

## **The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Human Rights Award 2016**

### **Background information about the political context, the nominee, and the reasons for the nomination**

#### **Political context**

For decades, the international image of Colombia has been dominated by a domestic conflict, crime and the drug cartels of Medellín and Cali. Nevertheless, the country has been on the road to recovery for at least ten years. There has been a significant drop in crime; today, the murder rate is at a level average for Latin America. Even though organised (economic) crime remains a major challenge, the drug cartels were broken up. Also the negotiations between the government and the FARC guerilla have reached a stage where, in all probability, a peace agreement can be signed within the first half of 2016.

Even if this is accomplished, Colombia will still be marked by enormous social inequality and an institutional landscape which is an obstacle to finding fast solutions to the numerous socio-economic problems. However, the world's longest-lasting armed conflict would finally come to an end.

As yet, the peace process is subject to a reservation made by President Juan Manuel Santos at the start of the negotiations: the negotiated partial results will only hold if the whole negotiation process is successfully concluded. Agreements have been reached for some time now on the chapters concerning the improvement of conditions in rural areas, the withdrawal of FARC from the drug business, and the participation of FARC in political life so that, in mid-December 2015, the chapters about the compensation of victims and transitional justice could also be closed. During the first months of 2016, the negotiating delegations will now focus on the questions of how the laying down of arms should be accomplished and how the negotiation results can be legally and socially legitimized.

Most observers are confident that the deadline of 23 March 2016 for the signing of a peace agreement as announced by President Santos can be kept, at least approximately. Until then it also needs to be clarified what form social legitimization should take. It is most probable that a plebiscite will be carried out, for which the quorum would be at 13 per cent of the electorate. With a view to President Santos' election result of the year 2014, it should be possible to overcome this obstacle. Admittedly, FARC still demand for a constituent assembly, but none of the political parties is in support of this. It is unlikely that the FARC will allow their final approval to the peace agreement to fail over this question.

Overall, it can be assumed accordingly that the Colombian government and FARC will come to a peace agreement in the coming months. If so, it will probably be presented to the Colombian population for vote already in the first half of 2016 so that the laying down of arms can also be expected to begin in the course of 2016.

It would be immensely important for the population of Colombia if this conflict could be ended through negotiations. A new era would begin also for all those organisations which campaign for the upholding and deepening of human rights and for the overcoming of socio-economic inequality. Particularly in many rural areas the civilian population has suffered far too long, and still suffers, from the conflict and experiences numerous violations of its fundamental rights. It is especially women who are affected by this, for example by displacement or sexual violence.

It is obvious that the signing of a peace agreement would not mean the end of working for peace in Colombia; it would only be a partial victory. A successful peace process and the implementation of the agreements require a vibrant, powerful civil society. This is why external actors ought to take advantage of their opportunities to strengthen organisations campaigning for a peaceful solution of disputes and demanding that human rights for all are put into practice.

### **The nominated project**

*La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* (in short: *Ruta Pacífica*, in English: The Women's Pacifist Route) is a feminist movement that calls for a solution of the armed conflict through negotiations. It has made a special contribution to making visible how the war has affected women, it campaigns for claiming the rights of truth and justice, and it advocates for a participative culture of memory.

This organisation has existed for twenty years and since has left its traces all over the country. Its initial target was to achieve an armistice in the municipality of Mutatá in Antioquia, which was plagued by violence, at least for the Christmas period. The movement received great attention particularly through demonstrations organised in the country's places especially affected by the armed conflict where a variety of creative elements was used like costumes or theatricals.

In the meantime, an alliance of almost 300 organisations has evolved in which women of all social strata and from the most important conflict regions have united. In nine regions, *Ruta Pacífica* is represented with its own regional organisations: Antioquia, Bogotá, Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó, Putumayo, Risaralda, Santander, and Valle del Cauca. On these regional and local levels, it strives to concretely help women to come to terms with the horrors of the war and overcome them, for example by way of providing legal advice, socio-psychological support, and cultural and educational programmes.

