



## Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

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



Home> CFO in the Media 2005

Spanish Version

### The label is *Justicia!*

With AFSC support, workers on the Mexico/U.S. border launch a fair trade business

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By Ricardo Hernández y Becky Flory

Forty years ago, a free trade zone was created in a strip of Mexico directly across the border from the United States. The AFSC had the vision to support a project to empower Mexican workers who streamed to border cities to take jobs in the U.S.- owned assembly plants known as maquiladoras.

The AFSC project developed into the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers or CFO), an effective grassroots organization that has educated workers and stands up for their rights. Together, the CFO and AFSC have advocated for systemic change through strategies that include:

- organizing workers on their human and labor rights, and
- initiating dialogues with corporate decision makers that have led to socially responsible policies and improved working conditions for thousands of workers.

Increasingly, however, the workers are facing unrelenting global competition. That competition forces the companies to shut down, slash costs by moving to lower wage countries, or undercut working conditions in Mexico.

In 2003, AFSC pioneered creative response to the negative impacts of global competition. With AFSC and CFO support, five CFO women initiated a small scale clothing production business. The women were laid off when large apparel maquiladoras making clothes for Levi's and other companies closed down in Piedras Negras, Mexico.

Thus was born Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia ("Dignity and Justice" Maquiladora Company). Dignidad y Justicia required a modest amount of capital, a low level of risk, and plenty of grit and determination.

In late 2004, Dignidad y Justicia delivered to the U.S. market its initial order of 1,000 tote bags made of organic cotton. Adult and baby T-shirts, as well as sweatshirts, are in the production pipeline.

The project adds a grassroots producer to a larger movement working to demonstrate that it is possible to do business ethically and fairly. The growing fair trade movement aims to show that a substantial pool of consumers will choose to purchase products produced according to these values— abandoning brands produced in sweatshops—even if they have to pay a modestly higher price. Dignidad y Justicia's U.S. business partner, North Country

Fair Trade, provides raw materials and equipment and markets the finished product. Meanwhile, the CFO and AFSC build the capacity of the workers, help them to design and implement the company policies, and facilitate the overall development of the project.

This "alternative" maquiladora utilizes the import/export legal framework of the maquiladora industry and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The difference is that the workers own 40 percent of the business, representatives of the CFO (former maquiladora workers themselves) own 30 percent, and North Country owns 30 percent.

If Dignidad y Justicia gets sufficient contracts in the United States, as well as financial support and technical assistance for the sewers to develop their business skills, this small workshop will develop into an economically viable fair trade producer. And it could duplicate its model in other border cities. The goal? It's on the tote bag label. It doesn't say Levi's, or Hanes, or Gildan. The label is Justicia! Justice, for the producer.

*Ricardo Hernández is the director of the Mexico/U.S. Border Program; Becky Flory is a member of the AFSC Corporation.*

More information about Dignidad y Justicia is available online at [www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dj.english.html](http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dj.english.html)

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