

# Weaving Stories of Reconciliation:

The power of storytelling and art as tools for reconciliation in Colombia and the Latin American continent.

*“Learning to stand in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins. And it's up to you to make that happen.”*

Barack Obama

## Interactive Virtual Panel Event

30th June 2021, 9:00 am -11:00 am Colombia time (CET+7), online

### Background: the implementation of a project that has supported the reconciliation process in Colombia

The Colombian society has been undergoing more than 50 years of armed conflict. Generations of Colombians carry the memories of their personal experiences of violence, exclusion, and protracted conflict. Their way of looking at the world has been shaped by these experiences and the differences in perspectives keep standing in the way to sustainable reconciliation.

**Weaving Stories of Reconciliation** is a panel discussion that builds on the outcomes of the project **Youth-Led Peace and Reconciliation in Colombia: A Transformational Approach**, which has been designed by The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) with the generous funding of the German Federal Foreign Office. It was implemented in Colombia, in partnership with the local NGO Ciudad Don Bosco (CDB) between 2019 and 2020, with the support of a network of 37 local organizations and institutions.

The project was designed to contribute to the peace and reconciliation process in Colombia by strengthening the resilience and conflict prevention capacity of young people, their families, and the communities to which they belong in vulnerable areas of different territories of the country. With the vision to support the leadership role of young people in strengthening community-based reintegration processes, conflict resolution mechanisms as well as community resilience and reconciliation, the project was structured in three components: (1) *Painting the Future*, which seeks the prevention of the (re)recruitment of minors into illegal armed groups, and support towards the successful reintegration of those children, adolescents and young people already separated from the armed conflict; (2) *Journey of the Hero*, which aims to strengthen the capacity of young people as agents of positive change in their immediate environments; and (3) *Perspectives of Peace*, which seeks to support the reconciliation process of Colombian society through the construction of historical memory.

It is precisely through Perspectives of Peace that the influence of the narratives of the past in the construction of the future is recognised, and therefore, the participants of this component, coming from different Colombian territories, worked using approaches that allow for the creation of collective historical memory from new constructive and peaceful narratives on the subjects of reconciliation, resilience and conflict resolution.

The starting point of this transformative process towards reconciliation was the trust-building workshops, as well as the activities that allowed reflection on the individual lived experience in connection with the collective history. This was followed by empathy-based interviews with community members conducted by participants of the project applying a do-no-harm approach. The common factor in these interviews was the recognition of a shared humanity, no matter a possible difference of perspective. At a second stage, the participants resorted to their creative abilities to artistically represent the story of their counterparts, and in some cases, their own story.

Many of these art pieces were documented and became the central axis of an art exhibition that was presented in seven Colombian territories, and will be presented in Geneva (Switzerland) and Bonn (Germany) in the fall of this year. In addition, in order to preserve and exhibit the totality of these narrative and artistic pieces, and to respect the voice of all the communities that joined “Perspectivas de Paz”, a virtual art exhibition has been created and is hosted on the project's main website.

## Panel Discussion: Weaving Stories of Reconciliation

**Perspectives of Peace** opened a space for artistic expression, dialogue and encounter of the Colombian society, around the voices of many communities that have a great capacity for resilience, despite having been affected by the armed conflict. This pedagogical process opened paths of personal healing and reconciliation among the members of the communities, who, in many cases, had simply decided to remain silent and ignore their experiences. After having lived Perspectives for Peace, these communities found common ground, shared visions from different life stories, or even different perspectives of the same story.

We believe that there are many valuable lessons learned from this process that deserve being shared with a wider audience. The panel discussion wants to provide a space to explore approaches that share the same goal and strategy – using storytelling and art as vehicles for reconciliation in Colombia and other Latin American contexts.

Thanks to the lessons learned, UNITAR is honored to lead a virtual panel discussion open to the general public, with the participation of renowned champions in the defense of human rights and peace, who play a central role in promoting a conversation around storytelling and art as vehicles for reconciliation in society.

With this virtual panel event, UNITAR is aiming to:

- Give a timely and much-needed platform for advancing discussions about effective support to community-led reconciliation processes in societies affected by armed conflict.
- Shed light on the power of arts and storytelling tools for the promotion of peaceful relations between community members, moving from mistrust and violence to a culture of dialogue and trust.
- Discuss the scope of transformative capacity building approaches, focused on using storytelling and arts as key vehicles for reconciliation;
- Share diverse perspectives, by giving voice to experts from the fields of human rights, the world of diplomacy and peacebuilding;
- Present the work that UNITAR, Ciudad Don Bosco and their network of local partners have implemented in Colombia and discuss possibilities for partnership with the aim to scale these activities to reach further Latin American countries.

