



06 – August

# THE MARCH IN ACTION

THE WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN'S THIRD INTERNATIONAL  
ACTION NEWSLETTER

## Editorial

Returning from Colombia and preparing for our Event in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have become ever more aware of the similarities between the causes and consequences of conflicts in different continents. In both countries there are coltan and gold mines, forests and water sources in areas where indigenous and peasant communities have been living for centuries. These communities begin to be displaced once different armed groups arrive, followed by transnational mining and mega infrastructure projects which correspond to corporations' rather than people's needs.

Violence against women is routinely used as form of control by those who control territories. Further more, women are considered guilty for the violence they suffer. In South Kivu, women seek health services on average only three years after the violence having taken place, and only to treat the physical consequences. In Colombia, public services do not recognise the violation of children and adolescents if the sexual violence did not result in the separation of their hymens.

The recognition of common experiences has mobilised our sisters in Korea, a country where women living in prostitution camps during the Korean war denounce the violence they suffered: "my body was not mine, but owned by the government and the United States military". However, when we resist, we recover our bodies and our lives.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Why DR Congo? Towards the closing of the 3rd International Action!

The World March of Women's (WMW) 3rd International Action will be brought to a close by a series of activities being held in the town of Bukavu, province of South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), from the 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> October. We are hoping that 1,000 women – especially from the African Great Lakes region – will participate in the week of activities, and that around 1,500 people will take part in the Big March for Peace on the 17<sup>th</sup> October.

The idea of bringing our action to a close in a country in conflict remained at the centre of debates during the International Meeting in Vigo, Galicia, in October 2008, where 148 delegates representing 48 countries took part. During the Closing Action, our aim is to draw special attention to the links between violence against women, conflict and militarisation. Diverse reasons were given for the choice of Bukavu, among them:

- The systematic use of rape of women and girls (considered spoils of war) to humiliate, dishonour and demoralise;
- The existence of women's groups organised locally / nationally that allow us the possibility of demonstrating our international solidarity through the strengthening of these groups;
- The manipulation of ethnic tensions to justify armed conflicts and, in this way, hide the underlying

economic causes of these conflicts, such as the control of mineral resources and the region's biodiversity, as well as the profit made by the arms industry and private security companies;

- The presence of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) – previously, the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) – that, in 2010, is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year in the region with impacts barely perceptible to local populations. In addition, MONUSCO budget represents a GNP (Gross National Product) per person 400 higher than the DRC GNP.

In this scenario, the Closing Action seeks to strengthen the socio-economic and political autonomy of Congolese women and to seek accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence and the use of women's bodies as weapons of war. It aims also to denounce the economic interests that prolong the conflict in the DRC, in particular the role of local militia and armed groups; to struggle so that the DRC's national resources are used, first and foremost, for the benefit of the Congolese people and to create conditions necessary for the Democratic Republic of Congo to experience a lasting peace that starts with the demilitarisation of Eastern DRC and the progressive and negotiated withdrawal of MONUSCO.

## REGIONAL

### Americas Action: Women Struggling Against Sexism, Capitalism and Neoliberal Terrorism

Humanitarian missions in 14 regions of Colombia, an extensive forum in Barrancabermeja and a Vigil for Life in front of the Palanquero military base in Puerto Salgar formed the actions of the Women and People's Summit of the Americas against Militarization, held from August 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>. From the proposal presented by the Women's Social Movement against War and for Peace during the World March of Women Americas meeting, held in Cochabamba in August 2009, we decided to adopt this initiative as the regional segment of our Third International Action.

A few months later, at the signature of the military cooperation partnership between the United States and Colombia, which allowed the establishment or increase of American military presence in seven military bases around the country, the meeting grew in scope, attracting the support of other mixed social movements, such as Via Campesina, Convergence of the People's Movements of the Americas and the World Peace Council.

The delegation organized by the World March of Women comprised 30 women from 10 countries, including WMW delegates (from Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Quebec) and allied movements (from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay), as well as a group of interpreters from Colombia. In a first assessment meeting, held on August 24<sup>th</sup> in Bogotá, one reassuring fact came to light: supporting the meeting was a well-chosen political decision. "The event in Colombia not only provided a view of the concrete reality in the country, but it also gave faces and names to those who had endured the process of militarization and who resist in their territories and their daily lives," says Miriam Nobre, the coordinator of the WMW International Secretariat. It also made it possible to confirm the economic and geostrategic interests that defend the military strategy carried out by the Colombian government for over 40 years. "It has, above all, made it very clear to our Colombian brothers and sisters that they are not alone in their struggle; they can count on the solidarity of people struggling all over the world."

The preparatory phase of the meeting, and especially of the missions, represented a unique moment for Colombian social movements. In every corner of the country, men and women from different sectors and working on different forms of action, began to work together, in many cases for the first time ever. Rosa Guillén, from the WMW in Peru, highlighted the fact that the missions and the event reached the goal of making the situation of women living in areas in

conflict visible to a number of groups already working against the military bases. Strengthening the alliance we have built is one of the challenges now before us, as well as creating a detailed report that focuses on the issues and ways of life of Colombian women and how we can monitor the situation.



