

Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States (CAFTA-DR)

Seventh Meeting of the Environmental Affairs Council

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

May 9, 2013

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

The CAFTA-DR Environmental Affairs Council (Council) held its seventh meeting today in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. At the meeting, each Council Member reported on his or her country's advancements in implementation of the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter and highlighted the main achievements and next steps in the CAFTA-DR environmental cooperation program.

The Council highlighted some of the achievements since entry into force of CAFTA-DR, such as:

- Improvement of over 150 existing environmental laws and adopting over 28 new laws and regulations;
- Over 558 judicial environmental enforcement actions;
- Over 1.3 million hectares of land under improved natural resources management;
- Participation of over 11 million people through public awareness campaigns on the importance of conserving biodiversity and protecting endangered and threatened species; and
- Provision of assistance to over 640 companies in practices and technologies that promote efficiency in the use of energy and water, and the reduction in waste, raw material, and emissions.

The Council heard a presentation from the Organization of American States (OAS) on its efforts to monitor and evaluate the environmental cooperation program. The OAS expects to complete its fourth evaluation report of the program by December 2013.

The Council also heard a report from the Secretariat for Environmental Matters (Secretariat) and recognized the high number of public submissions as a positive demonstration of increased public participation and awareness. Since 2007, the Secretariat has received 25 submissions regarding effective enforcement of environmental laws; of these submissions, two are active, one factual record is under development by the Secretariat, and two have been completed. The Council discussed the second factual record relating to El Salvador's alleged failure to effectively enforce its environmental laws related to approving a building permit for a housing project. The Council determined that the factual record does not indicate the need for environmental cooperation and the Council Member from El Salvador reiterated his country's efforts in enforcement and compliance of environmental laws, as well as the importance of public submissions and the positive dialogue generated with civil society. The Secretariat also reported on its progress to develop a factual record related to Honduras's alleged failure

to enforce environmental laws regarding construction of a resort. The Secretariat expects to send the factual record to the Council in June 2013.

The Secretariat also:

- Summarized its extensive outreach activities: it has provided information about the submission process to approximately 1,800 people in non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and governments through workshops, meetings, and outreach events;
- Outlined the process to develop a list of experts to assist with the development of factual records: the list includes 61 experts with a variety of environmental expertise; and
- Reported on progress towards completing a study for ensuring sustainable financing for the Secretariat: it expects to send a first draft to the Parties in September 2013.

The Council was especially pleased with the opportunity to meet with the public. People from non-governmental and international organizations, the private sector, academia, and the media attended the meeting and asked a range of questions about Environment Chapter implementation and environmental cooperation. During this session, Helvetas described how it is working with local community and non-governmental organizations in all of the CAFTA-DR countries to engage with their governments in environmental decision-making and enforcement. Since 2007, the CAFTA-DR countries have supported over 30 small projects with local organizations, directly involving over 12,000 people. The Council also discussed future environmental cooperation activities.

The Council Members all reiterated their commitment to work together to improve environmental protection and conservation and to advance sustainable economic development. As our economies grow through implementation of the Free Trade Agreement, it is important to ensure that development is sustainable and integrates environmental issues.

The CAFTA-DR countries—Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the United States—established the Environmental Affairs Council in the Environment Chapter of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement. The Council meets annually to oversee implementation of and review progress under the Chapter, and to consider the status of cooperation activities developed under the Environmental Cooperation Agreement.