## Format

120-minute panel event with 4 panellists, a keynote speaker, a moderator and an artist who will close the event.

Introduction – 5 mins  
Opening remarks - 10 mins  
Keynote speaker - 10 mins  
Panellists - 5 mins each  
Discussion - 30 mins  
Q&A - 20 mins  
Closing remarks - 10 mins  
Concert - 15 mins

The event will be conducted in Spanish, with simultaneous translation into English.

## Guests

Welcoming remarks: **Mr. Nikhil Seth**, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNITAR. He has over 35 years of service as an international and national civil servant, and extensive experience in leading, supporting and managing intergovernmental processes, including UN summits and conferences in the economic, social and environmental fields. He has held various positions at the UN since 1993, and since 1980 served successfully in the Indian diplomatic service.

Opening remarks: **Mr. Peter Ptassek**, German Ambassador to Colombia. He served as Delegate for Strategic Affairs of the European Union, and as Deputy Director General of the Europe Department at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. Since joining the German senior diplomatic service in 1993, Mr. Ptassek has been an official representing his country's government during missions in Afghanistan, Paris and Moscow.

Master of Ceremonies and moderator: **Mrs. Mónica Beltrán Espitia**, Minister Plenipotentiary of Diplomatic Career. She has more than 24 years of experience in diplomacy and international relations, a field in which, from the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she coordinated the Strategy of Sports and Cultural Diplomacy with young people from vulnerable communities, in order to prevent recruitment into illegal economic networks and illegal armed groups. Deputy Head of Mission at the Colombian Embassy in Canada.

## Panellists

- Keynote speaker: **Rigoberta Menchú Tum**, social leader, activist, political leader, writer and spiritual guide, she has worked tirelessly in the defence and vindication of the rights of women and indigenous peoples and has had an extraordinary trajectory in the peace dialogue processes in the region. She is the founder and Life President of the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation, which has been her platform for work at national and international level for the last 27 years, from where she has developed initiatives in the fields of education, food security, human rights and justice, in favour of the most vulnerable communities. She has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, Ambassador of Goodwill for UNESCO from 1996 to July 2020, awarded the "Legion of Honour in the Highest Degree of Commander" in 1996, the Prince of Asturias Award for International Cooperation in 1998, the Ibero-American José Martí Award in 2002, the Aztec Eagle Award in 2010, the Rubén Darío Cultural Order in 2010, and more than thirty Doctorates Honoris Causa.
- **Juanes**, Grammy and Latin Grammy Award-winning Colombian musician and singer-songwriter. Juanes speaks openly, both in his music and in the media, about violence and inequality in Colombia. Juanes created the Mi Sangre Foundation to help landmine victims. In 2005, he was named by Time as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.
- **Pastora Mira**, Social leader representing victims of the armed conflict whose life has been dedicated to serving communities, working for reconciliation among community members and promoting educational projects that help excombatants reintegrate into civil society. She attended the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize to former President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016, as a representative of victims, and shared her life testimony with Pope Francis during his visit to Colombia in 2017.
- **Luz Marina Monzón**, current director of the Unit for the Search for Disappeared Persons (UBPD). Human rights defender representing Colombian victims before national courts and the Inter-American human rights system. Together with the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, she has documented victims' struggles to seek justice for human rights violations in cases of enforced disappearance, arbitrary executions, torture and sexual violence.
- **Leonardo Párraga**, Colombian activist who believes in the value of systemic change through

sustainable peace, community well-being and building strong networks. Passionate about the arts, alternative development and constant learning. Graduate of Harvard University's Master of Education, with extensive experience in non-violent resistance. With his team at Fundación BogotArt, they create a more democratic art world one work of art at a time. He is co-founder of Juventudes Por La Paz, a Spanish-speaking network that builds a peaceful environment in Latin America, and participates in several international movements to highlight the role of young people as agents of social transformation and building peaceful societies.

## Artist

**Marta Gómez**, a Colombian singer-songwriter whose work combines the main Latin American folk rhythms with the sound possibilities of jazz, resulting in songs with a deep poetic sense and a high social content that have positioned her as a reference in the current music scene. The social component has always been present in her work; she is convinced that her throat and her guitar are powerful weapons to give voice to those who cannot tell their story - which has been blurred by violence and inequality - but who, in spite of everything, find reasons to continue fighting from joy and hope. That is why Marta's music That is why Marta's music is like a hug in the midst of the pain that afflicts the world. She has been awarded the Latin Grammy in 2014.

### Registration link to the event:

To participate as a panelist or attendee please register at the following link:

<https://bit.ly/3d51sxF>