



ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

FOR GLOBAL PEACE WITH JUSTICE

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- World Council of Churches
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Congressional Advocacy Day April 18, 2016 Lift Every Voice! Racism, Class & Power

We call on Congress to restore the voice of all Americans in our democratic process and to help create a global economy of inclusion, ensuring livelihoods for all God's children and a sustainable planet by:

- ***Supporting the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (S. 1659/H.R. 2867) as a substantial legislative step to restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and***
- ***Defeating the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement that deepens inequality and prioritizes corporate interests over both God's creation and the welfare of vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad.***

As people of faith, we hold the conviction that every voice matters and every voice must be heard. If we are to lift every voice, we must do all we can to ensure that no person is stripped of their right to vote.

Voting Rights Introduction

For decades, voting laws have been used to concentrate power by intentionally stripping certain citizens from their most prized and powerful right: the power of the vote. While the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a great step toward eliminating legal barriers to the voting booth, it did not eliminate voter discrimination efforts. Since its passing, there have been many attempts at passing discriminatory voting laws under the guise of reducing voter fraud and protecting voter integrity. For years, these efforts were largely stopped through a preclearance process for voting law changes under the Voting Rights Act. *Shelby County v. Holder* resulted in the undoing of this vital enforcement piece of the Voting Rights Act.

Support the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015

We support the ***Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (S. 1659/H.R. 2867)***, sponsored by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) as a substantial legislative step to restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). We ask that Senators and Representatives 1) **co-sponsor the bill** and 2) **push leadership to bring the bill to the floor for a vote in 2016.**



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Passage of the Voting Rights Advancement Act would modernize the preclearance formula needed to restore the VRA. It would also enhance the federal court's ability to apply preclearance review when needed, including in response to state photo ID laws.

- **Congress must pass legislation that restores core provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA).** In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the VRA in *Shelby County v. Holder*. It ruled that the formula used to determine which states must undergo federal preclearance before making any changes to their voting laws was unconstitutional due to its use of outdated data. Removing this preclearance formula halts the preclearance process until Congress enacts a new, modernized formula.
- **Without the preclearance process, states and local jurisdictions with a proven history of discrimination are free to make voting law changes without first proving they are not discriminatory.** After *Shelby*, discriminatory voting laws can be enacted and go into effect prior to any investigation or while discriminatory claims are being resolved in the courts, which can be a long, drawn out process. In essence, this leaves voters without protection from discriminatory voting laws. We agree with the Supreme Court opinion that “voting discrimination still exists”; therefore, Congress must enact a modern preclearance formula that restores the VRA.
- **The burden of proof now wrongly lies on the individual instead of the state.** Because the state and local jurisdictions preclearance process has been halted, the burden now lies on the individual, or advocacy groups, to prove that any voting law changes are discriminatory. The process for challenging discriminatory voting laws is long, difficult and expensive. The recent Texas voter ID law challenged and declared invalid took over a year to resolve and cost over \$1 million. Obstacles like these make it less likely and more difficult for voting law changes to be challenged and removed. The burden must be on the state to ensure that laws are not discriminatory — and must be approved by the federal government.
- **The process for challenging discriminatory voting laws must be simplified and altered to protect voters from the undue implementation of discriminatory voting laws.** Because the burden of proof has now been placed on the individual, it is imperative that the process for challenging discriminatory voting laws be simplified and altered to ensure that no laws go into effect before they are cleared in court. Altering the process by which preliminary injunctions are issued would ensure that voting law changes are not implemented until any discriminatory claims are resolved.
- **2016 is the first presidential election year in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act.** Since the 2010 midterm elections, 21 states have imposed new voting law restrictions. For 14 of those states, the 2016 presidential election year will be the first presidential election year where those rules will be in effect.



