

The quest for reparation for and by survivors

ANGELA ESCOBAR

SURVIVOR, MEMBER OF SEMA COLOMBIA, NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF LA RED DE MUJERES VÍCTIMAS Y PROFESIONALES

« Breaking the silence allows us to heal and benefits society »

For those of us who have been victims of sexual violence during armed conflicts, being at the centre of the decisions that are made, and the actions that are implemented which affect us, is not just a right, it is the only way to prevent the persistence of the social and institutional practices that have stigmatised us. For me, the centrality of victims to this process is a precondition for the design and implementation of reparation programmes. They need to take into account our needs and proposals, and to promote empowerment processes. Thus we, the victims, can represent ourselves and talk about crimes that nobody wants to talk about and nobody wants to hear described. As Dr Mukwege said, **the silence of victims only benefits perpetrators**. Breaking the silence allows us to heal and benefits society.

I am part of the Global Survivor Fund because I dared to speak out about what had been done to me, and start my search for justice. In these efforts I met other victims, from my country and from others, and I learned from them. Without realising it, I began to defend our rights, which include demanding that our proposals for reparations be considered. It is this centrality of victims that inspires the work of the Global Survivor Fund and is implemented through projects in over 20 countries.

Participating in these international spaces has been another learning experience, which is reflected in my work with victims of sexual violence in Colombia. In 2019, I was invited to an event in South Korea that inspired us to propose early reparations. We initiated this work with a group of 72 indigenous women who each decided to denounce sexual violence. These women could not read or write, so we proposed a literacy programme to improve their access to justice. As a result, the 72 indigenous victims are not only literate, but they are no longer stigmatised by their families and communities. All of them are actively participating in legal and other organisational processes, while developing their leadership skills.

From this concrete and positive experience, we have managed to encourage other victims to support the calls for early reparations. They are also participating in the processes of identifying the consequences and impacts of this crime on their physical, emotional, sexual and reproductive health. For the first time in my country, victims are developing proposals for reparations.

We have learned what needs to be done, now let's do it for ourselves!



Angela Escobar at the Stand Speak Rise Up! forum in 2019