



Leo W. Gerard
International President

July 17, 2006

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 850,000 members of the United Steelworkers (USW), I write to express our union's **adamant opposition to the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**. Despite public admissions by then-designate U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab at April's Ways and Means committee hearing that there are considerable failings in Oman's labor laws and the U.S. State Department's reports of serious violations of basic labor rights in Oman, H.R. 5684, the legislation to implement the Oman FTA, is expected on the House Floor later this week.

By now, I am sure you are aware of the attempts by Ways and Means Democrats to urge the Sultan to bring the labor laws of Oman into compliance with ILO standards. Their recommendations noted ten (10) deficiencies in current Omani law. However, despite the Sultan's recent Royal decree to reform the labor laws, only one of the worst forms of child labor appears to have been addressed. However, prohibitions against unions, the right to bargain collectively and few, if any, protections against forced labor still exist.

Compounding the problem is the large "guestworker" population in Oman. Currently, over 75% of the working population is made up of guestworkers. As we have seen from the horrible abuses of guestworkers in the Qualified Industrial Zones in Jordan, not even strong labor laws and long experience in administering them was enough to protect their much smaller guestworker population from forced overtime, substandard living conditions and miserable oppression by unscrupulous factory owners.

Another area of major concern that came to light during the Senate vote is the issue of port security. The Oman Free Trade Agreement specifically includes that landside port activities are to be covered by the provisions of the FTA. Although the same language is also included in the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and Bahrain Free Trade Agreement, this is an end run around the wishes of Congress on port management that could lead to a challenge should the U.S. deny a corporation registered in Oman a contract to operate ports -- like Dubai Ports World. Under the FTA, they would have the investor-state enforcement mechanisms to challenge the U.S.

The United Steelworkers' Rapid Response grassroots network has been activated since before the Senate vote and we have been working together with all the other AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions to bring this message of unified labor opposition to House members. **I once again urge you to vote against the Oman Free Trade Agreement.**

Sincerely,

Leo W. Gerard
International President

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