

Fact Sheet (provided by United for a Fair Economy)
Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA)

Date for ending negotiations: January 2005 (some parts might be finished sooner)

Congress would approve the FTAA by: December 2005

What it covers geographically: All Americas except Cuba

What it covers economically: The FTAA has nine negotiating groups for: 1) Services; 2) Investment; 3) Government Procurement; 4) Market Access; 5) Agriculture; 6) Intellectual Property Rights; 7) Subsidies, 8) Anti-dumping and Countervailing Duties; 9) Competition Policy; and 10) Dispute Settlement.

What it doesn't cover: Negotiating groups were proposed for Labor Rights and Environmental Standards, but never set up.

Who has access to the negotiations: Five hundred corporate representatives (members of the Americas Business Forum) meet with the trade ministers and FTAA negotiators before each major negotiating session. A few representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been brought into the FTAA process, but they are sworn to secrecy under criminal penalty, so they cannot communicate with their organizations or the public. Members of Congress are said to have access to the draft FTAA text.

Expansion of corporate rights: The FTAA will probably incorporate NAFTA's revolutionary "investor-state" dispute settlement system, which gives corporations the right to sue governments directly without their prior consent for the first time in history.

More power to overturn national, state, and local laws: The FTAA may also adopt the World Trade Organization's strong "state-state" dispute settlement system, which allows WTO panels (composed of trade lawyers) to overturn nations' laws as "barriers to trade" and impose punitive tariffs on countries that do not change their laws.

Privatization of essential services: Ultimately, the FTAA could make it illegal for any country to create universal public health care or education. Public services represent huge potential "markets" for corporations. Water is a \$1 trillion "market" worldwide, education a \$2 trillion "market," and health care a \$3.5 trillion "market."

Never go back: The FTAA could lock 34 nations into a corporate-dominated legal system which it would be very difficult and slow to reverse, especially for less powerful countries. It could, for example, make it illegal for a government to create a universal public health care system if that excluded for-profit providers.