#### An intense agenda

The WMW delegation organized accounted for around one-third of the international delegation present at the meeting. We had a first meeting of reporting and preparation for our participation on the night of August 16<sup>th</sup> in Bogotá. The following morning, we met with the Political Commission for the meeting and other members of the international delegation to hear reports about the Colombian socioeconomic and political context and, especially, the situation of women in Colombia.

At the press conference following the reporting session, many questions were asked about the Constitutional Court decision not to recognize the partnership between the United States and Colombia. Yolanda Becerra, from the Women's Social Movements, says that, despite not solving the problem, it was a positive development that legitimated the meeting and enabled mobilization. "We have not only raised the issue nationally, but also internationally, and that has been very important. Some time ago, it was as if Colombians agreed with everything that was happening in our country. We were very afraid of denouncing – and we still are – especially because we know the fight is against the multinationals, their models and key points in the system.

In the same afternoon, the international delegation divided into groups and went on the missions carried

# THE MARCH IN ACTION

out on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Fourteen Colombian regions (of which the WMW visited 10) were visited: Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Catatumbo, Sumapaz, Ciudad Bolívar, Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Nariño - Pasto, San José de Apartado, Magdalena Medio, Barrancabermeja, Santander, Norte de Santander and Arauca.

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, our delegation met again, this time in Barrancabermeja, our debate forum headquarters, where we came together to share reports illustrating the climate of terror to which women and the Colombian people are subjected daily with militarization. Marissa Zepeda, from the WMW in México, reported, for instance, the fear generated by aircraft flying over the area where the participants from the Valle del Río Cimitarra mission were gathered. Aerial spraying is common in the area, allegedly to prevent illegal crops but, in the end, it destroys rural food production and leads to the displacement of families. Abandoned areas are then

“freed” for occupation by transnational mineral companies, drug trafficking or agro-exportation.

An initial general report of the missions, created around the three main themes – women and territory, women and militarization, and women and social movements – is available at:

[http://www.movimientos.org/encuentromujerespueblos/show\\_text.php3?key=18090](http://www.movimientos.org/encuentromujerespueblos/show_text.php3?key=18090)

In addition, the WMW delegation is preparing more detailed reports about each mission and a general mission assessment meeting, which will soon be released.

## The Summit in the media

In section <http://www.mmm2010.info/press-room-es/el-encuentro-en-los-medios> of the WMW 2010 website, you will find a complete list of news published in different American and European media channels about the Summit.

## Debate and agenda for a common struggle

Around 2,500 people were present on August 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> at the debate forum of the Women and People’s Summit against Militarization. In the mornings, the plenary sessions mixed cultural performances with political analysis and testimonials from the various resistance groups. In the afternoons, working groups (*picture*) engaged in more in-depth debates and reached agreements for common actions.

We emphasized the patriarchy as the system which supports militarism and capitalism and is materialized in very concrete terms, such as instrumental personal relationships with teenagers in order to obtain information, or humiliation and sexual violence. These actions are many times accepted or reproduced by men who are also our comrades in arms. We issued a joint call to action to the world, against patriarchy and militarization, especially for October 17<sup>th</sup>, when we will promote a Day of Struggle in solidarity with women living in zones of conflict.



One of the papers by political scientist and journalist Laura Gil explains how the military presence in the county of La Dorada, very close to the Palanquero military base, has gained acceptance from people’s minds, putting a stop to reporting of crimes committed and leaving a large tolerance for the sex trade, mainly associated with poverty. Gil confirmed the existence of 15 brothels at the location and several websites that offer sexual services to military staff and other “consumers.”

From an international perspective, solidarity was extended to Honduras, Haiti and the five Cubans unfairly imprisoned in American jails. The integration with the campaign against militarization, relaunched in the Americas Social Forum in Paraguay, and the visibility of the results of the Colombian meeting in each of the countries present constituted other doors beginning to open.

The document, “Call and Appeal of the Women and Peoples of the Americas”, summarizes the agreements and commitments made around a common agenda, adopted by the different organizations participating in the meeting. Some of the actions confirmed by this plan included the promotion of the Women and People’s Colombian Court, work to strengthen social and women’s movements, participation in social and women’s movements, and participation in the People’s Congress of Colombia, to be held October 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, as well as in the actions on October 17<sup>th</sup>.

## Street actions: march and vigil

A Candlelight March, of resistance and memory, marked the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> in Barrancabermeja. Walking with candles and stones with the names of



# THE MARCH IN ACTION

missing or dead people engraved on them, women claimed autonomy over their bodies and demanded the end of war and violence. The slogans read, “Women against war, women against capital, women against sexism and neoliberal terrorism.” Men were also a part of the march, which ended at Plaza de la Vida.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Vigil for Life (*picture*) marked the official closing of the meeting. After almost five hours in a bus, we reached Puerto Salgar, where we got off almost directly in front of the Palanquero military base. Deceitful pamphlets against us spread the lies that the investigations presented at the Barrancabermeja Meeting stated that the permanence of the military enclave in the area meant the birth of a village of prostitutes. From the platform, Yolanda Becerra denounced the intention of pitting the local people against us, reaffirmed our solidarity with the women of Puerto Salgar and responded to the hidden authors of the small pamphlets: we would continue our activities until the evening, as planned. From three in the afternoon until the evening, music, dance and theater with a high number of denunciations were once again intertwined with speeches.



