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NETWORK's Sister Simone Comments on Signing of Trans-Pacific Partnership

"Trade deals must uphold the common good rather than cater to the special interests."

About today's signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in New Zealand, Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby group, made the following comments:

"The TPP will not improve the lives of people at the margins of society. Trade deals must uphold the common good rather than cater to the special interests.

President Obama promised the American people a twenty-first century agreement – an agreement that protects the environment, protects workers, and upholds the rights of governments to ensure the health and safety of its citizens. This agreement fails to deliver on that promise.

This agreement, negotiated in secret and crafted largely with and for the benefit of large multinational corporations and their lobbyists, reveals the worst part of politics: powerful economic rights once again trump the rights of workers, small farmers, patients seeking health care, and the environment.

Major trade deals in the past have had severe consequences for under-developed and developing nations around the world. Our Sisters in the United States and around the globe tell us that these trade agreements have severely damaged fragile communities and further increased economic inequality.

Malaysia has a significant human trafficking problem. While the TPP asks that countries to change their laws to comply with basic standards of justice, it fails miserably to provide adequate enforcement tools to hold that government accountable. As history has shown in trade agreements with Mexico, Colombia, and Peru, words alone do not fix significant human and labor rights abuses. Twenty-first century agreements need rigorous enforceable mechanisms to ensure compliance; these are life and death issues for workers and human trafficking victims.

The rules of the global economy must be rules that work for the benefit of all, rather than rules that work for a privileged few. This agreement provides protections for investor rights while failing to provide the same rights to workers and communities.

It is now up to Congress to stop this agreement. Congress must answer Pope Francis's call to say no to 'an economy of exclusion' by rejecting the TPP."

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NETWORK, a national Catholic Social Justice lobby, which educates, organizes, and lobbies for economic and social transformation, has a more than 40-year track record of lobbying for critical federal programs that support those at the margins and prioritize the common good.