



## PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tri-national ministerial meeting to star Rice and Chertoff

### **Ministers of fear and war descend on Ottawa taking North America in the wrong direction**

**(Ottawa, Montreal, Mexico City and Washington-February 21, 2007)** - On February 23 US and Mexican visitors join Canadian Ministers to push forward the “Security and Prosperity Partnership” (SPP), a business-led NAFTA plus agenda. US Secretary of State Condi Rice and Security czar Chertoff will not only meet with their Mexican and Canadian counterparts in Ottawa, but will also consult with corporate CEOs, members of the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC). The Council’s 10 Canadian members were appointed last summer by Prime Minister Harper and given privileged access to government Ministers to push their corporate vision for continental ‘integration’.

An alliance of citizen’s groups in the three North American countries has challenged not only the agenda of this Ministerial meeting but also the secrecy which surrounds the ongoing discussions. “The Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) and the Competitiveness Council (NACC) which it serves advise the Ministers, but their advice is not accessible to the public,” comments Rick Arnold of Common Frontiers, a Canadian alliance of union, church, environmental and student organizations. “If the future of North America is under discussion, why is this tiny, super-rich and profit hungry group the only one our government listens to?”

“Security” is the priority agenda at this week’s meeting. The US team brings with them their war agenda :

- The failure to stop the Israel/Lebanon war which led to the evacuation of tens of thousands of Canadians and Canadian deaths.
- The “surge” in troops to Iraq, deepening the war in that country
- The continued war in Afghanistan
- The escalating threats of war against Iran

They also bring an agenda of fear :

- The continued terror alerts, building a climate of tension for ordinary citizens
- The “war on terror” rhetoric which translates into a war on Muslims in particular, and immigrants and refugees in general
- The escalation of border controls, identity documents and surveillance which invade personal privacy and make cross-border travel increasingly complicated for many

« The SPP is a militarized NAFTA-plus in sheep’s clothing », comments Pierre-Yves Serinet of the Montreal-based Réseau Québécois sur l’Intégration Continentale (RQIC). Based on the questionable principle that our prosperity depends on our security, multiple trilateral SPP committees are implementing military and security measures right here at home, while pushing ‘integration’ of everything from food testing and labeling to the shape of North American energy and electricity grids. « We are faced with a new phase of neo-liberal integration in North America », adds Mr. Serinet. « Deep changes are taking place that are bypassing our democratic institutions, like parliaments and the Assemblée nationale”.

Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC) spokesperson Alejandro Villamar reminds his government of Mexico's historic devotion to principles of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries, the pacific solution of controversies and opposition to the use and threat of use of force in international relations. "Mexico is abandoning both its Constitutional law and a vital tradition. The Ottawa meeting is aimed to consolidate a war agenda with the intent of bringing Mexico and Canada further into line with US policy."

"Dealing with important issues under a cloak of secrecy such as is happening in these SPP Ministerial meetings, means that citizens in all three countries are receiving no information and are not being consulted. This poses the most serious threat to people's democratic rights throughout North America," concludes Villamar.

The Washington-based Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART) stresses that a Democratic Congress may be able to slow down the agenda and achieve some transparency about what the SPP is seeking, but even in the new-look Congress there is little awareness about the SPP's intent. At the same time ART spokesperson Tom Loudon notes that US foreign policy is likely to continue on its destructive course since most Democrats are beholden to corporate interests.

"The proposed appointment of former Security czar John Negroponte as assistant Secretary of State is a troubling development" according to Loudon. He goes on to point out that, "As U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Negroponte was the tactical director of the dirty Contra war, and many believe that while he was Ambassador in Iraq, Negroponte was setting up death-squads there. The possibility of his taking over as the No. 2 diplomat looks very real as there is no opposition in the US Senate to his appointment."

As the Ministers ratchet up the security focus during the Ottawa talks, they will also be discussing plans for a full SPP tri-national June "Summit" of Presidents and the Prime Minister in Kananaskis, Alberta.

The alliance of four networks emphasizes that North American leaders should be discussing issues of vital public concern including the growing polarization of incomes and wealth in each of their societies, the need for guarantees of universal access to public health services and for immediate joint efforts to combat global warming.

The four networks call on the majority parties in Parliament to demand full transparency on the SPP process and to put a stop to the illegitimate corporate access to Ministers accorded the North American Competitiveness Council. The networks will press for a full debate in the House of Commons on the SPP given that Canadian citizens' security is being silently and inexorably tied to the US security agenda.

-30-

**For more information, please contact:**

Rick Arnold, Common Frontiers: Tel (905) 352-2430; [comfront@web.ca](mailto:comfront@web.ca)

Pierre-Yves Serinet, RQIC: Tel. (514) 276-1075; [rqic@ciso.qc.ca](mailto:rqic@ciso.qc.ca)

Alejandro Villamar, RMALC : Tel. 011 (52) (55) 5356-0599; [rmalc@laneta.apc.org](mailto:rmalc@laneta.apc.org)

Tom Loudon, ART-USA: Tel. (301) 699-0042; [toml@quixote.org](mailto:toml@quixote.org)