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Caribbean Leaders Concerned Over G.a.t.t. Uruguay Round Impact On Textile Trade

by Barbara Khol

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In Geneva last week, Peter King, chairperson of the Caribbean Committee on Textiles, told a negotiating group on textiles and clothing convened by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that the Caribbean would lose 100,000 jobs and annual income of over US\$2 billion if concessions were not made to the region under GATT proposals. He said the result of such a massive loss of jobs would be regional instability and capital flight. King told the Inter Press Service that the slow pace of the Uruguay Round has already created an investment shift away from the region. The Committee fears that proposals calling for elimination of industry quotas will devastate the US textile industry and by extension, the Caribbean sector. Eighty percent of the Caribbean textile and apparel industry consists of assembling clothing pre-cut in the US. In 1990, the industry accounted for 24% of total Caribbean exports. According to King, competition from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore will destroy the region's industry. These countries, he said, enjoyed a 15-year head start in quota protected markets and the Caribbean should get the same treatment. Current proposals dictate that quotas be abolished in 10 years. At the meeting in Geneva, the Caribbean team also proposed a review of the term, "world trade liberalization." Whereas Third World governments understand the term to mean increased participation in the global trade system by low- income nations, First World nations perceive the same as greater production and output. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 12/02/91)

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