

CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN



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Applying our faith to daily life in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee

WORKERS FROM NICARAGUA AND BANGLADESH WILL VISIT MILWAUKEE IN OCTOBER

OCTOBER 6: From Sweatshops to Co-operatives Tour

Four years ago Milwaukeeans, along with people on three continents, acted in solidarity with Nicaraguan sweatshop workers who make Kohl's clothing. The situation in those factories (called *maquiladoras*) is still bad.

However on October 6 two representatives, from one of the few export factories from any poor country where the workers have decent wages and dignity, will visit Milwaukee. Ruth Mena and Yadira Vallejos (accompanied by a translator) will share their amazing story of the struggle to create a T-shirt cooperative rather than to continue working in sweatshops. Their factory, *Nueva Vida*, now competes successfully against nearby sweatshops where some of them used to work

We encourage people of southeastern Wisconsin to meet these women, learn more about their worker-owned *Nueva Vida Women's Sewing Cooperative*, encourage them in their exciting new development. and enter the fair trade and just wage movement by buying T-shirts and more from them and others like them.

The itinerary for their October 6 Milwaukee tour follows their résumés:

Ruth Mena

Inspector/Hemmer
Member at Large Board of Directors

I was born in Managua, Nicaragua; in my family there were 15 children. My mother was a street vendor and my father made shoes. I studied up through sophomore year in high school. Before Hurricane Mitch I lived in Acahualinca in Managua sewing pajamas and blouses, but after Mitch I was left jobless. The hurricane really affected me because we had a house built and we lost everything. There aren't many jobs here. I started in the cooperative because I wanted a stable job and I wanted to give work to others. In the co-op we started with a positive attitude and with the willingness to thrive.

I'm now 36 years old and live in *Nueva Vida* with my two children. I feel that we have made great strides in the co-op and that we are going to continue forward as long as we are united and we respect the rights of everyone.

Yadira Vallejos

Administrator
President Board of Directors

I was born in León into a family of nine children. I'm 28 now. I'm a high school graduate and in my second year studying business administration at college on Saturdays.

I was interested in the project because I wanted to be able to help other people

through the co-op. I continued because we had started the project and we wanted to finish it. We didn't know if it was going to be a success, but I didn't want to quit in the middle. My hope pushed me to carry on. I don't want to be rich, but my hope is that God gives me my health and my daily bread, as we Nicaraguans say.

Meet Ruth Mena and Yadira Vallejos (accompanied by a translator)

Wednesday, October 6

- ◆ Noon, Marquette University, Union Ballroom A, 15th & Wells
- ◆ 2:30 pm, Mt. Mary College, Notre Dame Hall, 92nd & Locust
- ◆ 5:15 pm, Outpost NF Co-op, 100 E Capitol Dr.
you may buy your dinner at the deli
- ◆ 7:15 pm, Unitarian Universalist Church West,
13001 W. North Av., Brookfield

Free will donations for the co-op will be accepted.
For more information call: Alice 414-871-4081.

Hosted in Milwaukee by: Wis. Fair Trade Campaign, Presbyterian Mission Partnerships Team, Social Action Committee of Unitarian Universalist Church West, Milwaukee Archdiocese World Mission Ministries Office and Sonrisa.

National tour sponsored by: Campaign for Labor Rights, Nicaragua Network, North Country Fair Trade, Presbyterian Hunger Program, and SweatFree Communities.
Speakers from a Nicaraguan fair trade co-op

OCTOBER 8: The Human Face Behind the Global Economy Tour

The Wisconsin Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution will host four workers from sweatshops in Bangladesh at the Marquette University Union (1400 block of W Wisconsin Av) from 10:45 until noon. The event is free and open to the public. For more information about the Milwaukee visit, contact Michael Duffey at Marquette 414 288 3748 or Michael.Duffey@Marquette.edu.

