

NEWS



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Congressional Hearing Lauds Ametex CEO

– Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Chairman calls for immediate bilateral dialogue between U.S. and Bolivia –

WASHINGTON, DC – Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere Eliot Engel (D-NY) this week singled out and applauded Bolivia's largest private employer at the Subcommittee's hearing on U.S.-Bolivia relations. Marcos Iberkleid, Chief Executive Officer of apparel firm Ametex, was recognized for his creation of over 4,000 Bolivian jobs. Further, Chairman Engel called for immediate high-level bilateral dialogue between the United States and Bolivia in order to reconcile the differences that led to the suspension of the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA), placing many of the aforementioned jobs in jeopardy.

"When ATPDEA was suspended last year, our employees immediately felt and are still experiencing the effects," Marcos Iberkleid stated. "As the largest private employer in Bolivia, Ametex is proud to stand with Congressman Engel, urging our two countries to work together for the benefit of sustainable development and good jobs."

Tuesday's hearing, entitled "U.S.-Bolivia Relations: Looking Ahead," addressed the potential reinstatement of Bolivia's ATPDEA benefits after its December 2008 suspension. The deferral of benefits has since caused significant strain on Bolivia's businesses and workforce. Representative Engel and others urged strengthened relations between U.S. President Barack Obama and Bolivian President Evo Morales.

"I visited the [Ametex] factory last year and was heartened to see a leading example of the tens of thousands of jobs that ATPDEA had created," Chairman Engel said in his opening remarks. "Unfortunately, Ametex is only one of several companies which will be hit hard by the suspension of the trade preferences. Indeed, the job losses could tally into the tens of thousands...Let me say that I believe there is no one in the U.S. Congress who wants more than I to see improved relations between the United States and Bolivia, and the reinstatement of Bolivia's ATPDEA benefits."

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Background

Ametex is a vertically-integrated apparel manufacturer based in La Paz and El Alto, the poorest and fastest-growing city in Bolivia, where 50,000 people enter the job-seeking market every year. Until the recent suspension of Bolivia's ATPDEA benefits, Ametex exported the majority of its finished clothing to the U.S. and provided jobs for 4,500 Bolivians.

Ametex is a member of the Fair Labor Association, a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization that monitors the treatment of workers in factories that supply numerous American brands.

Mr. Iberkleid has traveled to Washington, DC on numerous occasions, meeting with key U.S. Government officials and Members of Congress. He has testified before the Senate Committee on Finance, the U.S. International Trade Commission, and the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

Excerpts from Mr. Iberkleid's testimony

"The recent suspension of Bolivia from the Andean Trade Preference Act has brought my apparel firm, Ametex, to the brink of collapse. Many other clothing manufacturers in Bolivia who rely on the U.S. market have since been shuttered. Thousands of jobs have been lost. Many more disappear with each passing day."

"The benefits of ATPA are clear and proven; they have played a central role in harnessing the productive capacity of the working people of Bolivia and the expansion of an entrepreneurial sector, recognized as essential to the development of democratic institutions in developing countries."

"Since the suspension:

- We have been forced to let go 1,800 direct and indirect workers from all areas of the firm, including from our administrative, productive, and executive departments;
- We have had to send the remaining workers, nearly 1,000 employees, on paid leave because there is no work;
- Our projected annual revenues from the U.S. have been reduced by half to around USD \$18 million; and
- We have lost most of our U.S. customers."

"If I could offer a recommendation to the Obama Administration, I would recommend that the United States keep engaged with Bolivia by reinstating the trade benefit and helping the private sector maintain the jobs that took us so long to build."

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