

PRESS RELEASE

The Committee on International Trade did not listen to more than 160 rural communities and NGOs in Europe and Latin America who asked them not to ratify the EU-Colombia and Peru Free Trade Agreement

Today - at the time of voting – MEPs appear not to have listened to civil society

Brussels, November 27, 2012. More than 160 NGOs and communities in Europe and Latin America have sent a letter to the European Parliament Committee on International Trade on October 25, 2012 asking them not to ratify the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union - Colombia and Peru. This request is based on the dramatic consequences that this treaty could have on human rights, the food sovereignty of communities, pollution of the living environment of entire villages, and the destruction of sectors of the economy. The FTA is a way to perpetuate and increase an export model in raw materials from Colombia and Peru to the European Union; a model that does not contribute to inclusive development.

The letter, entitled “Deciding our future, no to the free trade agreement with the EU”, defends “trade relations based on complementarity and inclusive development in the regions from a rights-based approach” and claims that the FTA was negotiated placing corporate interests before those of European and Colombian citizens. Ignoring civil society seems to be an increasingly common feature of the committee; another example was the invitation to the Colombian and Peruvian ambassadors, to a presentation of the EU roadmap for human rights, labour rights and environmental rights. Civil society organisations have been invited only a few minutes before to participate in the last hearing in which the Agreement was discussed. Only 2 civil society representatives have been given the possibility to speak 3 minutes each, just before the closing of the Committee session, when the Ambassadors of Colombia and Peru as well as different members of the European Parliament and other European institutions had already left. However, the Ambassadors of Colombia and Peru were invited in numerous opportunities in order to present the measures that would be implemented by their respective countries for human rights, labour rights and environment. “Does that mean that the Parliament listen more to governments than to its citizenship? Is this the kind of ‘debate’ that the European Parliament wishes to promote?” asks Vincent Vallies, ODHACO spokesperson. “European citizens continue to demand greater levels of democracy and participation. When will the institutions of the European Union hear their cry?”

Once again, it seems that most MEPs from the Trade Committee did not hear the call of Colombian, Peruvian, Latin American and European organisations and voted in favor of the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement. “As social organisations we welcome the efforts made by a minority of members of this commission to include civil society views in the debates” says Gustavo Hernández, ALOP spokesperson in Brussels.

As has been shown in numerous studies, the Agreement does not benefit Colombian or European citizens. It is important to note that one of the causes of the extinction of indigenous peoples in Colombia is the pressure on their territories from extractive and agro-industrial projects. “We hope that in the plenary meeting scheduled for the second week of December, the European Parliament will have developed the capacity to listen, something which everyone is asking them to do,” notes Vincent Vallies, ODHACO spokesperson.