

The North American Agreement on Labour Co-operation embodies a solemn promise to uphold and rigorously apply laws on unsafe workplaces, exploitative hours, sex discrimination or any other device that would take unfair advantage of North American working men and women, or their children.

I know that Canadians want all North American workers to enjoy the highest labour standards, the best working conditions and the fullest freedom of association.

The Agreement is a firm commitment that Canada, Mexico and the United States will work together so that their workers receive the full benefit of their labour laws.

We agreed early on that, to be effective, these agreements had to contain measures to ensure enforcement of our environmental and labour laws.

They contain such measures. But let me make clear, here and now: Under these agreements, Canada will never be subject to trade sanctions.

When governments do not enforce their laws, they would pay fines into a fund to improve environmental and labour conditions.

Canadian courts would be responsible for imposing any penalties levied against Canada.

Mexico and the United States chose a different form of penalty. Their failure to enforce their laws subjects them to a suspension of NAFTA benefits, including a duty or tariff. In other words, a trade sanction.

We negotiated the NAFTA to knock down trade barriers. Under this agreement there will be no new trade barriers -- barriers that, we believed, would have handed a weapon to protectionist interests to undermine the benefits of free trade.

In the end, the most powerful mechanism for enforcing these agreements is our commitment to listen to each other's views, examine issues of concern and correct problems as they arise. The co-operative process outlined here will be the strongest guarantee of the proper application of our labour and environmental laws.

In Canada, the federal government shares responsibility for the environment with the provinces, and about 90 percent of the labour force is within their jurisdiction. This made the involvement and co-operation of the provinces vital throughout the negotiations.