In addition to the presentations of four workers, the tour will include powerful new video footage, scores of photographs, documentation, including sweatshop clothing and most importantly, campaign materials on what we can do to re- make our economy with a human face.

Following the résumés of the three workers is a detailed explanation of the proposed action that would lift 1.8 million Bangladeshi garment workers and their families out of misery and at least into poverty. The names of two workers are withheld for their protection since they could be fired, or their lives threatened. They have the full support of their families, and of the local human, women's and worker rights organizations who accompany the women in their struggle

for their rights. They know that they will be speaking for all their sisters and brothers in Bangladesh, and indeed, for workers across the developing world.

The Bangladeshi workers:

"Ms. R" is 18 years old and has been working as a sewing operator in the garment factories for the past two years sewing clothing for Wal-Mart and other U.S. companies. She was fired from the last factory she worked at after she was seen attending a meeting with people from the U.S.

Ms. R earns 1,700 taka a month, which comes to \$6.75 a week and just 14 cents an hour. In the last month, Ms. R has been forced to work four 19-hour all-night shifts from 8:00 a.m. straight through to 3:00 a.m., after which the workers slept on the factory floor. Her typical work shift is from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., six or seven days a week.

Ms. R never had the chance to go to school, but with help from her friends, she has learned to sign her name. She lives with seven other people in a single room, sleeping on the floor. Typically she gets just five hours of sleep a night.

Ms. R works 12 to 14 hours a day sewing clothing for the largest company in the world, and yet her wages are so low she cannot even afford to purchase a toothbrush and toothpaste, and must clean her teeth with her finger, using ashes from the fire. If you think this is wrong, then this tour and campaign are for you.

"Ms. M" is 19 years old and has worked in the garment factories since she was 11. When she first started, as a helper in 1996, she earned just 2 cents an hour and 99 cents a week. Currently Ms. M, who also frequently sews Wal-Mart garments, is earning \$8.34 a week, or 17 cents an hour. Ms. M is a single mother with a two-year-old daughter. The factory at which she was working during her pregnancy cheated Ms. M of her legal right to maternity leave at full pay. Her typical work schedule is from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., working six or seven days a week. It takes her 25 minutes to walk home at night, and it is only after she feeds her child, and washes and prepares their clothing for the next day that she can go to bed, usually around midnight. Like Ms. R, she gets up at 5:00 every morning. Both women have told us, "We have no life. We live only to work."

In the wake of the devastating floods, Ms. M's one-room house is still under two feet of filthy water and sewage. She has lost most of her possessions.

Ms. Sk Nazma, president of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), was herself a child worker, starting out as a helper in the garment factories when she was 10 years old. Eventually she attempted to organize one of the first unions in the garment sector—an effort that was met with mass firings, a lock-out and violent repression by factory management. BCWS's offices are a beehive of activity, overflowing with workers who come seeking help and training.

Right now, the BCWS, the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) and our other partners in Bangladesh are working around the clock to help the over-500,000 garment workers in the Dhaka area alone, who have lost their homes in this year's tragic floods. Many of the workers' homes are still under two to six feet of water (really more of a thick, sickening muck of sewage, garbage and mud.) Clean drinking water and food are rare, and disease is spreading rapidly. The emergency work of the NGWF and BCWS—distributing desperately needed food, water purification tablets and other necessities—is literally saving scores of lives. (Thanks to NLC member support in response to the request for flood relief donations, and a generous contribution from Anita Roddick, the NLC has been able to forward \$22,000 in emergency aid to Bangladesh.)

Recently, the BCWS and NGWF won a major victory for the more than 1.8 million garment workers in Bangladesh, 85 percent of them women. The government in Bangladesh along with 18 of the largest apparel companies in the world, finally agreed to respect women workers' right to three months maternity leave with full pay. The government is now saying they will extend the legal paid leave to four months.

