



## Newsletter 1/2019

# FOCUS PEACE TABLE IN COLOMBIA

At the end of the two-day Women's Peace Table, participants received a pot with earth, seeds and a paper flower with motivational sayings.

## “Let us move together towards the truth”

**In May, 20 women participating in a Peace Table in southern Colombia discussed their experiences during the armed conflict. They spoke about grief, anger, truth and forgiveness. The Colombian Truth Commission is participating in this Peace Table programme in 2019 and 2020.**

The women walk together through the dense, lush forest. Stopping at a tree they read the yellow note attached to it. It says, “I have understood that I can't stay with this pain; I want to learn to forgive.”

One woman talks about how she wanted to commit suicide, because the pain of her experiences during the conflict in Colombia had become intolerable. But then something stirred within her: “I can't do the perpetrators the favour of not living anymore, after what has been done to me.” The other women listen in silence. Then they continue along the path, at the beginning of which a board calls on the women to “let us move together towards the truth.”

The 20 women participated in a Peace Table that took place in May in Popayan, in the south of Colombia. It was the first of four local meet-

ings organised this year by COMUNITAR, PeaceWomen Across the Globe's partner organisation. The Colombian “Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition” is cooperating in these Peace Tables with the aim of ensuring that women become part of the peace process and that their experiences are not forgotten. PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) provides essential support, particularly important as the Colombian state, which is responsible for financing the work of the Commission, has cut its budget by 40 percent.

### Stories of resistance

In Popayan, Alejandra Miller Restrepo, a member of the PWAG board and of the Truth Commission, talked about the current state of the peace process and explained the Commission's goals. One of its aims is to collect as many women's testimonies as possible so that they can be included in the truth-finding process and in the building of the historical record of the armed conflict. Her focus and that of the Commission is both on the women's pain and

suffering and on their stories of resistance, “what you did to survive,” Alejandra Miller Restrepo told the women. Including both aspects in their testimonies ensures that the women are regarded not only as victims, but also as actors, as women with agency.

Five members of local truth commissions, the so-called “casas de verdad”, took part in the Peace Table in order to record the “testimonios”, the women's statements. The decision whether to tell their stories or not is entirely up to the women. Even though they know that the statements will remain anonymous, they often find it difficult to talk about their experiences. But the time spent with women who listen and understand and share similar experiences makes it easier for them to open up.

At home, they repress the memories and the pain. “We do not dare to cry because we don't want to burden the family,” said one of the women. Another expressed what many thought: “This is a place where we can give free rein to our feelings – to grief and to the joy that we are not alone.”



Two participants share their experiences during the armed conflict.



Alejandra Miller Restrepo, member of the PWAG International Board and of Colombia's Truth Commission, welcomes the participants at the Peace Table in Popayan, southern Colombia.

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After two days, 14 out of the 20 women had told their stories to the Truth Commission staff members. The experiences from the local meetings will be gathered and exchanged at the national Peace Table, which will be held in Medellín towards the end of 2019. All the women who attended the local meetings will be invited to participate because accountability and strengthening the women's resources and networks are part of the process.

### Forgiveness without forgetting

A central component of the Peace Tables is the women's psycho-social support. The walk along the forest path brings the women, many of whom were driven from their land during the conflict, into nature and re-awakens memories. At the conclusion of the Peace Table, each woman receives a terracotta pot, some earth, a packet of seeds and a paper flower on which encouraging and motivational sayings are fastened. During the two days, there was much talking and crying but also hugging and singing, sadness and hope.

They have learned that they can break their silence and talk about the atrocities they have experienced, that they can forgive without forgetting. The process of coming to terms with the past, in which the Truth Commission's report will play an important role, will ultimately ensure this.

### Corporación de Mujeres Ecofeministas – COMUNITAR

COMUNITAR, PeaceWomen Across the Globe's Colombian partner organisation, has worked tirelessly for over 30 years for the meaningful participation of women in conflict transformation. As a women's organisation, it campaigns for the prevention of gender-based violence, for socio-economic empowerment and for political participation and access to land on behalf of women affected by conflict. COMUNITAR also coordinates the work of the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres network in Cauca province. More than 300 women's organisations from all over Colombia are part of this network. Together with other Ruta organisations, COMUNITAR makes a significant contribution to regional and national peacebuilding.



## FOCUS INTERNATIONAL BOARD MEETING

# Changing the world through feminist peace work

What exactly is “feminist peace work”? In which regions of the world does the word “feminism” have to be used strategically to avoid triggering hostility and prejudice? What does the future hold for the Peace Tables and what are some of the projects PWAG is planning? In May, the International Board discussed these issues in depth and laid down guidelines for the future.

