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Andean-U.S. Free-Trade Agreement Negotiations

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Summary

In November 2003, the Administration notified Congress that it intended to begin negotiations on a free-trade agreement (FTA) with Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. The notification said that an FTA would reduce and eliminate foreign barriers to trade and investment and would support democracy and fight drug activity in the Andean region. The Andean governments wanted to ensure access to the U.S. market, especially since their current trade preferences will end in December 2006. In the United States, the business community strongly supports the trade agreement, labor opposes it, and agriculture is split.

The first round of negotiations was held with Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador (with Bolivia participating as an observer) in Cartagena, Colombia in May 2004. Nine rounds have been held thus far. The last round was held in Lima on April 18-22, 2005. The next round was scheduled for June in Ecuador, but Ecuador's Congress replaced their president on April 20, 2005, and that country's participation in the FTA talks is now uncertain. At least two more rounds are anticipated — one in an undetermined location in June, and another possibly in Washington in July. The talks are expected to continue into the summer and possibly longer.

The United States currently extends duty-free treatment to imports from the four Andean countries under a regional preference program. The Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) authorized the President to grant duty-free treatment to certain products, and the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) reauthorized the ATPA program and added products that had been previously excluded. Over half of all U.S. imports in 2004 from the Andean countries entered under these preferences.

In 2004, the United States imported \$15.5 billion from the four Andean countries and exported \$7.7 billion. Colombia accounted for about half of U.S. trade with the region. Peru and Ecuador almost evenly split the other half, and Bolivia represented a very small share. The leading U.S. import from the region in 2004 was crude petroleum oil, which accounted for 37% of imports. Leading U.S. exports to the region were mining equipment, wheat, broadcasting equipment, and maize.

There are several important issues in the FTA negotiations. One issue is unresolved disputes involving U.S. investments in Andean countries. Another issue is a practice called a "price-band mechanism," where an agricultural tariff fluctuates so that the import price falls within a specified range. A third issue involves patent protection for test data. Another major concern is the treatment of trade unionists, especially in Colombia, where union leaders are targeted by death squads.

If an FTA is concluded, it is uncertain when an implementing bill might be considered in Congress. A bill to implement the U.S.-Central American-Dominican Republic FTA could be considered first, and any vote on that bill could prove a good indicator of congressional support for, or opposition to, a U.S.-Andean FTA.

Contents

Background	1
U.S.-Andean Trade	5
Selected Issues in the Negotiations	6
Investor/State Disputes	6
Agriculture	7
Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)	8
Worker Protections and Human Rights	8
Textiles	9
Visas	9
Environment	10
Prospects	10

List of Tables

Table 1. U.S. Trade with the ATPA Countries, 2004	6
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Andean-U.S. Free-Trade Agreement Negotiations

Background

At a meeting with President George W. Bush on April 28, 2003, in Washington, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe sought a free-trade agreement (FTA) with the United States as a means to improve Colombia's economy, provide employment, and offer an attractive alternative to drug activity in his country. President Bush was reluctant to agree to free-trade talks, however, because he wanted to achieve broader market opening through the hemispheric Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).¹ Because the FTAA talks appeared to be stalled though, President Bush reportedly offered at the meeting to send then-U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Zoellick to Colombia to discuss bilateral trade between the two countries.

At the time, some Members of Congress supported free-trade talks with Colombia. On June 11, 2003, Senator Max Baucus, Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, and three Democratic Members on the House Ways and Means Committee urged USTR Zoellick to give "significant weight" to market size in selecting countries for FTAs and included Colombia in a list of possible FTA partners.² On August 1, 2003, Senator Charles Grassley, Chairman of the Finance Committee, and a bipartisan group of four other Senators on the Senate Finance Committee sent the USTR a letter asking for "serious consideration of initiating [FTA] negotiations with Colombia...."³

The USTR traveled to Bogota and met with Colombia's President and others on August 8, 2003. The purpose of his trip, according to the USTR, was "...to clearly lay out the scope and depth of such a possible negotiation, what it would involve, and to listen and learn from Colombians about their goals and expectations."⁴ Peru and Ecuador also expressed interest in FTA negotiations with the United States.

