

Any trade agreement that emerges from the Santiago Summit, ICCHRLA urges, must have as its core objective, its first priority, to respond to the essential human needs of *all* of the region's citizens. Any agreement must also guarantee, with enforceable mechanisms, the fundamental and internationally-recognized human rights of all citizens to adequate food, just conditions of employment, fair wages, and access to health care and education, as well as to civil, political and cultural rights.

ICCHRLA is extremely concerned that without such guarantees and enforcement mechanisms, the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas is likely to provoke a similar chain of events to those which we have witnessed in Mexico since the implementation of trade liberalization measures that culminated in the NAFTA.

Together with our church and human rights partner organizations in Mexico, ICCHRLA has documented how these policies have exacerbated existing levels of poverty and inequity, provoked increasing outbreaks of both peaceful and armed social protest by those who are losing their land, livelihood and jobs, or seeing the real value of their income plummet in comparison to the rising cost of basic necessities, making it more and more difficult to feed their families. This, in turn, has provoked increasing social protest, including peaceful dissent and armed rebellion. We have also documented how the implementation of trade liberalization policies in Mexico has coincided with increasing use of military and paramilitary repression to control such social protest. And finally, we have observed that the implementation of NAFTA has coincided with an unwillingness on the part of the Canadian government to hold the Mexican government publicly accountable, or to use multilateral fora like the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and Organization of American States to seek effective international mechanisms to address a disturbing increase in gross and systematic human rights violations by Mexican state agents.

The deteriorating human rights situation in Mexico is a warning signal for the countries of the Americas, one which must be heeded at the Summit of the Americas in discussions regarding an expanded free trade agreement. Any such agreement must include both mechanisms to ensure existing inequities are addressed not exacerbated, and enforceable commitments to respect the broad spectrum of human rights enshrined in United Nations Covenants.

ICCHRLA is extremely concerned, therefore, that discussions at the Summit of the Americas on the subject of human rights and democratization are taking place separately from discussions on trade policies. Since economic and trade policies are increasingly undermining human rights and the possibility of democratic participation, it is imperative that human rights guarantees be built into the terms of any trade agreement. Indeed, experience shows us that separate, parallel agreements on human rights may commit governments on paper but run the risk of being undercut or ignored when trade policies are the priority.