



# Global Justice

## Case study #4

### Our Global Justice Fund at work

**Project:**

Empowering women maquila workers –The MEC Mobile Law Firm and Mediation, Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Centre, Nicaragua

**Supported jointly by:**

CUPE Global Justice Fund, CUPE BC, Codevelopment Canada (with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency), and Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women, Managua, Nicaragua.

**Goals:**

- Raise awareness in CUPE about the situation of women in Nicaragua and especially in the free trade zones;
- Foster CUPE BC's solidarity relationship with women workers in Nicaragua, supporting and learning from their struggle;
- Improve the ability of maquila workers to defend their rights in the area of mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution;
- Make the connections between worker's issues in Canada and globally.

This is just one project made possible with support from CUPE's National Global Justice Fund. To find out about others, and how to get involved in international solidarity work, visit [www.cupe.ca/globaljustice](http://www.cupe.ca/globaljustice).



Connie Kilfoil (CUPE Equality staff), Carlene Keddie and Susan Zander (General vice-presidents of CUPE BC), Megan Ashbury and Joey Hartman (HEU staff), and others joined MEC organizers in Nicaragua.

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**Activities:**

The Maria Elena Cuadra movement (MEC) provides legal advice and accompaniment for women workers who could not otherwise afford it. MEC also trains women leaders on a national level, in mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution techniques.

CUPE members are educated about the issues and benefits of the project through an exchange visit with maquila workers and the MEC leadership and through regular reports linking the struggles of women in Nicaragua and Canadian workers in CUPE publications.

**Background:**

CUPE BC has been working with MEC since 1995 when it was established, supporting training in a number of areas. This work evolved into the mobile law firm providing services to women workers.

The MEC Mediation Centre is run by and for maquila workers and provides mediation, negotiation and alternative conflict resolution. It began certified operations in April 2006 and offers mediation and arbitration recognized by the Nicaraguan Supreme Court.

**Issues:**

Maquila workers facing many different problems find assistance with the mobile law firm. Most are related to labour issues but lawyers also deal with family violence and child care support issues. CUPE's support for this work allows the partners in the South to participate in international campaigns and research on fair trade and globalization.

MEC continues to be a force to be reckoned with on the Nicaraguan labour scene, at all levels. Our partnership is longstanding, allowing CUPE members to see the effects of their contributions over time, and to understand that their struggles in the North are connected to the struggles of our partners in the South.

**Outcomes:**

The Mobile Law Firm assisted over 2,000 maquila workers facing problems last year. This work and the work of the MEC Mediation Centre continue to expand.

MEC's Tenth National Forum for Maquila Workers will take place in March 2008. More than 1,200 women workers are expected to participate.

**Please contact CUPE BC for more information about this project: [www.cupebc.ca](http://www.cupebc.ca).**

Visit [CUPE.ca/globaljustice](http://CUPE.ca/globaljustice) for more information about current projects, how to propose projects, and how you and/or your local can show your support for international solidarity by contributing to the Global Justice Fund.



For more information on the **Global Justice Fund** and other CUPE international activities, visit us online: [www.cupe.ca/globaljustice](http://www.cupe.ca/globaljustice) or contact CUPE Research: [research@cupe.ca](mailto:research@cupe.ca)