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Defeat the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement

*We call on Congress to **block the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement** that deepens inequality and prioritizes corporate interests over both God's creation and people, especially vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad.*

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement is a trade agreement between the U.S. and 11 Pacific Rim nations, which will establish trade rules between these countries. The agreement has been negotiated in secret, largely by corporate lobbyists, and brings the U.S. into a binding trade deal with countries like Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei, all of which have abysmal records on human rights. As people of faith, we believe that our economic system and trade policy should affirm the common good of all, and especially those at the margins, rather than cater to the special interests of some. The TPP is destructive of God's people and God's planet. It threatens health, jobs, food security, and the environment in all TPP countries. It is now up to Congress to stop this agreement from going into force. We call on Congress to answer Pope Francis's call to say no to 'an economy of exclusion' by rejecting the TPP.

Tell Congress to oppose the TPP for the following reasons:

- **Passage of the TPP would Elevate Corporate Rights over Human Rights and Democracy.** The TPP allows foreign investors to challenge a country's environmental and public health laws, regulations or court decisions using private courts that circumvent domestic judicial systems and democratic processes. These extrajudicial tribunals can award unlimited sums of taxpayer dollars based on the loss of "expected future profits" the company would have earned in the absence of the public policy it is attacking. For example, in the small town of La Oroya, Peru, roughly 1000 children have lead poisoning, which can affect cognitive development and reproductive health. After years of asking the U.S. company, Renco, to remediate the situation, Renco finally agreed but then sued the Peruvian government for lost profits for the money they will have to spend on remediation. Yet there is no legal tool for communities or the government to punish bad actor companies like Renco under trade agreements. It is often communities living in poverty, indigenous communities, Afro-descendants and other ethnic minorities that suffer the most from bad actor companies and unfair investment policies.
- **Passage of the TPP would offshore more U.S. jobs, undermine labor standards, and drive down wages.** As a result of passing the TPP, U.S. employers will be in closer competition with companies located in countries like Vietnam, where workers are legally paid less than 65 cents an hour, and Malaysia, where an estimated one-third of workers in the country's electronics industry are the victims of human trafficking. It could also threaten jobs in Central America and undermine the local economies in these countries
- and elsewhere, contributing to forced economic migration. The TPP does not provide enforceable labor protections leaving human rights abuses against workers, threats against workers trying to unionize, and other unsafe working conditions unchecked in TPP countries. Despite free trade agreements with the US that were supposed to curb abuses, workers in Colombia, Guatemala, and



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Mexico all receive death threats or are murdered with impunity. Overall, the TPP will not help workers in the U.S. or abroad and will increase income inequality across the world.

- **Passage of the TPP would undermine environmental protection.** Although the TPP includes an Environment Chapter, it is a step backward in terms of enforcement in comparison to previous agreements. These weakened standards would allow countries to violate their obligations to slow climate change, and protect God's gifts such as air and water in key environmental treaties without any consequences. One way these are undermined are through the investment chapter discussed above. For example, right now the U.S. is facing a NAFTA suit for denying a permit for the Keystone XL pipeline.
- Additionally, there is no legal recourse when the environmental commitments are violated. Currently in Peru, illegal logging is rampant despite a free trade agreement with the U.S. that supposedly included measures to curb it. Only now that the TPP has been signed has the U.S. even inquired about this problem. And again, there is not a legally binding tool to hold the Peruvian government accountable. Will Malaysia, Vietnam, or other future members be held accountable for illegal logging?
- **Passage of the TPP would limit patients from accessing life-saving medicines and make medicines more expensive.** Many of the TPP's intellectual property provisions would effectively delay the introduction of lower cost generic medications, increasing health care prices and reducing patient access to medicine both at home and abroad. This will increase the prices of life saving drugs used to treat cancer, AIDS and other conditions.
- **TPP harms the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the United States and globally.** The TPP will undermine the rights of smallholder farmers to save and share seeds from year to year, compelling them to buy patent protected seeds, and also introduce GMO seeds that can contaminate local, indigenous, or organic seeds varieties.

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Additional Notes: