



Transregional learning exchange  
 in the Philippines

# Hope and inspiration for peace work

It was a special kind of exchange that we were able to organise with our partners in the Philippines in December: at a series of events, two representatives of the Gender Working Group of the Colombian Truth Commission exchanged their experiences with peace activists from the Philippines. Many moments of recognition and understanding emerged from these encounters. Our programme managers Andrea Filippi and Karin Widmer were there.

The programme was packed: among the planned events were two public conferences and a Women’s Peace Table in the capital region and on Mindanao in the south of the Philippines. The main focus was on the exchange between peace activists from the Philippines and the two women from Colombia.

Remedios Uriana, a Wayuu indigenous woman from the north of Colombia, and Juliana Rodríguez López, from the department of Cauca, were members of the Gender Working Group of the Colombian Truth Commission and are active in the feminist peace movement. The trip took place a few months after the end of the Truth Commission’s mandate. The exchange helped her “to look back and realise new things”, said Remedios.

For the partners and participants from the Philippines, the “intense and profound experiences” of the two women from Colombia were an inspiration. They made “the challenges and importance of transitional justice and especially the role of women in these processes clearer and more meaningful”, said Karen Tañada, director of our partner organisation, the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (GZOPI).

Andrea and Karin share their experiences and insights from this intensive trip:

**What were your shared goals?**

**Karin:** We wanted to motivate and inspire women working on transitional justice [TJ] in the Philippines and Colombia. In addition, we wanted to support the recommendations in the report of the Philippine Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission TJRC so that they receive more attention and finally are implemented. And, we plan to make the experiences from this trip available to other women working on TJ.

**What were the different events and meetings about?**

**Andrea:** They were about learning from each other, exchanging positive and less positive experiences, gaining insights into the work of others and thus inspiration for our own project work. Experts and directly affected people from the Philippines gave us an understanding of the local context. We were able to feel and directly experience their emotions. Using pictures, videos and personal stories, Remedios and Juliana made the years of work, the challenges and successes of the Colombian Truth Commission come alive for us.

**Which topics came up most frequently at these events?**

**Karin:** The importance of civil society engagement and active participation in peace processes across categories of difference were confirmed several times. Remedios and Juliana and the actors from the Philippines emphasised the exchange between key persons and those directly affected. This was particularly evident in the experiences of the “listening processes”. These focus group discussions were the main method used by the TJRC to listen to those directly affected and to document their testimonies.



Participants at the Women’s Peace Table in group work.

**Andrea:** It was discussed again and again that individual and collective listening are central. The common definition of and search for appropriate local and indigenous terminologies for “transitional justice” were also emphasised. A frequent theme was the intersectional focus of the Colombian Gender Working Group. It was anti-racist from the start, included Afro-Colombian and indigenous perspectives, focused on the experiences of women and queer people, and was as inclusive as possible of all age groups. The importance of this intersectional approach was identified as a perspective that peace activists in the Philippines would like to strengthen.

→ Continued from page 1

### Did you notice any similarities?

**Karin:** I am always struck by how meaningful sharing experience across contexts and borders can be. Inspiring each other and passing on hope, beyond measurable indicators, are so important for peace work. On such occasions, the mental and physical strain of processes of coming to terms with the past is often mentioned. The exchange of memories and individual experiences helps with processing. I am fascinated by how these spaces of exchange are shaped by people and by cultural aspects. What connects them in this space and helps them to process the past is the act of sharing.



Andrea Filippi, Remedios Uriana, Juliana Rodríguez López, Karen Tañada and Karin Widmer (from left to right) in Cotabato City.

**Andrea:** A shared experience is that peace work and dealing with the past require a great deal of stamina. The often sadly lacking political will to come to terms with the past is a reality in many contexts. Therefore, individual as well as collective (self-)care is central to maintaining the strength for peace work in the long term.

### Which moments do you remember most clearly?

**Karin:** I remember the Peace Table particularly clearly, because there we could share our experiences and emotions in a protected setting. The participants said they continue to believe in peace and would work to ensure that their daughters do not have to experience what they did. The meaning of “sisterhood” across borders and language barriers has stuck with me. I can still see the intimate and tearful embrace between Yasmin and Bencita, a Muslim and an indigenous peace activist, both of whom have been involved for years as internally displaced persons and as those who have been directly affected.

**Andrea:** The trip will stay with and nourish me for a long time. I remember many things, especially this Peace Table. It made me feel on an emotional level how important safe spaces are for exchange and for strengthening one another. The personal encounters and connections with so many different people have left a lasting impression on me. Again and again I was struck by how similar our challenges are, despite contextual differences and differences in their extent. We are all confronted with a backlash and resistance to inclusive feminisms and processes.

### What did the partners from the Philippines highlight?

**Karin:** They highlighted the implementation of the inclusive and intersectional approach of the Colombian Gender Working Group and their realisation that in the more conservative context in Bangsamoro, it is relevant to make transitional justice and reconciliation gender-responsive. The participants from the Philippines also mentioned promoting intergenerational dialogue: “Today’s generation doesn’t know what happened yesterday.”



### What is the next step for our work in the Philippines?

**Karin:** The current project “Women’s Peace Tables in Nepal, Colombia and the Philippines: Strengthening Women’s Effective Participation in Conflict Transformation” will last until the end of 2023. We are supporting the GZOPI in its efforts to ensure that the recommendations on transitional justice are implemented. At the Peace Table, participants from the Philippines developed concrete actions and campaign strategies. They were inspired by the experiences from Colombia and integrated them into their plans.

