

**Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement
(CAFTA-DR)**

Sixth Meeting of the Environmental Affairs Council

San Pedro Sula, Honduras

12 April 2012

Joint Communiqué

The Environmental Affairs Council (Council), established pursuant to the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), held its sixth meeting today in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to carry out its obligation to oversee implementation of and review progress under the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter and to consider the status of cooperation activities developed under the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA).

Today, each Council Member reported progress on implementation of the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter and the impact of environmental cooperation in his or her country. The Council took note of the relationship that exists between CAFTA-DR environmental efforts and other internationally relevant issues.

The Council also heard a report from the Secretariat for Environmental Matters (Secretariat) and recognized the high number of public submissions as a positive demonstration of increased public participation and awareness. The Secretariat has received 22 submissions to date regarding effective enforcement of environmental laws by CAFTA-DR Parties; of these submissions, seven are active with three factual records under development by the Secretariat. The Council engaged in a general discussion regarding sustainable financing of the Secretariat and directed the Points of Contact to establish terms of reference for a study to be commissioned by the Secretariat on this matter.

During this meeting, the Council considered the first finalized Factual Record related to the Dominican Republic Sea Turtle Submission, which alleged that the Dominican Republic had failed to effectively enforce certain domestic laws intended to protect endangered sea turtles. Under the CAFTA-DR environmental cooperation program, the Dominican Republic has worked with several non-governmental organizations and relevant United States government agencies on a range of capacity-building activities to address this issue, including enforcement trainings, product seizures, monitoring, and awareness-raising campaigns with civil society. The Council welcomed the steps taken by the Dominican Republic to

increase enforcement, which has resulted in a significant reduction in the trade and sale of products made from sea turtles.

The Council signed a decision on the process for engagement of environmental experts to assist the Secretariat for Environmental Matters with the preparation of factual records.

The Council also discussed the “Third Evaluation Report: Monitoring Progress of the Environmental Cooperation Agenda in the CAFTA-DR Countries,” which the Organization of American States (OAS) published in February 2012. In the report, the OAS noted that: “The ECP [Environmental Cooperation Program] has served as a mechanism to identify priority areas at the national and regional levels, strengthened inter-institutional relationships, [and] promoted the establishment of solid public-private partnerships and alliances to address environmental issues...”

The Council was especially pleased to have the opportunity to interact with members of the public. The Council met with representatives from civil society, including non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector to gain a better understanding of their expectations, concerns, and interests with respect to the CAFTA-DR and environmental cooperation. The Council provided the public with information on progress in implementing obligations under the Chapter, and on important results achieved through environmental cooperation.

The Members of the Council reaffirmed their strong commitment to work together to further enhance the mutual supportiveness of trade and environmental protection through continued implementation of the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter and Environmental Cooperation Agreement.