

Anti-Sweatshop Activists Convene in Denver to Promote Sweatshop-free Purchasing and Oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement

News Conference

**For Immediate Release
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When: Friday, May 6th, 11:00 AM

**Where: American Friends Service Committee Office
The Community Room
901 W. 14th Avenue
Denver, CO 80204**

On Friday, May 6th, the Ethical Trade Action Group (E-TAG), a coalition of community members, student groups, nonprofits, churches, businesses and labor groups, will hold a press conference to announce the launch of its campaign to make Denver "sweatfree." Their demand: no more tax dollars for sweatshop goods. Also key to the campaign is opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which undermines the very worker and human rights they are trying to protect and enforce through sweatshop-free purchasing policies.

The sweatfree campaign in Denver will be coordinated by E-TAG, which is part of a national network of groups that take action against sweatshops, SweatFree Communities. SweatFree Communities supports and coordinates campaigns for purchasing policies requiring that public institutions buy goods made under just conditions. "These campaigns create significant market demand for products made in humane conditions by workers who earn living wages and are free to organize unions. Together, they help reclaim government for the public interest and put an end to sweatshops," says Bjorn Claeson of SweatFree Communities.

This initiative follows in the footsteps of many other successful sweatfree city and state campaigns, such as Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Maine, and California. As Josh Schachterle, a representative of E-TAG, highlights: "We want our government to use our tax money responsibly and ethically. Tax payer money spent to buy police uniforms and school uniforms should not be used to support sweatshop conditions."

Liana Foxvog, a national organizer for SweatFree Communities, points out that "creating and enforcing sweatfree purchasing policies on the local level is a great way to make a real difference in the lives of factory workers world-wide." SweatFree Communities is meeting this weekend in Denver at the Auraria Campus to discuss successes, challenges, and strategies in its second annual national conference.

This local effort is also part of the hemispheric movement against the Central American Free Trade Agreement. CAFTA threatens to further undermine workers' rights, create more sweatshops in Central America, and accelerate the race to the bottom in terms of labor standards and wages in all CAFTA countries. "Among its other faults, CAFTA seriously weakens labor rights in Central America. It effectively ignores both the International Labor Organization's standards and a long history of non-compliance in the region. Workers in Central America will be left more unprotected than ever," says Katherine Stecher of the Campaign for Labor Rights, a grassroots activist group and founding member organization of SweatFree Communities.

Two labor leaders from Central America will also be on hand to express their opposition to CAFTA, countering CAFTA proponents' argument that the trade agreement will have a positive impact in Central America. Gabriela Flora, Project Voice Regional Organizer, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), emphasizes that "the experience in Mexico with NAFTA leads us to believe that CAFTA is sure to accelerate inequality and exacerbate poverty and exploitation in the region, which includes some of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. Because of this, Colorado Congressional representatives and Senators should look carefully at the costs of unjust trade and take a public position against CAFTA."

Speakers:

Bjorn Claeson, SweatFree Communities

Gabriela Flora, Project Voice, American Friends Service Committee, (AFSC)

Gilberto Garcia, Labor Studies and Support Center (El Salvador)

Leslie Moody, Denver Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO

Miguel Ruiz, Union Workers Confederation - José Benito Escobar (Nicaragua)

Josh Schachterle, Ethical Trade Action Group (E-TAG)

Katherine Stecher, Campaign for Labor Rights

Liana Foxvog, SweatFree Communities (moderator)