On November 18, 2003, USTR Zoellick formally notified Congress of the Administration's intent to begin FTA negotiations with Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. A press release that accompanied the notification said that the

¹ "Bush Plays Down Prospects for Colombia Trade Pact." *Reuters*. April 30, 2003.

² Brevetti, Rossella. "Pro-Trade Democrats Urge Zoellick to Consider Market Size in FTA Choices." The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. *International Trade Reporter*. June 19, 2003.

³ Letter reprinted at website of *Inside U.S. Trade*, [<http://www.insidetrade.com>].

⁴ Office of the USTR. "Zoellick to Visit Colombia, Meet with President Uribe on August 8." Press Release. August 7, 2003. Available at [<http://www.ustr.gov>].

Administration planned negotiations to begin the second quarter of 2004, initially with Colombia and Peru, and that the United States would work with Ecuador and Bolivia “with a view to including them in the agreement as well.”⁵

The USTR’s letter of notification to Congress identified economic reasons for the negotiations. It said that an FTA would help U.S. interests “...by reducing and eliminating barriers to trade and investment between the Andean countries and the United States. The FTA will also enable us to address impediments to trade and investment in the Andean countries...” The combined markets for the four Andean countries, according to the USTR, have a gross domestic product (on a purchasing power parity basis) of \$463 billion and a combined population of 93 million people.⁶ The letter of notification also stated that an Andean FTA would add momentum to the broader negotiations on an FTAA. Those negotiations were still stalled, primarily because of differences between the United States and Brazil.

The notification identified political reasons for the talks as well. It said that an FTA “...will also enhance our efforts to strengthen democracy and support for fundamental values in the region.” It said that one reason for negotiating with all four countries was that a regional strategy would help in combating narcotrafficking.⁷ It also pointed out several issues of concern to the United States: protection of worker rights in Ecuador; disputes involving U.S. investors in Peru; violence against trade unionists and disputes with U.S. investors in Colombia; and the need to work with Bolivia and the other Andean countries on capacity building.

In the United States, the business community supports an Andean FTA. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), for example, states in its trade agenda that one of its key objectives is the congressional approval of the Andean FTA and other FTAs now being negotiated.⁸ Its trade agenda states, “The NAM supports FTAs because U.S. manufacturers face much higher barriers in foreign markets than foreign producers face here.” A number of other groups, however, oppose an Andean FTA. A coalition of 51 labor, religious, and environmental groups wrote to the USTR on September 9, 2004, urging him to suspend the negotiations. They argued that the negotiations have been conducted in secret, there has been no meaningful dialogue with the public, and the Andean negotiations are modeled on

⁵ Office of the USTR. “USTR Notifies Congress of Intent to Initiate Free Trade Talks with Andean Countries.” Press Release. November 18, 2003.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ On a regional approach to combating illegal drug activity, the letter of notification stated: “Narcotrafficking is a regional scourge that respects no borders. Experience has shown that to combat it effectively requires coordination and effective strategies among all four Andean countries.” For more information on Andean countries and issues of interest to Congress, see CRS Report RL32250, *Colombia: Issues for Congress*, by Connie Veillette; CRS Report RL32580, *Bolivia: Political and Economic Developments and Implications for U.S. Policy*, by Connie Veillette; CRS Report RS21687, *Ecuador: Political and Economic Situation and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando; and CRS Report RL32733, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Issues for the 109th Congress*, coordinated by Mark P. Sullivan.

⁸ National Association of Manufacturers website at [<http://www.nam.org>].

failed trade agreements.⁹ Among the signatories were the AFL-CIO, American Friends Service Committee, and Public Citizen.

The Andean governments are pursuing an FTA with the United States to assure access to the immense U.S. market. They have preferential access now under unilateral U.S. programs (see following section), but that access is scheduled to expire at the end of December 2006. An FTA would lock-in those preferences and additional duty-free treatment. The Andean governments also want to attract foreign investment and see an FTA with the United States as a way to establish a more secure economic environment and increase foreign investment.

