



40th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, 25 February - 22 March 2019

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Oral statement delivered by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

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APG23 thanks Mr Forst for his work and his report that focuses on women human rights defenders.

In the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartadó in Colombia, the volunteers of Operazione Colomba, the APG23 civil peace corps, witness the ethical, moral and humanitarian commitment of the women human rights defenders.

The constant threats of the different armed groups do not discourage these women from regularly denouncing the abuses suffered by the civilian population living in rural areas.

To the question of what it means for them to be a defender of human rights, from the youngest to the oldest, they answer unequivocally: "*it means not only fighting for the rights of women, but also defending everyone's life in order to ensure peaceful coexistence. Defending rights consists in creating a community*".

Among many stories, we are going to mention Brigida Gonzales'one, namely, the keeper of the historical memory of the Community of Peace, trade unionist in the '80s and activist for the defence of women's rights. In her opinion, defending means both denouncing the abuses and not keeping quiet in the face of violence, even at the cost of her own life, that has often been in danger. She adds that many women in Colombia have played an important role, because they have struggled despite discriminations, which accused them of being incapable of leading or, even worse, of being useless. Their contribution has had a huge human weight, considering that they have defended life bearing the immense pain of the loss of children, husbands or family members, due to the conflict. In the last decades, there have been many social and political changes, but the threats to human rights defenders have remained the same. Brigida continue saying that since the last two years the situation has paradoxically worsened, despite the Government's agreement with the FARC.

In Colombia, there is not yet peace, the paramilitary advance is devastating, the illegal armed groups are more and more numerous, there are thousands of displaced people and the social leaders killed are dozens as early as 2019. Human rights defenders will always be persecuted because they bear witness to the truth of things, to the abuses made by those who do not consider everyone's life more important than their own economic and power interests.

Thank You!