Helping the artisans

 Teri Scully with artisans in Haryana.

Teri Scully is in charge of the purchasing and marketing teams for Ten Thousand Villages Canada and decides what products will be sold in the 50 stores nationwide and on the web site, [www.tenthousandvillages.ca](http://www.tenthousandvillages.ca/) (.com for the U.S. site). In this role, she travels to the villages to meet the local artisans and works with their local fair trade marketing organizations, part of the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO).

In places like Vietnam, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, Teri Scully has met some remarkable artisans who began with nothing and used their crafting skills to improve their lot in life and that of their family.  As director of merchandising for the fair trade organization and retailer Ten Thousand Villages, she has seen lives transformed. Ten Thousand Villages began in 1946 and now sells handicrafts through its 160 retail stores and 220 festival sales in North America that are made by more than 130 artisans from 38 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The quality goods vary from large items such as benches, dressers, tables, chairs and stools to smaller ones, such as checker boards, picture frames, mobiles, jewelry and coasters. They also sell coffee, hot chocolate, jams, tea, sauces, and dried fruit.

Fair trade means providing a fair wage to workers in developing countries and promoting sustainability. Ten Thousand Villages works in places such as India, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Indonesia, Vietnam, Guatemala, Congo and Peru, where governments generally do not have the means to help the unemployed or disabled. Products sold by Ten Thousand Village are often made in small group settings or in home workshops where artisans also manage household responsibilities or farm work.

Ten Thousand Villages considers how many people were involved in creating the product and compares it to other organizations working in that country. It is Ten Thousand Villages’ goal to ensure that an artisan’s basic needs for food, clothing, housing, medical care and children’s education are met.

The artisans set their own wages, the price of the article, and agree on a rate that covers the cost of labour and materials, which gives them fair compensation for their work. They receive 50 percent payment upfront so they have something to live off and can continue to purchase raw materials. The balance of the payment is sent when the order is about to leave the country. Ten Thousand Villages pays 100 percent before it receives the product.

Scully says that a lot of artisans are disadvantaged. They don’t have a lot of options. She helps them improve their livelihood by trade, as opposed to aid. She is helping them improve their circumstances. She says if we insist on buying cheaper things we make artisans disadvantaged and they will never come out of poverty. The purchase of a fair-trade product helps in supporting the survival and dignity of an artisan.