF).

As we discussed at the Washington, D.C. briefing on May 21, the ATSDF is designed to complement and expand existing efforts within civil society to engage governments regarding the FTAA, and not to replace or supplant any activities already planned for Miami – nor any regional discourse already established regarding the proposed FTAA. We circulated a further update after the DC briefing (in Spanish and English, attached), and while that probably answers some of your questions, it may not touch on all the issues, so we will also respond below.

- A history of the planning and process of the event up to this point:

The opportunity to construct a forum for direct dialogue in Miami arose quite recently – from a series of discussions that began after the last trade ministerial in Quito. We were motivated by the modest yet important step forward in Quito where trade ministers for the first time agreed to formally receive input from civil society groups other than the Americas Business Forum (ABF). Since that time, we have worked to open up an even greater public space inside the ministerial (inside the “security perimeter”) to make that input more meaningful, interactive and organic.

Acting as a local adjutant, the University of Miami's North-South Center began working with the office of the US Trade Representative, as host government, and the local Miami committees (as meeting hosts) to go beyond the Quito experience and build a vehicle for dialogue. North-South Center first pushed for the possibility of changing and opening the Americas Business Forum to non-profit voices. The ABF, however, has a history and role that does not really fit the needs and interests of non-profit civil society organizations. Thus, we sought to establish a space that would be operationally equivalent to the access provided the ABF and proposed the idea of a separate forum for non-profit civil society concerns with equal access to the ministers.

We received word in early May from USTR and the local meeting hosts that this request would be honored, and we immediately scheduled an open public meeting to describe the opportunity. That was the meeting in Washington on 21 May. We're also making efforts to reach out to networks of NGOs throughout the region to assure broad participation. Our

main concern at this point is to build a meaningful process open to as many interested organizations as possible.

- The composition of and criteria for selection of the “core organizing group” and their decision-making process for the ATSDF:

There are no criteria for selection. Rather, this effort has evolved since the Quito ministerial beginning with conversations among colleagues who agreed to work informally to seek a new and additional opportunity for public discourse in Miami. Our group includes academic and policy organizations from throughout the Americas with experience in coordinating public input into Inter-American policy processes such as OAS assemblies and political meetings, the Summits of the Americas, the early ABFs, and the FTAA ministerial meeting process. We also looked to organizations with expertise in a broad range of social, political and economic issues related to trade. This effort continues as we invite additional organizations willing to help shape, coordinate and participate in ATSDF.

Our decision-making process for the ATSDF is one of consensus with a commitment to transparency of process, and openness to the inputs of other organizations. These principles bore initial fruit in and after the May 21<sup>st</sup> Washington meeting, organized immediately on the heels of the news of ATSDF’s approval. They will continue to guide the process as we head to Miami. We are actively seeking to involve as many interested organizations as possible in helping to plan and build a meaningful, productive and substantive dialogue in Miami – and we hope you and your colleagues will join us in this.

- The process for participating in the trade ministers roundtable and having questions answered by the ministers:

This has yet to be determined, and will most likely be a product of compromise with the USTR as host, and other governments. Note that the proposed roundtable is only one potential element for AFTSD. By holding workshops and other educational activities within the “security perimeter” and accessible to governmental staff and negotiators, we hope to create opportunities for informal dialogue and learning throughout the two days of meetings. Also note that this proposed element of the program will be a briefing on the results of the discussions at the Forum. It will *not* be a representation to Ministers of the views of civil society as a whole – a distinction that will be made explicit.

- The financial responsibility of participating organizations:

We are proceeding at this point as volunteers without dedicated funds for the effort, but we’re committed to seeking funds to make this forum a reality – and hopefully others will join us. Our emphasis on assuring broad participation means we’re actively seeking financial support not only for core costs of the forum, but also for travel-related costs to assure broad participation from less-well-funded organizations to the greatest extent possible. Again, we hope others will help identify, support, and fund participation by interested organizations from throughout the region.

- The process for selecting, organizing and participating in workshops and panels:

The selection and organization of workshops and panels is also evolving based on input we're receiving from interested parties. We've been able to secure space for up to 8-10 simultaneous workshops (in rooms of varying sizes), and are proposing to organize panels and roundtables around the same number of thematic areas. Possible themes were set forth in the materials circulated on May 21<sup>st</sup> based on the principal issues emerging from civil society during past years, and the list continues to be discussed and supplemented through input from the region.

Based on our experience and input received so far from interested organizations, certain key issues, such as labor, environment, public participation, corruption, democracy, human rights, gender, indigenous concerns, investment, and agriculture will most likely be represented among the themes, and topics may be adjusted or re-cast by coordinators as they are designed and executed. Within thematic areas, the idea would be to invite workshops, panels, roundtables, etc on issues and topics proposed and facilitated by knowledgeable groups who have a stake in the issues. We are counting on a broad range of organizations to make suggestions and offer their energy to design, coordinate and/or collaborate in these workshops and panels. We would hope that these sessions would allow for the expression of a diversity of views and opinions, and the results may be reporter's notes, consensus documents, or other outcomes (depending on the session facilitator's design). Session facilitators can use and distribute these results in any way they see fit, and we will also seek to collect and report the results.

As we said in DC, there is no "litmus test" or criteria for participating, although we would hope that participants would agree to certain ground rules that will assure a meaningful civil dialogue among all participants about substantive issues.

- Available resources for ensuring that representatives from civil society from throughout the Americas are able to participate:

We are bringing organizations and individuals from throughout the region into this process, including as planners and facilitators but, as noted above, at this point all are participating on a volunteer basis. Again, we are working to support and assure participation by Latin American and Caribbean organizations as a top priority, including fundraising. We welcome ideas and support from all quarters.

- Whether or not the ATSDF and the roundtable meeting with Ministers will be open to the media:

USTR has committed to closed circuit and web broadcasting of the proceedings.

Again, we are committed to an open, transparent and meaningful opportunity to discuss a broad range of ideas relating to the proposed FTAA, and we believe this can be an important addition to the range of other civil society events being planned for Miami. In this way, we recognize the

rich potential of HSA's broad-based coalition to contribute to the deliberations in the ATSDF, and to bring energy and creativity to this event.

Sincerely,

Tulane University's Institute for Environmental Law  
PARTICIPA, Chile  
North-South Center, University of Miami  
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)  
Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Argentina (FLACSO)  
Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental (CEDA)  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)