

**U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez**  
**Trade Finance Seminar**  
**San Pedro Sula , Honduras**  
**October 19, 2005**

[As Prepared for Delivery]

It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon.

Making CAFTA work is a very high priority for President Bush. That's why we have assembled a top notch U.S. business delegation, and an inter-agency delegation to visit Central America .

Today you'll hear from our inter-agency delegation—including representatives from the:

- U.S. Export-Import Bank,
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation,
- Trade and Development Agency,
- Small Business Administration,
- Inter-American Development Bank, and

the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

These agencies have resources to facilitate trade and investment, steps that will help our Central American neighbors towards stronger economic growth and prosperity.

As you know, the Caribbean Basin Initiative opened the door for expanded U.S. trade with the region.

CAFTA and the other free trade agreements in the hemisphere mark additional advances toward bringing our nations closer together and securing the benefits of trade for all.

We were pleased to hear the news last week that Nicaragua ratified. We're hopeful that Costa Rica will soon join us in this partnership.

The trade and investment that open markets attract, creates economic growth and jobs.

The World Bank reports that economies that sign free trade agreements tend to grow an additional 0.6 percent annually during the first five years after implementation.

For CAFTA, this would translate into lifting nearly a half million Central Americans out of poverty by 2010.

When President Bush signed the CAFTA-DR agreement last August, he said: "CAFTA is more than a trade bill; it is a commitment among freedom-loving nations to advance peace and prosperity throughout the region."

As a Hispanic American, it's a special pleasure for me to have my first trade mission be to Central America.

I've had the good fortune of doing business in Central America since 1980, so I've been traveling to this region for 25 years.

Like many of you, I can recall what it was like a generation ago. And I see how much progress has been made. Today, the CAFTA countries are making the transition to freedom.

A free trade agreement is a beginning. It's an important first step. But, there's much hard work yet to be done.

Governments have to create the right conditions for expanding trade and investment in the region.

That includes improved infrastructure, access to credit, secondary and technical education, and streamlined government regulations.

We look to the business community to work with government to enact sound policies that promote growth, transparency and strong institutions.

CAFTA will promote the indispensable building blocks of a free society—respect for the rule of law, private property rights, competition, and government accountability.

And we are working with the private sector to establish responsible business practices.

CAFTA is about building a better future. Free trade and free enterprise are strongly in the long-term best interests of every person in our hemisphere.

I have great respect and admiration for the vision you have shown in support of free trade.

And I look forward to working with all of you for a stronger, more prosperous and more economically engaged hemisphere.

Thank you and God bless you.