“When we started to build the 1000 PeaceWomen network, we wanted governments to learn from the PeaceWomen’s work. We wanted to change the world and create new, dignified ways of living”, said Co-President Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold in her introduction. Then as now, PWAG wants to create a peaceful society, where women can exercise and enjoy equal rights. This was confirmed in the board meeting discussions between 12 and 14 May 2019 in Bern.

However, since the nomination of the 1000 PeaceWomen 14 years ago, the world has not stood still. From today’s perspective, and following some positive developments, many setbacks can be observed, both in increasingly nationalistic and patriarchal countries such as Brazil or India, as well as in key policy instruments such as the weakening of the latest UN Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security in April 2019.

### Strengthening women’s agency

According to board member Cécile Mukarubuga from Rwanda, violence against women is a huge problem. In particular, when women see themselves as victims, internalise that role and take on the burden of shame. Civil society solutions, she said, focus on the symptoms of violence and not enough on women’s agency. This is where PWAG comes in: projects such as the Peace Tables create spaces where women can share opinions and experiences and give them

the capacity to challenge policies in their countries. In this way, PeaceWomen can demand accountability of the decision-makers. “Our network is a good basis for strengthening women’s agency,” says Cécile Mukarubuga.

Today, feminist peace work must focus on several topics: racism and post-colonialism, religious, ethnic or political affiliation, economic class and sexual orientation. What is known today as “intersectionality” has always been a cornerstone of women’s peace work, says board member Margo Okazawa-Rey. The “matrix of resistance” also includes militarism, neo-liberalism and transnational corporations. Feminist peace work aims to build a “culture of peace” and is constantly expanding. The PWAG board agrees that today, the fight against environmental degradation and climate change is also a part of feminist peace work.

### A glimpse into PWAG’s future

The deepening of women’s Peace Tables in the context of conflict transformation in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines will remain the focus of the Peace Table programme until 2021. Regional Peace Tables are also at the planning stage. In addition, the promotion of civil-society spaces, where women can share and exchange experiences in a safe environment, is another important strand of PWAG’s work.

Under the name “Feminists Connecting for Peace”, the 1000 PeaceWomen network will be updated, expanded and made accessible to a broader public, allowing the horizontal exchange of experience and expertise between PeaceWomen.

Read the interview with our Co-President Kamla Bhasin in *Der Bund/Tages-Anzeiger* (in German) on our website under “Medien – Medienspiegel” (only available on the German website).



## News

### Conference on Women, Peace and Security

Together with cfd and KOFF, PeaceWomen Across the Globe invites you to a conference on women, peace and security. The conference will highlight the political relevance of Switzerland's National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 at national and international level. In workshops and panel discussions, we critically examine the linking of the agenda "Women, Peace, Security" and the global security agenda against terrorism and violent extremism.

Wednesday 18 September 2019, 8.45 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
PROGR, Waisenhausplatz 30, Bern

More information is available on our website under "Events".

### PeaceWoman Ruth Weiss turns 95

On the occasion of the 95th birthday of PeaceWoman Ruth Weiss, we interview her about her remarkable life as a journalist, speaker and activist for peace and tolerance.

Read the interview on our website under "News".

### The women's strike on 14 June

With well over half a million people participating, Switzerland's women's strike on 14 June 2019 was a huge success. An overwhelming energy was palpable. Many women report a newfound energy that strengthens their commitment. The strike and especially the preparations for it encouraged the women and offered them the opportunity to network, whether in their neighbourhoods or nationwide. The women's strike has thus created a basis for further feminist action.

We from PeaceWomen Across the Globe joined in the strike – and stood up for a feminist peace that can only be achieved through gender justice. But: every day is June 14th. We continue to work against structural violence and for a genuinely peaceful and safe society for all.



## Close Up

### PeaceWomen Across the Globe's International Board

**"Feminist peace work means making women's peace work visible and usable for sustainable peace processes. Because peace is never a military project, but always a civilian project – a collective women's project."**

Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold initiated the 2005 "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize" project and founded PeaceWomen Across the Globe. As a member of the Council of Europe, she inspected refugee camps in countries in crisis and at war. There she met women who tried to manage the daily lives of their children, of the elderly and the sick, often under dangerous conditions and with very few means. For decades she has been committed to women's hard work and to women's unwavering peace work. PeaceWomen carry a high degree of social responsibility, but do not have millions of dollars at their disposal for the work they do. Like women all over the world, they perform billions of hours of unpaid work. As co-president of PeaceWomen Across the Globe, Ruth-Gaby Vermot supports these women and their commitment.

She studied ethnology and sociology, worked in development cooperation in Africa and headed "Schulstelle Dritte Welt" that provided advice and materials for schools and teachers in Switzerland. Later she co-founded the Hekate office, which advises women and teams in difficult professional situations. She was a member of the Swiss National Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for 12 years.

\*In every edition we present a member of the International Board.



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