

## Civil Society in Latin America Campaigns Against Trans-Pacific Partnership

Posted by Joan Russow

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By [Emilio Godoy n](#)



Activists from Chile, Mexico and Peru opposed to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), during a meeting in January in the Mexican capital, which was also attended by representatives of civil society from Canada and the United States. Credit: Emilio Godoy/IPS

MEXICO CITY, Jun 20 2016 (IPS) - Civil society organisations from Chile, Mexico and Peru are pressing their legislatures and those of other countries not to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The free trade agreement, which was signed in New Zealand on Feb. 4, is now pending parliamentary approval in the 12 countries of the bloc, in a process led by Malaysia. Chile, Mexico and Peru are the three Latin American partners.

The treaty will enter into effect two months after it has been ratified by all the signatories, or if six or more countries, which together represent at least 85 percent of the total GDP of the 12 partners, have ratified it within two years.

“We are seeking a dialogue with like-minded parliamentary groups that defend national interests, and we provide them with information. We want to use the parliaments as hubs, and we also want dialogues with organisations from the United States, Canada and the Asian countries,” Carlos Bedoya, a Peruvian activist with the [Latin American Network on Debt, Development and Rights](#) (LATINDADD), told IPS.

Civil society groups in Peru created the [“Our Rights Are Not Negotiable”](#) coalition, to reject the most controversial parts of the agreement.

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With similar initiatives, ["A Better Chile without TPP"](#) and ["A Better Mexico without TPP"](#), non-governmental organisations and civil society figures are protesting the negative effects that the treaty would have on their societies.

The activists complain that the [intellectual property chapter](#) of the agreement stipulates a minimum of five years of data protection for clinical trials for Mexico and Peru. And in the case of biologics, the period is three years for Mexico and 10 years for Peru.

In Chile, in both cases it will be five years of protection, in line with its other free trade agreements.

These barriers delay cheaper, generic versions of drugs from entering the market for a longer period of time.

Another aspect criticised by activists is that the member countries must submit disputes over investments to extraterritorial bodies, like the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

The alliances against the TPP also criticise the provisions for Internet service providers to oversee content on the web in order to control the distribution of material that violates copyright laws.

Latin American activists complain as well about the U.S. demand that the partners reform domestic laws and regulations to bring them into line with the TPP, in a process separate from or parallel to ratification by the legislature.

In addition, they protest that Washington was given the role of [certifying](#) that each partner has faithfully implemented the agreement.

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The TPP emerged from the expansion of an alliance signed in 2006 by Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore, within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. These countries were later joined by Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the United States and Vietnam.



A girl holds a sign saying the TPP means Transferring Fully our Powers, during a protest against the trade agreement in Santiago, Chile. Credit: Courtesy of “A Better Chile without TPP”

The agreement encompasses areas like customs, textiles, investment, telecommunications, e-commerce, dispute settlement, and labour and environmental issues.

The economies in the bloc represent 40 percent of global GDP and 20 of world trade.

The TPP “has negative effects on health and economic development. It won’t benefit our countries. But there will be a lengthy debate, because it contains issues that generate conflict,” Carlos Figueroa, a Chilean activist with his country’s coalition against the treaty, which encompasses 99 organisations, prominent individuals and five parliamentarians, told IPS.

Among its actions, the “A Better Chile without TPP” organises mass email campaigns to petition the government against the accord, promotes campaigns over the social networks, holds public demonstrations and is lobbying in parliament to block approval of the treaty.

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In Mexico, conservative President Enrique Peña Nieto has enough votes in the Senate, which is responsible for ratifying international accords, to approve the treaty, with the votes from the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party, its ally the Green Party, and the opposition right-wing National Action Party.

In Chile, socialist President Michelle Bachelet's centre-left alliance will be able to count on enough votes from the right to ratify the agreement.

And in Peru, the party of President-elect Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, a former World Bank economist and Wall Street banker in favour of free trade, has only a small number of seats in Congress. But a rival right-wing party, Fuerza Popular, which has a broad majority in the legislature, will approve the TPP, after the new government takes office in July and the new lawmakers are sworn in.

But furthermore, in Peru, the content of any free trade agreement does not require legislative approval unless it goes beyond what was agreed in 2009 with the United States.

Despite attempts by governments of the countries in the bloc to promote the positive impacts of the TPP, recent reports call the supposed benefits into question.

['Global Economic Prospects; Potential Macroeconomic Implications of the Trans-Pacific Partnership'](#), a report published in January by the World Bank, projected that the treaty could boost the GDP of its members by 1.1 percent and their trade by 11 percent a year on average by 2030.

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In the case of Canada, Mexico and the United States, which have their own free trade agreement, NAFTA, since 1994, the benefit is just 0.6 percent of GDP.

And for Mexico, the positive impact would be even more reduced, because the cuts in import duties give other members of the TPP greater access to the U.S. market, the document says.

Economists from Tufts University in the U.S. state of Massachusetts had a more negative view of the trade deal, predicting “increasing inequality and job losses in all participating economies.”

[“Trading Down: Unemployment, Inequality and Other Risks of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement”](#), a study by the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts University, estimates that the TPP would lead to employment loss in all member countries, with a total loss of 771,000 jobs, including 448,000 in the United States alone.

In Mexico, 78,000 jobs would be lost, and in Chile and Peru, 14,000.

The authors estimate that by 2025, Mexican exports will grow 6.2 percent and GDP one percent; Peru’s exports will grow 7.1 percent and GDP 1.4 percent; and Chile’s exports will grow 2.5 percent and GDP 0.9 percent.

For its part, the U.S. International Trade Commission stated May 18, in its report [“Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement: Likely Impact on the U.S. Economy and on Specific Industry Sectors”](#), that by 2032 the TPP would boost the U.S. economy by an average of 0.01 percent a year and employment by 0.07 percent.

Enrique Dussel, coordinator of the [China/Mexico Studies Center](#) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, questions Mexico’s involvement in the TPP without evaluating the consequences of further freeing up trade.

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“There has been a 20-year learning process to know what works and what doesn’t,” he told IPS. “TPP partners without free trade agreements represent one percent of trade with Mexico and one percent of investment. The question is what do I do with the remaining 99 percent, what focus do I give trade and investment.”

NGOs in Latin America are hoping the U.S. election campaign will limit the debate on the TPP to Congress until the winner of the November elections takes office.

“That gives us a little time to fight against ratification. It will be a long battle,” said Bedoya.

Dussel anticipated three possible scenarios. “In two years it goes into effect; there will be no TPP; or in the United States the new president will call for substantial changes.”

*Edited by Estrella Gutiérrez/Translated by Stephanie Wildes*