Within the Andean countries, however, there is broad grass-roots opposition to an FTA. Opponents argue that any economic benefits from increased trade under an FTA will be realized by only a small segment of the economy, worsening the separation of the classes. They also argue that a large part of the Andean population is poor farmers, who are especially vulnerable and cannot compete against increased agricultural imports from the United States, which some Andean officials claim are heavily subsidized. A further argument is that an FTA would mean reduced revenues for the Andean governments, and some opponents state that revenue losses will have to be replaced with regressive domestic taxes.¹⁰

On March 23, 2004, the USTR issued a press release announcing that the United States and Colombia would begin FTA negotiations between the two countries, and possibly other Andean countries, on May 18-19, 2004.¹¹ The naming of only Colombia made it clear that there were still concerns with Peru and Ecuador that had not been addressed. The press release mentioned outstanding disputes between U.S. investors and the Peruvian government and concerns about protection of worker rights and investor disputes in Ecuador. According to the press release, “We [the U.S. Government] hope that in the coming weeks these countries will take the follow-on steps that will enable us to include them at the negotiating table, along with Colombia, at the start of the negotiations. We look forward to including Bolivia at a later stage, and are working with them to increase their readiness.” On May 3, 2004, the USTR announced that issues with respect to Peru and Ecuador had been addressed, and those two countries would join with Colombia in the first round of the negotiations.¹²

The first round of FTA negotiations was held in Cartagena, Colombia on May 18-19, 2004. Fourteen working groups were established. The negotiators agreed on a schedule that, according to chief U.S. negotiator Regina Vargo, would probably

⁹ Alliance for Responsible Trade website at [<http://www.art-us.org>].

¹⁰ Several arguments against the Andean FTA are presented in: Hansen-Kuhn, Karen. “Andean FTA: Threats to Development,” available on The Development Group for Alternative Policies (The Development Gap) website at [<http://www.developmentgap.org>].

¹¹ Office of the USTR. “U.S. and Colombia to Begin FTA Negotiations on May 18.” Press Release. March 23, 2004.

¹² Office of the USTR. “Peru and Ecuador to Join With Colombia in May 18-19 Launch of FTA negotiations with the United States.” Press Release. May 3, 2004.

involve seven rounds by early 2005 — one round every five to seven weeks.¹³ On the day that negotiations began, students, union members, farmers, and others in Cartagena held a one-day protest against the negotiations because of feared job loss in the agriculture sector.¹⁴

Bolivia has attended the negotiating sessions as an observer, but is not expected to be a party to an agreement. The USTR said, “We want to maintain the door being open....but we also have to recognize realities,” and noted that Bolivia’s government had ““some basic stability issues.””¹⁵

Nine rounds of negotiations have been held so far: Cartagena (May 18-19, 2004); Atlanta (June 18, 2004); Lima, Peru (July 26-30, 2004); San Juan (September 13-17, 2004); Guayaquil, Ecuador (October 25-29, 2004); Tucson (November 20-December 4, 2004); Cartagena (February 7-11, 2005); Washington (March 14-18, 2005); and Lima (April 18-22, 2005). After the ninth round, U.S. lead negotiator Vargo said that negotiators had “...finished discussions on trade capacity-building and on electronic commerce, and made advances in competition policy, government procurement, and services...”, but continued to have differences on agricultural safeguards.¹⁶ The parties narrowed their differences, but were still wide apart on some important topics.

On April 20, 2005, the Congress in Ecuador impeached Ecuador’s president Lucio Gutierrez and replaced him with the vice president, Alfredo Palacio. The new president is reportedly considering holding a referendum over the FTA and “plans to revise the agreements reached so far...”¹⁷ Ecuador’s chief negotiator reportedly said during the negotiations that were going on at the time that “...he won’t make any new proposals nor make any commitments until he receives instructions from the new president...”¹⁸ The next (tenth) round of negotiations were supposedly to take place in Ecuador in June, but that is now uncertain. The last (eleventh) round was scheduled to be in Washington in July, but that is uncertain as well.

¹³ Mozzo, Javier. “U.S. Toasts Strong Start to Andean Trade Talks.” *Reuters*. May 19, 2004.

¹⁴ Toro, Juan Pablo. “U.S., South American Nations Complete First Round of Free Trade Talks, Meet Next in Atlanta.” *The Associated Press. Associated Press Newswires*. May 19, 2004.

¹⁵ Brevetti, Rossella. “Zoellick Hopes Progress in Global Round Will Help Lagging Hemispheric Trade Talks.” *Daily Report for Executives*. Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. September 10, 2004.

¹⁶ Brevetti, Rosella. “Vargo Declines to Set Time Frame for Concluding Andean Free Trade Pact.” *Daily Report for Executives*. Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. April 27, 2005.

¹⁷ “Washington Waits for Signal from Ecuador over FTA Talks.” *Latin America News Digest*. April 28, 2005.

¹⁸ Kozak, Robert. “Ecuador Negotiator to Stall at Andean/US Trade Talks.” *Dow Jones International News*. April 20, 2005.

U.S.-Andean Trade

The United States extends special duty treatment to imports from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru under a regional trade preference program. This program accounted for about half of all U.S. imports from the four countries in 2003.

The program began under the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA; title II of P.L. 102-182), enacted on December 4, 1991. ATPA authorized the President to grant duty-free treatment to certain products from the four Andean countries that met domestic content and other requirements. It was intended to promote economic growth in the Andean region and to encourage a shift away from dependence on illegal drugs by supporting legitimate economic activities. ATPA was originally authorized for 10 years and lapsed on December 4, 2001.

After ATPA had lapsed for months, the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA; title XXXI of P.L. 107-210), was enacted on August 6, 2002. ATPDEA reauthorized the ATPA preference program and expanded trade preferences to include additional products that were excluded under ATPA. The additional products under ATPDEA included petroleum and petroleum products, certain footwear, tuna in flexible containers, and certain watches and leather products. ATPDEA also authorized the President to grant duty-free treatment to U.S. imports of certain apparel articles, if the articles met domestic content rules. Duty-free benefits under ATPDEA end on December 31, 2006.

In 2004, a major share (42%) of all U.S. imports from the four Andean countries entered duty-free under ATPDEA, and a smaller share (12%) entered duty-free under ATPA.¹⁹ A very small share (2%) entered duty-free under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences, which applies to most developing countries throughout the world. Of the remaining 44% of imports, most entered duty-free under normal trade relations, which applies on a nondiscriminatory basis to almost all U.S. trading partners. Only 10% of the value of U.S. imports from the four countries was dutiable in 2004. Thus, compared to the status quo, only a relatively small share of U.S. imports would become duty-free under an FTA. That small share, however, might include products that are relatively import-sensitive in the United States or disproportionately important to the Andean countries.

In 2004, the United States imported \$15.5 billion, or 1% of total U.S. imports, from the four countries. The same year, the United States exported \$7.7 billion, or 1% of all U.S. exports, to the four countries. Colombia accounted for almost half of those U.S. imports and over half of the U.S. exports (see **Table 1**). Peru and Ecuador split nearly all of the other half of imports and exports, and Bolivia accounted for a very small share.

¹⁹Data from USITC Interactive Tariff and Trade DataWeb at [<http://dataweb.usitc.gov>]. For more information on U.S. imports under ATPDEA and ATPA, see, U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC). *The Impact of the Andean Trade Preference Act*. USITC Publication 3725. September 2004; and USITC. "The Expanded Andean Trade Preferences Act and a U.S. Free Trade Agreement with its Beneficiaries." *International Economic Review*. USITC Publication 3742. November/December 2004. P. 14.