Accompanying the tour:

Mr. Rafiq Alam, former communications director for the Institute for Integrated Rural Development, one of the most effective development NGOs in the world, helping to empower people to escape poverty through community projects, is now also working with the National Labor Committee. Mr. Alam, a skilled researcher and expert on labor rights conditions in Bangladesh, is also bi-lingual and will act as the delegation's translator. Mr. Alam has been an integral part of many recent major worker rights victories in Bangladesh, including the maternity leave campaign and relief efforts to help flood victims.

Charles Kernaghan, director of the National Labor Committee, and NLC senior associate Barbara Briggs will lead the tour.

A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL LABOR COMMITTEE about ...

The campaign "25 Cents More" will document that if the giant corporations would only agree to pay 25 cents more per garment, we could lift 1.8 million Bangladeshi garment workers and their families out of misery and at least into poverty. And the same could be true for the nearly 40 million garment workers all across the developing world.

If the corporations refuse to pay 25 cents more, we will ask concerned consumers to intervene. Together, we will pay the 25 cents, and in the process we will remake our economy with a human face.

For example, paying just 25 cents more per garment made in Bangladesh would add 20 cents an hour, or \$1.60 a day, to the workers' base wage-which is exactly what the women say they would need to climb out of misery and at least into poverty. The workers know Bangladesh is a very poor country, and they are willing to work very hard, but they say if they could only win this very modest demand for 20 cents more per hour, it would have such an enormous positive impact on the lives of their families. Most importantly, it would mean better, more nutritious food. Given that there are 1.8 million garment workers in the country, we would be putting into Bangladesh:

- \$2.9 million a day,
- \$17.3 million a week,
- \$75 million a month,
- \$898 million a year,

In fact, this \$898 million is eight times more than all U.S. aid to Bangladesh combined. Better yet, it would go directly into the pockets of the workers.

The rights of the human being certainly deserve at least as much legal protection as is currently afforded to corporate trademarks and products in the global economy.

It is wrong that corporations have demanded, and won, all sorts of enforceable laws, backed up by sanctions, to protect their trademarks and products. And yet, when you ask these very same corporations, "Can't we also protect the basic rights of the 16-year-old who makes the products?" the companies respond, "No. That would be an impediment to free trade."

We want fair trade! During the tour, the National Labor Committee, together with USWA, UFCW and other organizations will release draft legislative language to end child labor and sweatshop abuses in the global economy. This draft language can serve as a roadmap to get the debate started on how to end sweatshop abuses and the Race to the Bottom. The lawyers who helped draft the language believe that when such a bill is eventually passed, it will be seen as one of the three great pieces of labor legislation in the last 100 years. It took 25 years before the language of the New Deal was turned into reality. The same could be true of the struggle to end child labor and sweatshop abuses. But the most important thing is to begin the debate. The people have the right to be at the table and part of this debate.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY HAS NO CLOTHES

The corporations would like us to view the global economy as we do the universe. It exists. It is enormous, and it is governed by immutable natural laws. Even if we don't thoroughly understand all these laws, we have no choice but to go along with the status quo. We are, after all, only small individuals who are helpless in the face of the giant global economy. This is wrong! We can end poverty for tens of millions of workers in the global economy, simply by paying 25 cents more, and we can win legal protections to defend the rights of the human being which are at least as strong as those currently afforded corporate trademarks and products. Perhaps more than any other segment of our society, young people can lead the way. Many of the workers around the world who make our CD players, sporting goods, computers, sneakers and clothing, are the same age as high school and university students.

More than ever, we need a positive message and agenda in the face of the worldwide lifting of textile and apparel quotas in 2005. This will lead to the closing of one third to one half of all garment factories in the world, throwing tens of millions of desperately poor women out on the street with nothing, as more and more work shifts to China, India and Vietnam. In the process, wages which are already well below subsistence level will fall even further, and respect for fundamental human and worker rights will be similarly rolled back. Left unchecked, the Wal-Mart model of slashing wages, benefits and human rights will dominate the global economy.

As a people, we can take back our economy and remake it with a human face.