

Nicaraguan Woman Speaks Out Against Sweatshop Abuses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WHEN: Monday, March 14, 10 AM

WHERE: Central Connecticut State University, DiLoreto Bldg, room 001

Jacqueline Sevilla has traveled from Sébaco, Nicaragua to share her story with citizens of Connecticut who are backing a state campaign to support sweatshop workers like her. Sevilla is visiting several schools, including Central Connecticut State University, where students are organizing for their school administration to demand that its logo be produced under dignified conditions. A coalition of students, representing seven schools including CCSU, has already issued a strong statement in support of Senate Bill 1148, an anti-sweatshop bill.

SB 1148 would require suppliers of apparel and uniforms bought by the state to meet fair labor standards in their production factories. Such ethical purchasing standards include a living wage, no forced overtime, no sexual harassment, no intimidation of union organizers, and no unjust firings.

Last week the Committee on Labor and Public Employees heard from students, trade unionists, academic experts, and former sweatshop workers on the need for a sweatfree purchasing policy. The policy aims to create a demand in the market for just conditions in garment factories so that no worker suffers violations of their basic rights.

Sevilla's visit made clear the pressing need for Connecticut to require higher standards in its production factories. This week, in visits to classrooms at CCSU, Uconn-Storrs, and Uconn-Stamford, Sevilla recounts her struggles at a factory where she was recently fired for her union activity. Sevilla said: "We had to stand up because the treatment got so bad. We were hit by the management, we couldn't go to the bathroom when we wanted, and we had to stay every night long past dark due to the high production quotas." Trying to improve the conditions by organizing in a union, the workers only suffered management's retaliation and firings.

Liana Foxvog of SweatFree Communities said that for a sweatfree purchasing policy to have a direct effect on workers, there must be independent monitoring of workplace conditions. "Affiliation with the Worker Rights Consortium is a necessary step that Connecticut must take, so that the state can know the conditions of factories it is buying from and require companies to improve conditions when violations are found."

Sevilla thanks the international movement for helping them win recognition and respect from the factory management. "Without pressure by U.S. consumers on Gildan, the company we sewed

for, we might still be out of work. Now that we've been reinstated by management we have their respect as union members and for the first time we have access to water and bathroom breaks when needed.”

Katherine Stecher, representing the human rights organizations, Campaign for Labor Rights and Nicaragua Network, said: “This visit highlights the importance of the worker's voice, which must be taken into consideration by purchasing institutions, otherwise labor conditions will only continue to worsen.”