

EDITORIAL

NAFTA PUT MEXICAN WOMEN AT RISK

Mari Mennel-Bell Fort Lauderdale
22 January 2004
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
Broward Metro

Copyright 2004, South Florida Sun-Sentinel. All Rights Reserved.

In their recent meeting, President Bush and Mexican leader Vicente Fox failed to discuss an issue of importance. According to a recent Amnesty International report, approximately 370 women have been brutally murdered in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua since 1993, most after violent sexual assault.

U.S. Rep. Hilda Solis introduced a resolution to raise awareness, express concern and propose a set of actions to deal with the murders (HR 466).

This issue is complex and tied in with current U.S. and Mexican trade talks. According to The Women's Edge Coalition, the North American Free Trade Agreement created incentives in Mexico for U.S. multinational corporations to relocate to Ciudad Juarez. The factories primarily employ young women who, desperate to better support their families, come from rural regions all over Mexico.

The women travel to work in the early morning hours and back in the late night hours. Most of the time, the buses do not run at the hours they leave home or work. Thus, the very structure of their employment makes them vulnerable to becoming murder victims.

Amnesty International has found major deficiencies in the investigative process, including unjustified delays by police investigators and failure to follow up on evidence and witness statements.

Some members of the Bush administration have joined in the call for justice, and recently President Fox declared solving the Ciudad Juarez femicide a "national priority." While these responses are encouraging, they are clearly not enough.

It is critical that American and Mexican women and men pressure their presidents to act immediately to resolve these heinous crimes against innocent women. Further, it is critical that any and all trade talks carefully weigh the effects that future trade agreements will have upon Third World women.