



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

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



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Spanish Version

Women and Fair Trade: Globalizing Cooperation

AFSC - Austin Area Newsletter

By Josefina M. Castillo, Program Coordinator, AFSC-Austin office

This t-shirt was made for you from organic cotton. We have been fired for advocating workers' rights. As owners and workers of the Dignity and Justice Maquiladora we are struggling to show the world a workplace model based on fairness and respect for producer and consumer alike. - Tere, Juanita, Rosalia & Matilda

The words above are part of the label attached to every organic t-shirt made by four devoted ex-workers of the foreign-owned process assembly plants, better known as "maquiladoras" along the US-Mexico border. Tere, Juanita, Rosalia and Matilda are active members of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO), a Mexican nonprofit organization that has organized and advocated for workers' rights for 24 years. The CFO is sponsor and part-owner of the Dignity and Justice Maquiladora (D&J). The CFO strives to achieve a living wage for the thousands of workers in assembly plants and respect for worker's rights, such as:

- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining;
- Adherence to health and safety standards; and
- Elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

Likewise, Fair Trade organizations adhere to workplace standards regarding payment of a living wage and respect for workers' rights. Consumers choose to purchase Fair Trade products at a fair price that supports workers' rights and promotes healthy families, workplaces and communities. The women of D&J are creating a Fair Trade cooperative that embodies the rights for which the CFO advocates in assembly plants. With each purchase of their products, you are also supporting a struggle that offers promise to the thousands of workers in assembly plants.

The Austin office of AFSC believes that in order to build peace, we need to address the fundamental causes of poverty. By supporting economic efforts such as this, we help envision initiatives that will change the present conditions of inequality and enable communities to prosper in their cultural mores and traditions. This is one of the main goals of our second Women and Fair Trade sale. For years the Austin office has been supporting Colores del Pueblo, a group led by women's cooperatives which brings Mayan artisan crafts. Their policy is to pay a fair price for the crafts, thus helping worker-artisans break through the cycle of poverty in Guatemala. This year we invited Ten Thousand Villages to join the sale, as well as five other cooperatives that work at the grassroots level enabling their communities to prosper and continue their cultural traditions based on weaving, sewing, basketry, ceramics and other local crafts.

Tere and her partners are helping to write a new chapter in the history of low-wage workers in the maquila industry. All seven vendors, in fact, are part of a larger movement of groups and cooperatives, big and small, who grew out of similar situations and who face a big challenge: to build creative alternatives in a world where free trade seems to be predominant, but which these workers seek to change. These attempts foster fair wages and community sustainability within a healthy environment, as opposed to corporations based on the three-legged stool of free trade: capital, cheap labor and deregulation.

We believe in a society that provides each person the opportunity to become self reliant and live a prosperous life. The Women and Fair Trade sale offers an opportunity to change economic relations where compulsive buyers are transformed into ethical consumers in order to network together for the benefit of the environment, of our communities and of our families. We can start consciously with ourselves but we can continue promoting this idea in whatever groups we belong to. For example, we can encourage economic justice in universities and hospitals that work towards a more just society. Soon the example will spread and could inspire cities and communities whose workers yearn for a fair wage in a sweat-free environment.



Judith Rosenberg of Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera and Patricia De Luna Duarte of the CFO tabled at the D&J display during the Women and Fair Trade event. Patricia was fired from the ALCOA maquiladora for demanding her rights and now works part time at the D&J maquiladora.

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