

Living a Fair Trade Life

A boisterous group of Canadian students led over 700 people in a chant as they marched into the Fair Trade Futures conference on September 30, 2005 carrying the mark of the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT). The IFAT mark was first introduced at the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai, India as an international symbol to recognize fair trade organizations. Since its debut, the IFAT mark has been on a global journey to promote Fair Trade around the world. Thus it was appropriate that the mark's first appearance in the United States came at the beginning of the Fair Trade Futures conference, which brought together over 700 activists, consumers and businesses to discuss the future of the Fair Trade movement.

The Fair Trade Futures conference was held in Chicago from September 30 to October 2, 2005. The conference was organized by the Fair Trade Resource Network and the Fair Trade Federation and was sponsored by a number of Fair Trade organizations including Ten Thousand Villages. 715 representatives from 35 states, the District of Columbia and 17 countries attended the three-day conference to network and participate in workshops related to the theme "Living a Fair Trade Life."

On Friday evening, the director of the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative in Ghana, Mr. Kwabena Ohemeng, opened the conference with a speech about how Fair Trade has empowered his community and created opportunity for his farmers. Mr. Ohemeng entertained the crowd by playing a fair trade rap that was written and performed by children in the UK for a contest sponsored by the Divine Chocolate Company. He ended the first evening of the conference with a challenge to the participants to be, "Papa Paa," - the Kuapa Kokoo motto meaning "the best of the best."

Throughout the weekend participants sampled a wide variety of delicious fairly traded chocolates and gourmet coffees. There were also beautiful handicrafts on display at many of the tables throughout the conference hall featuring textiles, jewelry and home décor products from artisans around the world.

Participants attended workshops and plenary sessions to gain a broader perspective on the Fair Trade movement and to brainstorm ideas about what it means to live a Fair Trade life. During one workshop, participants created proposals for the ideal "Fair Trade town". Another workshop, led by the Stefan Deurwal, director of IFAT, used the success of the European Fair Trade movement to offer practical advice for growing the movement in North America. Gerardo Wijnana, a representative from Ten Thousand Villages artisan partner COMPARTE in Chile, led a workshop to teach participants about collaboration between the North and the South in the Fair Trade movement. And Llenay Ferretti and Doug Dirks from the Akron headquarters each led workshops during the weekend to teach other fair traders how to increase market access for artisans in the South.

In addition, Helen Yocum and Lisa Stratton from the Ten Thousand Villages marketing department spent much of the weekend meeting new customers and businesses at an

informational table in the main conference hall. A number of staff and volunteers representing Ten Thousand Villages contract and partner stores from across the country also attended the conference and were eager to bring the excitement from the conference back to inspire their customers and volunteers.

At the end of an action-packed day on Saturday, the Chicago Fair Trade Coalition hosted a fashion show featuring clothing and jewelry from local fair traders. Funky and fun handmade apparel, jewelry and shoes from artisans in Asia, Africa and Latin America were on display in a unique show that combined Fair Trade activism and the world of fashion. One of the models wore the Turquoise Spike matching jewelry set donated by the Ten Thousand Villages store in Evanston, Illinois. The fashion show was followed by a social hosted by Catholic Relief Services and featuring music by the Chicago AfroBeat Project.

The three-day conference culminated in an exhilarating drumming session led by Jamtown on Sunday afternoon. The 700+ participants came together to exemplify the Fair Trade goal of “cooperation, not competition” by creating an energetic cacophony of sounds using fairly traded instruments from around the world. The drumming session was followed by a special ceremony to honor Ten Thousand Villages CEO, Paul Meyers, for his lifetime contribution to the Fair Trade movement. Bob Chase, CEO of A Greater Gift/Servv International, presented Paul with a piece of Chulucanas pottery from Peru in recognition of his achievements.

Citing the success of this year's conference, planners are already thinking toward the future. Participants left the conference inspired to grow the Fair Trade movement through their actions as consumers, activists and fair trade businesses. Building on the momentum generated by the 700+ participants who attended this year's conference, planners hope to have 7,000 people at the next Fair Trade Futures conference. We hope to see all of you there!