

**Communiqué of the Environmental Affairs Council of the
Dominican Republic – Central America – United States Free Trade Agreement**

Guatemala City, Guatemala
May 24, 2006

- The Environmental Affairs Council (Council) of the Dominican Republic – Central America – United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) met for the first time today in Guatemala City, Guatemala. The Council is pleased to hold this historic meeting in Guatemala and to carry out its obligation to oversee implementation of the CAFTA-DR's Environment Chapter.
- Today's meeting highlights the Council's commitment to democratic, transparent, and participatory implementation of the CAFTA-DR Environment Chapter, in particular the establishment of a Secretariat for Environmental Matters (Secretariat) to receive and act upon public submissions alleging that a CAFTA-DR Party is failing to effectively enforce its environmental laws.
- The Council today reached concurrence on the substance of an agreement that formally establishes the Secretariat and elaborates its functions. For example, the Council agreed that the Secretariat is to report annually to the Council on its activities and to promote public awareness and understanding of the public submissions process, including maintaining an official website. In addition, the Council accepted that the General Coordinator and the Secretariat's professional staff will receive the full support and collaboration of the Parties in the administration and performance of the Secretariat's functions.
- The Council is pleased to announce that it intends to select the Secretariat's General Coordinator by July 1, 2006, and to formally announce the name of the General Coordinator on July 6, 2006, in anticipation of the Secretariat becoming operational by September 1, 2006.
- The Council is also pleased to announce two agreements, signed this week, that are essential to the Secretariat's operation. First, pursuant to a request from the CAFTA-DR countries, the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) agreed to house and provide administrative support for the Secretariat. Second, SIECA and the United States Agency for International Development concluded a cooperative agreement to fund the Secretariat for the upcoming year.
- Today, in fulfillment of its obligation to provide for public participation in its work, the Council held a session with the public. The Council is pleased to report that the session involved a productive exchange of perspectives between the Council and civil society representatives.
- The Council appreciates the opportunity provided by today's meeting to also discuss each country's legal procedures for bringing into force the Dominican Republic – Central America – United States Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA), which is a separate agreement to build environmental capacity in support of the CAFTA-DR. In this regard, the representatives of the Environment and Trade Ministries of the CAFTA-DR countries agreed on an initial Cooperative Work Program to implement the ECA.