

REPORT: Roundtable on Canada and Trade in the Americas

Identifying Practices that Support the Guided Principles of the
Free Trade Area of the Americas draft agreement

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Vancouver, British Columbia

On April 6, 2001, the British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) organized a roundtable discussion on Canada and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Just weeks away from the Summit of the Americas hosted by Canada in Vancouver, this was a timely and important piece in the growing dialogue around the FTAA. Representatives from various civil society and government organizations gathered at Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre to discuss the draft agreement and the integration of the global economy. They were joined by a panel of experts who presented their views on the fundamental principles of "strengthening democracy, environmental sustainability, and economic growth" introduced at the Miami Conference in 1994. Lawyers, economists, and business leaders from the private sector and community organizations were heard during the roundtable. Some thought was given to the challenges and opportunities of the FTAA and what practices are currently in place for preparing what presently exists. The following account is a summary of the roundtable, including the introductory panel, small group discussions, and final

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PREPARATION AND SETTING THE CONTEXT

In order to prepare participants for the roundtable discussion, preparatory documents were distributed as part of the agenda package. These documents included "A Search for the FTAA" by Philip Delagrove, Minister for International Trade, a summary of "Trade by Treaty: What's Going on in the FTAA Negotiations" by Marc Lee, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and "Canada and the FTAA: the Transatlantic Trade Campaign" by Jean Poudelet and Larsen Moberg of the North American Institute and the Norman Paterson School for International Affairs. Copies of these documents are attached with this report (see Appendix I).

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To get a context and a sense of the current state of the FTAA negotiations, the history of free trade, the current state of the FTAA negotiations, and the impact of free trade on Latin America and those at the community level.

Marc Lee, research economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), gave an overview of how free trade has been arrived at over the years and outlined some of the major issues confronting the current negotiations. Nine negotiating groups, which work has mainly been done through, have been meeting regularly since 1994. The FTAA draft text is due to be finalized and signed by the end of the year. The public has not had access to the contents of the negotiations. The agreement, once signed, will be a significant contribution to a very complex trade agreement. Marc Lee outlined the current state of the negotiations and the power and privilege to business and corporations, as well as the role of the public sector. He also mentioned that he had an opportunity to express his views on the FTAA.