



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

**For the labor rights and all human
rights of the maquiladora workers**



Home > CFO in the media

Spanish Version

Resisting globalization from the bottom up

AFSC Quaker Action

Spring 2006



By Willie Colón Reyes

"Entren. Que bueno que se acuerdan de nosotros." (Come in. It's so nice that you remember

us.) With this heartfelt welcome, Ángela Fernández invited us into her hillside home in one of the poor *colonias*, or neighborhoods, outside of Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

It was a sunny and warm Saturday in October, the second day of my visit to several Mexican border towns. Eleven of us from different parts of the United States had come to learn about the day-to-day reality of those who work in the maquiladora industry. (Maquiladoras are foreign-owned factories along the Mexico-U.S. border. Most are subsidiaries of U.S. companies.)

Angela's one-room cinderblock home-crammed with tall dressers, a large china cabinet, beds, and other pieces of furniture-could barely contain us. But she didn't hesitate to interrupt her plans for the day, accommodate us as best she could, and tell us her story.

Seven years earlier, she'd arrived in Acuña from Nachital, a small town in the southern Mexican state of Veracruz. She'd come looking for work and found a job at a car parts factory, where she now worked

the night shift, 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., for \$75 a week. Although her factory paid the most in the area, she still needed to pool her salary with that of her grown children in order to cover living expenses.

Angela met with us for 45 minutes, graciously answering all our questions. We'd arrived unannounced, but that seemed to make no difference to her.

Extreme poverty along the border is increasingly common, partly the result of international trade policies and corporate globalization. Visiting a poor *colonia* one is a sobering experience.

However, the organizers of Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera, the group that arranged my visit, want participants to leave feeling inspired, not depressed.

A project of the AFSC Austin Area Program, Tan Cerca de la Frontera organizes four delegations a year to the Mexico-U.S. border. The delegations promote solidarity with maquiladora workers and, within the limits of a two-and-a-half day trip, participants learn how globalization is accelerating a "race to the bottom" for many workers around the world.

The project started in 1999 after a visit to Austin by organizers from the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers). Based in Piedras Negras, Mexico, the CFO founded by AFSC a long-time partner in Mexico, helps maquiladora workers learn about and stand up for their rights. The group also hosts every Tan Cerca de la Frontera delegation.

"My feeling is that this [the CFO's work] is just a grain of sand, but we're laying the foundation for future generations," said Julia Quiñonez, the CFO's lively, energetic coordinator. Julia's modesty belies the impact of the CFO. In the seven border cities where it organizes, the CFO has helped thousands of maquiladora workers win significant victories, including substantial wage hikes and improvements in working conditions. In 2004, the CFO also helped start the aptly named Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia

(Dignity & Justice Maquiladora Company), a small-scale, worker-owned clothing production business that shares office space with the CFO.

"Knowledge is power," Julia said. "Through our work, we see workers becoming more conscious of their rights and power. And it's not the CFO confronting factory bosses; it's the workers representing themselves."

The CFO is rooted in equality: Everyone is considered a leader. That underlying principle played out again and again during our visit.

As the CFO's coordinator, Julia is outspoken and in charge, but she readily cedes the spotlight to others. For example, it was Juanita López Torres who came with us on our day trip from Piedras Negras to Acuña. She told us how the CFO helped transform her from a mousy factory worker into a self-assured organizer. In Acuña, we met in the home of María Elena Robles. She, along with other CFO organizers, guided us through an enlightening "market basket" exercise that showed in detail the difficult economic

Find out more

Find out more about Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera and the AFSC
Austin office or call (512) 474-2399.



Julia Quiñonez (standing, center) with delegation members.

choices maquiladora workers have to make in order to survive. (Milk, chicken, cheese, and fruit, for example, are some of the items that workers cannot afford to buy every week.)

But it was Julia who best summed up what the CFO's ongoing struggle for justice means to its many volunteers and organizers.

"This fight is part of our lives," she said. "We don't go home and forget this work."

Julia added: "Things are difficult at the border, but the workers are unbowed. We have a sense of pride and dignity."

There was a second visit to a poor neighborhood during my short stay in Mexico, this one to a *colonia* in Piedras Negras. There, the homes were not made of cinderblock, but wood and corrugated cardboard with tin roofs.

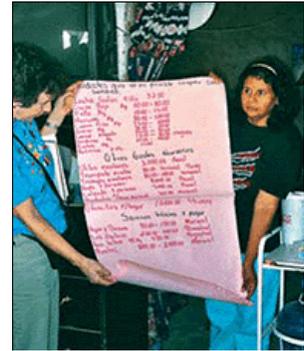
We met with Leticia (Lety) Ramírez, a tiny woman who greeted us warmly and led us into her three-room home. We filled up on tamales, beans, and a very spicy green chili as many of us sat around Lety's kitchen table and talked about the comings and goings of CFO volunteers. We had a lovely time.

"You look from the outside, and it's so sad and depressing," said Mouna Sfeir Evans, another Tan Cerca delegation member, on the drive back to our hotel. "But you go in and it's a home—there's furniture, decorations. It's remarkable."

Yes, it is.

Willie Colón Reyes is the editor of Quaker Action.

[Top](#)



Maria Elena Robles, at right, during a market basket exercise.

www.cfomaquiladoras.org is produced in cooperation with the
Mexico-U.S Border Program
 of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO)
 Monterrey #1103, Col. Las Fuentes
 Piedras Negras, Coahuila
 C.P. 26010, México