

KOREAN AMERICANS OPPOSE THE KOREA-US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

SAN FRANCISCO---April 2--At the eleventh hour, the United States and South Korea signed the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (Korus FTA), the second largest free trade deal since NAFTA. President Bush and big business claim victory, but democracy has lost.

It is a sad day for peoples' movements around the world who are fighting to preserve human dignity amid growing corporate power over our lives and democracies. At 3:55 pm on April 1, 54-year old Heo Se-Wook, a union member of KCTU, attempted suicide by self-immolation as an act of resistance against the Korea-US FTA negotiation. He is in critical emergency condition at the Han-River Sungshim Hospital.

Heo Se-Wook, Lee Kyung-Hae and others who have sacrificed their lives have done so to salvage what little social protections remain under corporate-led globalization. By eliminating the power of governments to protect their own farms and factories that provide livelihoods to their citizens, the Korus FTA will enable the largest corporations in the world to dictate our nations' development. This is the lesson of NAFTA, which has exported over 1 million good paying U.S. manufacturing jobs and has forced over 1 million Mexican corn farmers off the land. The same will happen under the Korus FTA, and even greater intellectual property rights will be granted to corporations to overturn our public laws, in the United States and South Korea.

Tens of thousands of people in South Korea have been protesting the FTA for the past 10 months, fearing what it will do to their livelihoods, their access to medicine, and their right to food security. A nation that recently suffered over three decades of brutal repression under dictatorships knows well the experience of sacrificing democracy for development. And again, democratic rights have failed.

The South Korean government has deployed severely repressive tactics to quash dissent and opposition to the free trade talks. Whether it was the mere 20 minutes allowed for a hearing before President Roh Moo Hyun announced trade talks, or the fact that the Korean Advertising Broadcasting Agency blocked running an advertisement produced by farmers and filmmaker, the government has not allowed for open, public debate about the FTA's impact on the nation's economy and sovereignty. Tens of thousands of police have been deployed, checkpoints set up on major roads to halt workers and farmers from exercising their freedom of assembly and travel, and water cannons and batons have been

used to strike fear into the minds and bodies of protestors. The police has issued summons and warrants for over 170 social movement leaders, raided the local offices of civic organizations, detained leaders of farmers and workers organizations, and even made threatening phone calls to potential participants of public rallies. But this has not stopped the South Korean people from using their hard won democratic rights to organize by the tens of thousands in protest, waging hunger strikes and candlelight vigils.

Despite the South Korean government's efforts to quash dissent to the FTA, popular opposition has turned the disapproval rate of the FTA from 29.2 percent on June 7, 2006 to over 70% in the most recent poll, driven by economic anxieties and the growing conviction that civil society has been shut out of the negotiations process.

Promising development while ignoring democratic failure works against U.S. interests in South Korea. Should the FTA become law after an undemocratic process and in spite of mass popular opposition, the FTA will drive the perception in South Korea that America's democratic rhetoric is merely a cover for profit-seeking behavior. The U.S. does not need an FTA that further incites anti-Americanism; annual trade between South Korea and the U.S. already tops \$74 billion, and this will continue whether or not the FTA becomes law.

We must work together to call on Congress, who has just an up or down vote, to vote against the Korus FTA. We must work together to call on Congress to end the Trade Promotion Authority to President Bush that doesn't allow for any voice from Congress or the people. We must call on Congress to start a fresh dialogue for a U.S. trade policy that respects international norms that uphold the human right to food, housing, health, education, and dignity. Without these goals as a centerpiece of our trade and development agenda, we will not secure more peace and security in the world.