

Alpaca Coat Seamstress, Lima, Peru

by Carmen Roca

“We kept hearing that Peru was the best placed country in Latin America to face the crisis, that the country would still grow although not as much as recently, and that it would grow more than any country in the region, but what does that matter when you work in a workshop making *alpaca* coats and jackets, sold in the US? So much fuss was made about the Free Trade Agreement with the US, so many celebrations for that important step, our hopes were up high for good years ahead and see what happens... First, I was told not to come on Saturdays anymore, then they cut my days in half - that meant a severe drop in my income. Now, I was just given the news that two fellow seamstresses and I are let go until sales to the US pick up. The owner has not come back from her latest trip there but she asked the administrator to give us the news... It is so hard for me to find another way to earn income in the meantime... plus, who knows when will it be that “things improve” and that they call me again? I can try to search for something at the workshops in Gammara, the clothing conglomerate in Lima, but there are hundreds of other women also seeking for work. I will have to try, offering them my good skills, but working with *alpaca* wool is different from working with cotton, cotton is easier but precisely because of that, there are many people who can do the job. My husband has been doing work for a mining firm in Cajamarca, a province far away from Lima for close to 2 years now. He was not part of the regular staff. A “service” firm gives him temporary contracts, but he had been working solidly all this time at the mining site, without the benefits that the employees of the mining firm get, of course. He called me a week ago with news that with the drops in metals prices, the mine will not contract external services anymore. He is there waiting to see if they will call him for some work, but I think he better come soon to Lima and find something to do here, while I find some piece work to do....”