

Thank you so much for this opportunity to share with you some thoughts about CAFTA. My name is Katherine Kates, and I volunteer with the Bangor-El Salvador Sister City Project which is connected with PICA here in Bangor. In 1999 my family and I were lucky enough to have the opportunity to live for four months in Carasque, the tiny village that has been Bangor's sister city since 1991. More recently in 2003, I was part of a fact finding delegation to look at the effect of free trade policies in El Salvador.

While I understand that the focus of the hearing is how CAFTA might affect Mainers, one primary argument put forward in favor of Cafta is that it will help the poor population of Central America, and that it is anti-hispanic to be anti-CAFTA. It seems important therefore to take some moments to listen to some of the voices in this population .

When we lived in the village it soon became apparent that Don Felipe Orellana (photo) and the majority of Salvadorans are not entrepreneurs looking for a low tariff environment for exporting their products. They are subsistence farmers who grow corn, rice, and beans to feed their families, and try to sell their extra at market to buy other staple items, shoes and medicines. You can see in this photo the dignity in this man, in his work. For these people free trade agreements like CAFTA mean freedom for them to compete with subsidized agribusinesses from the U.S., which have driven the price they can get for their corn lower than their cost to produce it, even if one discounts their labor as entirely free.

Trade agreements have achingly real human costs, as people are left with two choices. They can move to the big cities to work in garment assembly export plants called maquilas – often these have sweatshop conditions for the workers – Their other choice is to become an illegal immigrant working in the U.S.

Lolo – the dedicated young president of the community when we lived there, carried his new baby to mtgs. He worried about the effect on the community of its leaders leaving. The last thing he wanted to do was leave. Yet he talked with us about his heartbreaking decision to stop growing corn. We were not surprised to learn the following year that he had made the journey to the u.s.

This emigration is a harrowing, life-threatening ordeal since it is illegal. There are 8 million Salvadorans, of whom roughly 1/4 or 2 million now live in the U.S. So it's no overstatement to say that under free trade policies which CAFTA will accelerate, the chief export of El Salvador will be poor Salvadorans now unable to feed their families. This means fathers and mothers leaving children, leaders leaving communities, whole villages peopled by only the old and the very young. It means that the rich fabric of community life that surrounded and joyously nourished the people is left torn and threadbare.

On our fact-finding delegation, we asked who in fact will benefit from agreements like CAFTA. Four groups, we were told. One is importers of basic grains from the U.S. who profit from selling their countrymen corn and rice that they can no longer

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