This is an abridged version of the interview. You can find it in full length on our website under News.

Cover photo: Remedios Uriana talks about the experiences she and Juliana Rodríguez López (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) had as members of the Gender Working Group of the Colombian Truth Commission.



Members of the WPS Focal Points network at a meeting in South Africa.

### Implementation of “Women, Peace and Security”

## The fundamental role of civil society

Civil society plays a significant role in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”, not, however, to the same extent everywhere. National and cross-regional exchange is an important focus of our work in 2023.

Civil society organisations work to ensure that governments take their commitments seriously and keep their promises, including in the implementation of Resolution 1325. This milestone in feminist peace and security policy recognises the impact of war and armed conflict on women and the importance of their equal participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution represents a global commitment to integrate women more systematically and sustainably into peace and security processes. It laid the foundation for the so-called WPS (“Women, Peace and Security”) agenda. With their 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs), 105 UN member states have so far committed themselves to implementing the principles of the resolution at the national level.

Switzerland belongs to a small circle of only six UN member states that have already adopted four NAPs since 2000. The fact that the Swiss government invites civil society to monitor the implementation of the NAP and is co-financing a corresponding project met with interest at a meeting of the “WPS Focal Points” network in South Africa in December, according to our programme officer Carla Weymann, who attended the meeting. The WPS network comprises 95 countries and organisations, supporting the participating countries in the national implementation of the resolution. In 2022, South Africa and Switzerland shared the chair.

### A domestic policy instrument

At the meeting it became clear how necessary civil society organisations are in the implementation of the WPS agenda. “In many countries, there is little exchange between governments and civil society,” says Carla. “There was a correspondingly high level of interest at the meeting to exchange ideas on implementation with other countries that have developed NAPs.” The resolution was a result of the engagement of civil society organisations and transnational networks. The participation of civil society in implementation must be a logical continuation of these exchange and networking efforts.



Carla Weymann in conversation with Caryn Dasah, Cameroon Women’s Peace Movement.

In an alliance with KOFF - swisspeace and the feminist peace organisation cfd, we have been coordinating the dialogue with the government for more than five years and passing on civil society’s insights on Switzerland’s implementation of the resolution. A recurring criticism of Switzerland’s NAP: it is currently being used almost exclusively as a foreign policy instrument. Countries of the Global South, such as South Africa, use the NAP to improve the security of women at home, as the resolution also calls for the promotion of gender equality in order to prevent violence against women.

### New NAP project

In summer 2022, the “Alliance for Women, Peace and Security: Bringing Civil Society Voices to the WPS Agenda” project was launched, building on experience gained so far. It also draws on the lessons learned from co-chairing the WPS network and from Switzerland’s seat on the UN Security Council in 2023/2024. The new project aims to ensure that the planned 5<sup>th</sup> Swiss NAP reflects civil society’s concerns.

One aim of the new project is to increase the relevance and visibility of the WPS agenda and the NAP within the Federal administration, broader civil society and the interested public in Switzerland. Webinars and exchange forums, among others, will be used for this purpose. Hearings at which civil society can voice its concerns are

→ Continued from page 2

planned for the autumn. These concerns will be channelled into their report on the NAP, which will also contain the consolidated priorities. Politicians and civil society can then refer to all NAPs to make WPS-relevant demands and hold the government to account.

All civil society publications on the previous Swiss NAPs can be found on our website under Political Work - Our Engagement.

New director

## For women and peace with passion and expertise

For our new director Deborah Schibler the opportunity to advance feminist peace policy and the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda worldwide is “a dream come true”. She took up her new post on 1 May. As a true citizen of the world, for the first few months she will be leading the Bern team from her current city of residence Bogotá.

Many aspects attracted her to the new position: the opportunity to combine her passion and expertise in her new function, the challenge of reconciling thematic work with the operational management of an NGO, and the chance to work with strong women who carry out peace work worldwide with clear principles and ideas.

“Not only does PeaceWomen Across the Globe match the goal of my professional life in terms of content and subject matter, but also in terms of the international, feminist and networked way of working, which allows me to be part of a strong team of women and to work within that collective,” she says.



### From Iraq to Colombia

Born in Switzerland, she describes herself as a “citizen of the world”, a description that her biography confirms several times over. After studying law in Fribourg and Dublin and being admitted to the bar in Lucerne, she joined the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). She visited prisoners and detainees, worked to protect civilians, re-established contact between family members, and accompanied families of missing persons in their search for loved ones and relatives and in coming to terms with what they had experienced. Her work has taken her to Jordan, Iraq, Madagascar, Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama and Costa Rica.

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Information on how to donate and become a member can be found on [www.1000peacewomen.org](http://www.1000peacewomen.org).

You can find the current annual report under Publications and Multimedia – Annual Report.

### Focus on women’s participation

Her commitment focuses on women’s peace work. Four years ago, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs delegated her to the Organization of American States as a member of the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding. There she accompanied the peace process after the official end of the armed conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government. She coordinated projects to promote civil participation and dialogue in regions affected by conflict and violence, particularly with women and young people. One goal of these projects was to promote and strengthen women’s participation in peace processes and local peace work.

On 1 May, Deborah took over the management of the office from Flurina Derungs, who left PeaceWomen Across the Globe at the end of March after six years to take on a new professional challenge. We extend a warm welcome to Deborah and wish Flurina all the best for the future!

### Imprint

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