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PRESS CONTACT

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Obama's Trade Rep. Must Fix Broken U.S. Trade Policy Kirk Must Work with Congress on New Fair Trade Approach

Minneapolis – President-elect Barack Obama's choice for the next U.S. Trade Representative, former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, must fix a broken U.S. trade policy, which has caused enormous harm to farmers, workers, communities and the environment, according to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP).

Mayor Kirk's public record on U.S. trade policy is thin—particularly for agriculture. "We look forward to finding out more about Ron Kirk's positions on trade," said IATP President Jim Harkness. "We hope he recognizes that the push to blindly deregulate trade has failed not only people in the U.S., but also people around the world. To build a better approach to trade, we must put people and the environment at the center. Recognizing the importance of basic human rights is a critical start. A new approach must also recognize that agriculture and food are unique and should not fall under the same trade rules as tv sets. Countries must have the policy flexibility to address the current global food crisis. We look forward to working with him to ensure that more voices, not just big business, are at the table as we develop a more fair and sustainable approach to trade."

Kirk has a number of major tasks ahead of him, including:

- Following through on President-elect Obama's campaign pledge to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. A commitment to review provisions on the environment and labor rights are a start. But NAFTA's investment provisions, which empower corporations over governments, and agriculture rules, which have devastated rural communities and increased food insecurity, must be renegotiated with a stronger emphasis on human rights and sustainable development.
- An increasing number of bilateral and other free trade agreements reproduce the unfair and destructive features of NAFTA. The Bush administration expanded bilateral agreements to include conditions on military cooperation. We must undo the militarization of trade policy.
- The recent food crisis has shown that poor countries need to reduce their dependence on imported food and focus on strengthening their domestic agriculture. U.S. trade policy shouldn't continue to insist on forcing open markets in basic food crops and instead should allow developing countries the space to protect their own food security.
- The World Trade Organization's Doha Round negotiations are stalled, largely because the agreement does not fulfill its original mandate: to help poor countries. It's time for a fresh approach to the multilateral trading system, starting with scrapping the Doha Round and re-thinking global trade rules to improve the lives of people and support human rights.
- The administration must work closely with Congress in the new fair trade climate. U.S. voters strongly supported fair trade candidates, adding an additional 40 fair trade supporters to the House and five new fair trade challengers to the Senate. The TRADE Act, sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME), requires an assessment of existing trade agreements and helps to chart a new course.

IATP has been working on trade issues for over 20 years. IATP works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. www.iatp.org.