At the rally organized by the WMW we affirmed that: “We want to show the direct consequences of wars and conflicts on women’s lives, which go beyond those faced by the male population of countries in such situations. In a context of war, women’s bodies are appropriated as a resource, as a form of control, intimidation and plundering. Sexual violence is common, practiced by the army as well as by paramilitary groups and in local communities where men begin to reject and blame the women who are the victims of this aggression.” We also denounced the ideological manipulation displayed, for instance, in the “war on terror,” which impacts women’s lives, criminalizing members of social movements and restricting their right to freedom of movement. “This occurs with Colombian women, who are victims of the abuses committed in the fight against drug trafficking. We also denounce the role of firearms manufacturers which derive substantial profit from conflicts and which politically intervene in their courses...”

Carole Jacob, from the WMW in Haiti, shared these fraternal words rich in solidarity: “I am here to tell you that, in Haiti, the people are fighting against the occupation, against MINUSTAH and we support the Colombian people in standing up to militarization.”

The rally culminated with the women’s commitment to carry on, “on the march until we are all free.”

It is almost 10 at night. The members of the group are starting to return the site to “normality.” It has been a great day. We have reached our goal: Puerto Salgar was raided by peace.

*Text based on the article written by Miriela Fernández (Martin Luther King Center/ WMW-Cuba). The full version is available on the website of the 2010 action.*

**Other suggested reading about Colombia:**

**Magazine ALAI n. 457** – Militarization and the patriarchy have a close relationship (only in Spanish)

## August 23<sup>rd</sup> around the world

In a response to the call to action made by some of the movements that called for the meeting, street demonstrations, pronouncements and vigils in different parts of the world expressed solidarity with the women and people of Colombia and the Americas and condemned militarization.

In **Brazil**, actions were carried out in the capital city of São Paulo, in southeast Brazil and Mossoró (Rio Grande do Norte) with several social movements. In São Paulo, participants distributed leaflets at Praça Ramos, a downtown square, denounced the presence of foreign military troops in Latin America and showed solidarity with the women and people who resist this imperialist strategy. In Mossoró, a debate about the foreign military presence in Latin America, followed by the launch of a video about the Third International Action of the WMW in Brazil, made August 23<sup>rd</sup> a remarkable event.

In Barcelona, **Catalonia**, a number of women carried out a night vigil against war and militarization in front of the Colombian consulate. In **Colombia**, a vigil against militarization and for life was held on August 23<sup>rd</sup> at Parque de los Estudiantes, in Cali, organized by Colectivo de Noviolencia (Non-Violence Collective). In Maracaibo, in the state of Zulia, **Venezuela**, a cultural activity with the presentation of several musical groups and the play Madre Colombia (Mother Colombia) brought several groups, organizations and institutions together on the same date, rallying to the slogan, “For life and integration in Latin America, no to militarization in our America”.

# THE MARCH IN ACTION

On the other side of the world, in **Korea**, women went to the streets to demand the end of American military activities in the Korean peninsula, denounce the threat to world peace represented by American military dominance and to oppose the installation of new military bases in Colombia. On August 19th, there were actions in front of Bupyeong military base in Incheon (picture).

Pronouncements and messages of solidarity and support were also sent to the WMW in Chile, the Continental Social Alliance, the Peace and Justice Service of Paraguay and the Canadian Human Rights International



Organization (CHRIO). To read these greetings and

pronouncements, please visit the meeting website:  
<http://www.movimientos.org/encuentromujerespueblos/>

## MOBILISATION AND ALLIANCES

### 17<sup>th</sup> October: Global Day of Action

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October, while some WMW activists will be in the big march for peace in Bukavu, others will also be present in the streets of diverse countries around the world. They will mobilise in solidarity with the woman and people of the DRC and also the women and peoples of other countries in conflict, while demanding a lasting and active peace for all these countries, as well as an end to the militarisation of our societies, the criminalisation of poverty and of social movements, and violence against women.

We will publically demonstrate the strength of organised women and demand an equal participation of women in the maintenance of peace and in post-conflict reconstruction processes. The economic interests (of the arms industry, of transnational mining and petroleum companies, etc) and geo-political interests (of national and foreign States, armed groups, etc) of conflicts will be also be denounced during these street demonstrations.

The 17<sup>th</sup> October event was strengthened by other social movements as the day of the struggle against

militarization during social forum events, like the one held in June in the United States and the Assembly of Social Movements (picture) held in the Americas Social Forum, held from 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> August. Several other actions are planned for the week of 7<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October, covering issues such as decent work, migration, fight against debt and multilateral financial institutions and for climatic justice and food sovereignty, and against false solutions to climatic change.



**The March in Action** is a newsletter edited by the World March of Women International Secretariat (IS) and distributed by email.  
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