*Ruta Pacífica* especially distinguishes itself by the shift in perspective brought about by the organisation and its members: the women of *Ruta Pacífica* do no longer perceive themselves exclusively as victims of the conflict but as social and political actors who actively participate in the peace process. They are in the forefront here as *Ruta Pacífica* designated a member of the delegation of 60 victims of the conflict who shared their experiences with representatives of the negotiation delegations

assembled in Havana. Marina Gallego, the national coordinator of the movement, also played a role in the peace process as a member of the gender commission.

An important project initiated by *Ruta Pacífica* was its own truth and memory commission. Within this framework, *Ruta Pacífica* collected over 1,000 individual testimonies of women whose human rights were violated in the context of the armed conflict. The report of this commission, which was explicitly supported by grass-roots activists, is regarded as an important contribution to the ongoing peace negotiations, and it was also published as a book with the title, “La verdad de las mujeres: Víctimas del conflicto armado en Colombia”. In this way, *Ruta Pacífica* contributed directly to the process of searching for truth and a culture of memory and ensured that, in this process, the perspective of women of all social strata is included in the discussions.

In recognition of this outstanding work, *Ruta Pacífica* is supported by a great number of national and international organisations. Representatives of the network participate regularly in the debates organised by FES Colombia. In 2014, *Ruta Pacífica* was awarded the *Premio Nacional de Paz* with FES Colombia as a co-presenter.

### **Reasons for the nomination**

Although the members of the negotiation delegations of the FARC guerilla and the Colombian government in Havana are mostly at the centre of attention when the peace process is discussed, the positive development of the last few months would not have been possible without civil society organisations which have nurtured the “flame of hope” for years. This is true especially for those periods of time when Uribe’s government (2002 to 2010) relied on a military solution of the conflict.

One of the most important organisations here is La *Ruta Pacífica* de las Mujeres. Through its work, it contributed to the two features of the peace process which can provide an impetus for conflict solution even beyond Colombia: for the first time, the victims of a conflict will participate in peace negotiations and it is also the first time that the history of a conflict will be reviewed while this conflict is still going on.

In contrast to some other organisations campaigning for peace, it can be expected from *Ruta Pacífica* that it will not lose its reason to exist with the conclusion of the peace process. Its members and representatives are aware of the fact that the end of the armed conflict will be a *game changer* but this will not mean for Colombia to have dealt with all the challenges it has to face. *Ruta Pacífica*’s fight for women’s rights of equal participation and physical integrity will merely enter a new stage.

If peace is to be secured in Colombia, considerable efforts of many persons and organisations will still be needed. An organisation like *Ruta Pacífica*, which has offered non-violent resistance against different forms of the violation of human rights and repression for a long time and is an outstanding example how women, and women’s organisations, can stand up for their rights independently in the sense of *empowerment*, may play an important role here.

For all these reasons we recommend that the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Human Rights Award of the year 2016 is awarded to La *Ruta Pacífica* de las Mujeres from Colombia.

## **The representative**

As a representative of the many thousands of women from about 300 organisations associated in *Ruta Pacífica*, Marina Gallego, its national coordinator, is to receive the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Human Rights Award 2016. Marina Gallego has gained experience in the women's and peace movements for over twenty years. She has received high recognition for providing an impetus to political discussions about human rights, armed conflicts and peacemaking from women's point of view.

Marina Gallego is one of the founders of *Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* and presently the national coordinator who manages the organisation. In this function, she organised the country-wide mobilisation of women which also received international attention. Being a qualified lawyer, she also coordinated the truth and memory commission within *Ruta Pacífica* and supported it as a part of the research team.

As a member of the first expert delegation in the field of gender, which travelled to Havana in December 2014, she actively participated in the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerilla. In the same year, she was included in the list of the most important personalities of the year by *El Tiempo*, the country's highest circulation daily newspaper.