

An Open Letter to the Canadian Government:

We are Canadian, Québécois and Indigenous artists. We are creators of every art: writers, composers, performers, filmmakers, singers, directors, poets, playwrights, visual artists, musicians, publishers....

Each of us reflects our community and our cultures with our art. Our distinct voices are heard in our many and varied communities. Without reflective, critical and provocative expression in the arts, our cultural distinctions would not exist. Artists play a vital role in communities.

We call on the Canadian government to ensure cultural protections remain in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to reinforce it by remaining firm in not extending free trade deals to cultural industries. Our cultures face a fierce battle for the right to exist next to the vast powers of the Hollywood mega-entertainment complex and the other corporate cultural industries in the U.S.

We have a lot to be proud about. Much of our recent international success, especially in music and literature, happened because Canadian content regulations ensured that our singers and musicians were heard on our airwaves, and funding was provided to our writers and publishers. Without this creative foresight, we wouldn't have been able to punch above our weight and protect our cultural diversity both here and internationally.

The choice is simple: either we continue to be vigilant about our cultural identities, or we surrender to the pressures of international corporations that want to create a homogenized global standard for even greater profits. The Internet is rapidly becoming the primary vehicle for distributing cultural works, and companies like Google, Facebook and Netflix are becoming the primary producers. It is imperative that we respond to these challenges by continuing to produce, protect and support our artists in a way that recognizes the complexity of the new global marketplace.

During previous trade negotiations, Canada resisted efforts to include cultural industries, and we generally protected our ability to develop whatever cultural policies we want. But now, the Motion Picture Association of America and other industry groups are pressing the U.S. government to end this cultural freedom and open up our cultural industries to foreign corporate ownership. Every nation in the world understands the need to protect its cultures. We need to fight for our cultures the way the American people fight for theirs.

Trade negotiations must not put into questions the cultural exemption. Governments must be firm in making sure that international trade treaties don't touch culture.

In these NAFTA negotiations we, the undersigned, call on the Canadian government to:

- Ensure that the NAFTA cultural exemption is maintained, and update the definition to guarantee that the current media used to produce and distribute cultural works are included.
- Remove the notwithstanding clause from NAFTA that authorizes the U.S. to retaliate against Canadian cultural policies that would have been inconsistent with the agreement but for the exemption. The threat of retaliation effectively curtails the scope of our cultural policymaking.
- Ensure that Canadian laws which limit foreign ownership in cultural industries are maintained.

Canadian cultures, in their multilingual, multinational, and regional diversity, must be recognized and protected through the arts and entertainment industry to reflect our truly diverse communities and cultural

heritage of Canadian, Québécois and Indigenous peoples. We call on the Canadian government to protect the rules that allow artists to reflect our communities and our cultures. Our cultures must be strengthened, not given away.

Sincerely,