

Fourteenth Meeting of the Environmental Affairs Council (EAC)

Dominican Republic–Central America–United States

Free Trade Agreement

(CAFTA-DR)

Virtual – Host Country: Costa Rica

October 14, 2021

Joint Communiqué

Government Representatives from Central America, Dominican Republic, and the United States Review Implementation of the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter

The Environmental Affairs Council (Council), established under the Dominican Republic–Central America–United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) held its fourteenth meeting on October 14, 2021, via a virtual format, to oversee implementation of, and review progress under, the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter (Chapter 17). To commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of CAFTA-DR, the Council renewed its commitment to protect and enhance the environment while promoting sustainable economic growth, in accordance with the provisions of the Environment Chapter.

During the meeting, Council Members focused on monitoring and reviewing the implementation of Chapter 17 and engaged in a constructive dialogue to identify opportunities to enhance and strengthen these efforts. Council Members also discussed progress and challenges in Parties' implementation of their respective Environment Chapter obligations. Each Party provided updates on actions it has taken to maintain high levels of environmental protection, effectively enforce environmental legislation, and promote public participation in environmental decision-making in accordance with the Environment Chapter. These actions include the modernization of electronic permitting systems and new platforms for the enforcement of environmental legislation. In addition, the Parties identified the climate crisis as one of the most pressing environmental challenges, and one that the global community must urgently address.

The Council received an annual report from the CAFTA-DR Secretariat for Environmental Matters and recognized the Secretariat's role in promoting environmental monitoring, public participation, and environmental awareness. Since 2007, the Secretariat has received 46 submissions regarding Parties' effective enforcement of their respective environmental laws, including laws related to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), management of water and other natural resources, conservation of protected areas, threatened or endangered species, land management, noise pollution, and hazardous waste. The General Coordinator of the Secretariat updated Council Members on the status of active submissions and factual records. The Council continues to emphasize the importance of effective enforcement of environmental laws, as well as

opportunities for the Parties to work with key stakeholders to address environmental challenges in their respective countries.

Further, the Organization of American States presented for the Council a summary of the Ninth Monitoring Report on results achieved and lessons learned through the CAFTA-DR Environmental Cooperation Program (ECP). The report also celebrates 15 years of environmental cooperation among the Parties. To date, the United States has invested more than US\$100 million in environmental cooperation projects under the ECP and attracted more than US\$21 million in co-financing from private and government partners. The ECP's efforts address environmental priorities set by CAFTA-DR Parties, such as building capacity to combat the illegal trade of wildlife, conserving tropical forests, improving air quality, modernizing EIA processes, strengthening solid waste management, promoting public access to environmental information, and increasing civil society's knowledge of environmental laws. To date, the ECP has:

- facilitated the improvement of more than 260 laws and regulations on environmental issues;
- trained more than 140,000 people in environmental policy and enforcement;
- supported around 870 micro, small, and medium-sized companies in the adoption of cleaner production technologies, which led to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; and
- reached more than 31 million people through public awareness campaigns focused on the protection and conservation of protected species throughout the region.

In the afternoon, the Council held a virtual public session to share information and exchange opinions regarding the effective implementation of Chapter 17 and the ECP. Representatives of government, civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the private sector participated in the session. The Council highlighted achievements of the CAFTA-DR and the ECP over the last 15 years and identified priorities for future actions. In addition, participants had the opportunity to engage directly with Council Members on environmental matters in the region. CAFTA-DR ECP beneficiaries joined the session via videoconference from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Guatemala to share their experiences and participate in the public forum.

The Council continues to stress the importance of ensuring high levels of environmental protection, effective enforcement of environmental laws, and active public participation in the process of environmental decision-making. The Council will continue to cooperate to overcome national, regional, and global environmental challenges that are best addressed by joint action of the CAFTA-DR countries.

Additional Resources

- CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter:
www.ustr.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/agreements/cafta/asset_upload_file9_3937.pdf

- Secretariat for Environmental Matters (Secretariat) <http://www.saa-sem.org/>
- CAFTA-DR Environmental Cooperation Program <http://www.caftadr-environment.org/>