The leading U.S. import from the region in 2004 (35% of imports) was petroleum oil, principally crude oil from Ecuador and Colombia. Other leading U.S. imports were gold, coal, cut flowers, coffee, articles of copper, and bananas. Leading U.S. exports to the region were mining equipment, wheat, broadcasting equipment, and maize.

Table 1. U.S. Trade with the ATPA Countries, 2004

Country	U.S. Imports		U.S. Exports	
	Region Share (%)	Leading Items	Region Share (%)	Leading Items
Bolivia	2	jewelry, tin	2	jewelry, mining machinery
Colombia	48	crude oil, coal	54	maize, corn, vinyl chloride
Ecuador	27	crude oil, bananas	19	mining machinery, kraft paper
Peru	24	gold, refined copper	24	wheat, gasoline

Source: USITC Interactive Tariff and Trade DataWeb at [<http://dataweb.usitc.gov>]. Data are for U.S. imports for consumption (Customs value) and domestic exports (Fas value). Regional shares may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Selected Issues in the Negotiations

The following highlights some of the more difficult issues in the negotiations. There are many issues that are part of the negotiations, such as market access, services trade, and labor and the environment. Some of these are controversial as well, but are not covered here.

Investor/State Disputes

One of the most important issues in the negotiations is unresolved disputes involving U.S. investments in Andean countries. On October 6, 2004, the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, held a hearing on U.S. investment disputes in Peru and Ecuador. At the hearing, E. Anthony Wayne, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs, testified, "Nearly every U.S. company doing business in Ecuador has faced problems with Ecuadorian government entities, from regulatory bodies to the courts and the customs agency." He said that the situation in Peru was "...considerably better," although there still were problems. He stated that both countries had been cautioned that, "...left unresolved, these disputes are a stumbling block to achieving an FTA." A few months later in October 2004, Deputy USTR Peter Allgeier warned that Peru

and Ecuador could be dropped from the FTA, if outstanding investor disputes were seen as endangering congressional approval of an FTA with Colombia.²⁰

Unresolved disputes continue to be an issue of concern to Congress. On April 13, 2005, the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, held a hearing on U.S. trade agreements with Latin America. At the hearing, John Murphy, Vice President for Western Hemisphere Affairs of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said that the situation regarding investment disputes with Peru and Ecuador was difficult and that persistent disputes could "...stand as a substantial obstacle that could block the participation of these countries [in an FTA]." These disputes have been discussed at the negotiations.

Agriculture

U.S. negotiators have refused to talk about rules for agricultural subsidies, saying that subsidies should be dealt with in the on-going multilateral trade negotiations in the World Trade Organization. Nevertheless, an important goal for the United States in the FTA talks has been elimination of a practice called the "price-band mechanism." Under this mechanism, a fluctuating tariff is imposed on an import for the purpose of keeping the import's price within a specific range. The band addresses changes in world commodity prices. Colombia and Ecuador have these variable duties on over 150 items, including corn, rice, soybeans, and powdered milk.²¹ Andean negotiators have said that the price-band mechanism is necessary to protect their farmers, especially small farmers, against subsidized imports. A spokesperson for small farmers in Colombia said that there is a large rural population and high unemployment in Colombia, and without protected alternative crops, the people will produce drugs.²²

Some specific products are especially important to the trading partners. For example, access to the U. S. market is critical for Andean producers of cut flowers (Colombia and Ecuador) and asparagus (Peru). These products, however, had the largest potential displacement effects on U.S. producers under ATPDEA²³, so they are worrisome to U.S. growers. Also, U.S. sugar producers are concerned about increased imports from the Andean countries. Conversely, Andean farmers see some U.S. products, such as corn and chicken parts, as threatening.

²⁰ Brevetti, Rossella. "Allgeier Says Peru, Ecuador Face Omission From FTA Unless Investor Disputes Resolved." The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. *Daily Report for Executives*. October 4, 2004.

²¹ USTR. *2004 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*. Pgs. 96 and 117.

