

# Free-trade agreements causing people to leave Mexico

By Jeannine Koranda  
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HERMISTON - Instead of creating more jobs, free-trade agreements in Mexico have caused people to immigrate away from their communities, Centolia Maldonado Vasquez told a small group Monday night at Hermiston High School.

"We come because we have to come," she said.

Vasquez, of Oaxaca, Mexico, is part of the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations and spoke in Hermiston as part of a series of talks organized by Witness for Peace.

Instead of prosperity, she's seen free-trade agreements dismantle local farming operations, forcing people to leave their communities to earn money for food, she said through a translator.

That is especially true in her home state, which is in Mexico's southern tip and is home to many indigenous cultures. To earn money, people have migrated north within Mexico, then to the United States, she said.

Ask many of the workers living in the U.S. if they would stay home if they had good-paying jobs and they would likely say, "yes," she said.

"We need more democratic and just laws," she said.

Vasquez has been giving her talk to a variety of groups in cities such as Spokane, Bend, Portland and Tacoma.

The goal is to get people to see how U.S. policies are affecting the immigration process, said Beth Poteet, regional organizers for Northwest Witness for Peace.

The policies also have had an effect on the local level, said Arthur Stamoulis of the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign which helped organize Monday's talk.

His group estimates that 68,000 jobs in Oregon have moved abroad because of fair-trade agreements.

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