



The U.S. and Mexican bishops' conferences have issued a joint statement saying NAFTA renegotiations must respect the poor, alleviate the need for migration, protect laborers and intellectual property rights, and care for creation, indigenous people, and small farmers.

The statement, issued Nov. 21, urged leaders to remember the “human and moral dimensions” of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, which eliminated many tariffs on trade and investment among the US, Mexico, and Canada.

In July 2017, President Donald Trump initiated talks to renegotiate the agreement, criticizing the impact of the agreement on the American labor market. Talks stalled this week after five rounds, as the Mexican and Canadian government have shown little interest in proposals for revision suggested by the Trump administration.

The joint statement from U.S. and Mexican bishops called for measures beyond NAFTA to “prevent the deepening of inequality between families and regions.” The statement also called for negotiators to develop mechanisms respecting “participation rights” in the negotiation process, noting that “human dignity demands that people have a voice in decisions that touch their lives.”

“The Church believes that trade must, first of all, benefit people, in addition to markets and economies. It is crucial that these complex and multifaceted agreements arise from a sound legal and moral framework that protects the common good and the most vulnerable,” the statement said.

“If adequate compensatory economic, political, and social policies are not adopted that mitigate and counteract the previously mentioned adverse effects, as has been the case thus far,” the bishops warned, “inequalities between regions, sectors, and various groups will deepen, as well as forced displacement and disordered, involuntary and unsafe migration, as well as violence, will continue to predominate.”

As ratifying NAFTA was considered by Congress in 1993, the US bishops wrote a letter to the Senate expressly declining to take a position on the proposed agreement, “given the many specific prudential judgments required, the lack of a clearly compelling case for or against this particular agreement and the absence of strong consensus among the bishops here or in Mexico.”

The 1993 letter called for any international trade agreement to be attentive to the poor, laborers, migration, small farmers, and others, expressing concerns similar to those raised by the 2017 joint statement.