²² Otis, John. "Tree Oil Plan Tries to Bear Fruit; Growing Palm Extract Instead of Lucrative Coca is a Hard Sell for Colombia Farmers." *Houston Chronicle*. February 6, 2005.

²³ USITC. *The Impact of the Andean Trade Preference Act*. P. 3-11.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

A major area of disagreement is so-called “data exclusivity.” This term refers to an additional period of patent protection that is given to test data, especially data on pharmaceuticals and agricultural chemicals. The United States wants rules on data exclusivity in an FTA to protect the results of research by pharmaceutical companies for five years.²⁴ In related action, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) has petitioned the U.S. Government to withdraw ATPDEA benefits for Peru and Ecuador because they have no data exclusivity laws.²⁵ Oxfam has argued, “Guaranteeing exclusive rights over pharmaceutical data will result in delays and limit generic competition in cases where the patent has expired or a compulsory license has been granted.”²⁶ The Andean countries had opposed rules on data exclusivity, arguing that the additional period keeps generic pharmaceuticals from entering the market and thus hurts poor people. Most recently, however, there have been reports that some Andean countries might be considering a three-year period of protection for test data.

Another IPR issue is so-called “bio-piracy.” Andean negotiators want IPR provisions to protect against the use of “traditional knowledge” and “genetic resources” without fair compensation. The United States wants “second use” protection, where a product gets additional protection if it is found to serve a use other than the original one under the patent. It also wants protection against parallel imports, which are products legitimately made in one foreign country, but imported into another country without the approval of the IPR holder. The Andean countries oppose these U.S. positions.

Worker Protections and Human Rights

Some unions and labor rights groups have protested against trade negotiations with Ecuador and Colombia, because they claim that these countries have unacceptable records on worker rights and permit violence against trade unionists. For example, an official with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unionists (ICFTU) criticized Colombia’s president for negotiating with paramilitary forces, who are the killers of trade unionists according to the ICFTU official, and said that the more a union protests the president’s economic policy, the more the union is

²⁴ The United States negotiated rules on data exclusivity in the Central American-Dominican Republic FTA. Guatemala subsequently approved a law that the USTR claims is inconsistent with the data exclusivity provisions of the FTA. A bill to repeal that law was introduced in the Guatemalan congress on January 28, 2005. See, Brevetti, Rosella. “Guatemala Takes Steps Toward Repeal of Data Law USTR Claims Violates CAFTA.” Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. *Daily Report for Executives*. February 1, 2005.

²⁵ The Colombian government issued decrees in 2002 and in 2003 that gave protection of data for drugs and for agricultural chemicals respectively. See, USTR. *2004 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*. P. 98.

²⁶ Oxfam. “Make Trade Fair for the Americas; Agriculture, Investment and Intellectual Property: Three Reasons to Say No to the FTAA.” Oxfam Briefing Paper 37. Available at the Oxfam website a [<http://www.oxfam.org>].

persecuted.²⁷ The Colombian government responds that through several programs it has instituted, it “...has clearly demonstrated its commitment to the protection of human rights and has given special priority to the protection of union members.”²⁸ The U.S. State Department country report on human rights for Colombia identifies many legal rights for unions, but recognizes problems with protecting those rights.²⁹ For example, the report states that in Colombia, the Constitution provides a right for most workers to organize unions, but in practice, “...violence against union members and anti-union discrimination were obstacles to joining unions and engaging in trade union activities....”

Ecuador’s record on human rights is also controversial. On February 1, 2005, 38 House Members (37 Democrats, 1 Independent) wrote to the foreign trade minister of Ecuador, expressing concern with “...serious workers’ rights violations in Ecuador and Ecuador’s failure to live up to commitments made to the U.S. government in October 2002, as part of a review of Ecuador’s benefits under the [ATPDEA].”³⁰ They said that they would recommend the gradual withdrawal of Ecuador’s ATPDEA benefits and that Ecuador’s continued failure to observe the ATPDEA commitments “...casts doubt on whether Ecuador will be able to follow through with obligations...” under an FTA.³¹ (As mentioned earlier, Ecuador’s president was replaced on April 20, 2005.)

