

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

Executive Summary

The National Congress of Trade Unions submission for civil society

We accepted your invitation on the FTAA process and your report of the Ministerial Declaration. The NCTU has come to the conclusion that neither the Bahamas nor the Caribbean region will experience much mutual benefit from joining in this Agreement. Indeed it is our opinion that it has the potential to cause The Bahamas and Caribbean to regress to an all too familiar landlord - serf relationship. The NCTU cautions the Bahamas' involvement without thorough involvement of Labour and other members of civil society in a timely and inclusive fashion. The implications for the country without such involvement and education could be significant.

Our submission outlines our concerns that relate to:

- i. the inadequate labour laws that exist in the country at this time, specifically outdated Industrial Relations Act; outdated Fair Labour Standard Act; inadequate protection of Labour in agreements with large investors; Labour Standards are not ILO consistent; inadequate enforcement of Labour Laws and lack of consistent health and Safety Standards;
- ii. unemployment and underemployment, specifically the collection of data, and the validity and reliability; the usefulness of current data, as well as the issue of a nation minimum wage;
- iii. education, specifically the level of education required to help for our population to be competitive;
- iv. ownership, specifically as it relates to current laws governing the movement of capital and current economic support for national entrepreneurs.

The National Congress of Trade Unions has also determined that the FTAA should not proceed until such time as Labour is afforded the opportunity to be actively engaged at ALL levels of discussion.

The National Congress of Trade Unions of The Bahamas on behalf of Labour in The Bahamas requires the following:

- **Labour must have a representative on all negotiating committees. Representative must be appointed by Labour not by the government or country. Their role is to represent Labour concerns on all negotiating committees. It is important that this appointment**

be supported financially and given the same accommodations and courtesies as all other representatives.

- **All Labour Standards need to be enforceable. While it is recognised that the FTAA will have Labour standards that are ILO consistent, what MUST be included is an enforcement of these standards.**
- **Labour requires national legislation that enforces a minimum wage.**
- **Labour also requires that a living wage be negotiated locally by workers according to their own conditions**
- **Labour requires prior to signatory of the FTAA minimum safety and health standards**