Textiles

A small but significant share of U.S. apparel imports from Andean countries still pay full duty under ATPDEA. The Andean region is not considered a major supplier, but there could be some increase in imports. In addition, the rule of origin for textiles and apparel has been an important issue in the negotiations.

Visas

Andean countries, especially Colombia, wanted to have visa and immigration issues in the talks. They said that heightened U.S. security has made it hard for their business representatives to enter the United States. U.S. negotiators have insisted that immigration issues are not negotiable.

²⁷ Interview on ICFTU web page [<http://www.icftu.org>].

²⁸ Written Comments by the Government of Colombia Regarding Its Commitment to Human Rights and Labor Rights. Before the Trade Policy Staff Committee. April 2, 2004.

²⁹ U.S. Department of State web page at [<http://www.state.gov>].

³⁰ Letter from World Trade Online at [<http://www.insidetrade.com>].

³¹ On December 17, 2004, Human Rights Watch reported that in a special session of Ecuador’s congress called the preceding week by the president, “...52 members of the 100-seat congress voted to replace 27 of the 31 justices with their own political allies.” Human Rights Watch saw this action as a violation of judicial independence. Available at [<http://hrw.org>].

Environment

An important environmental issue concerns investment provisions. In a letter dated September 13, 2004, a number of environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Sierra Club, expressed concern about the possible inclusion in an Andean FTA of an investment chapter similar to Chapter 11 of the North American Free-Trade Agreement.³² That chapter allowed private investors from one signatory country to seek binding arbitration against the government of another signatory. Such provisions, environmental groups argue in their letter, could allow "...foreign companies to completely bypass domestic courts to challenge public interest safeguards." On the other hand, U.S. negotiators have sought such provisions in trade agreements, since U.S. companies want such protections for their foreign investments. After the most recent round of talks, U.S. negotiator Vargo indicated there was "substantial disagreement" on investment issues and said that the "... investment text includes 'probably more brackets' than in any other area ...", which means that much work is still needed in that area.³³

Prospects

The ninth round of negotiations was held April 18-22, 2005, in Lima. At least two more rounds are expected: one in a location to be determined (previously scheduled for Ecuador) and another possibly in Washington in July. The negotiations are expected to continue at least into the summer and possibly longer. Agriculture and IPR are reportedly the most difficult remaining issues.

Negotiators had originally intended to conclude an FTA in time to meet the current deadlines under trade promotion authority (TPA). Under the current deadlines, expedited legislative procedures will apply to implementing bills for trade agreements, if, among other requirements, the agreements are signed by June 30, 2005, and the President notifies Congress 90 days beforehand. Those deadlines cannot be met. The deadlines, however, might be extended for two years. A two-year extension is automatically granted, unless Congress blocks it by passing an extension disapproval resolution before July 1, 2005. If Congress blocks the extension, then a bill to implement a trade agreement signed after June 30, 2005, would be considered in Congress under normal legislative procedures (no deadlines, amendments allowed). If Congress does not block the extension, which is generally considered more likely, negotiators have another two years to conclude a trade agreement with an implementing bill considered under expedited (deadlines, no amendment) legislative procedures.

³² The letter is available at [http://www.choike.org/documentos/ngos_us.pdf]. For further information on Chapter 11, see CRS Report RL31638, *Foreign Investor Protection Under NAFTA Chapter 11*, by Robert Meltz.

³³ Rugaber, Christopher S. "U.S., Andean Countries Complete Eighth Round of Talks; Significant Work Remains." The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc. *Daily Report for Executives*. March 22, 2005.

It is uncertain if or when a U.S.-Andean FTA might be reached and Congress might consider action on an implementing bill. A bill to implement the U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic FTA (CAFTA-DR) might be considered this year, and the debate on such an implementing bill could be heated. Any eventual vote on such a bill could be a good indicator of congressional support for, or opposition to, a U.S.-Andean FTA.