



Angela Escobar at Stand Speak Rise Up! forum in 2019

The quest for reparation for and by survivors

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Serving on the board of the Global Survivor Fund has been a very important life experience for me. It has allowed me to see first-hand the progress being made and the obstacles hindering the emergence of a fully victim-centred approach. Contributing to the work of this new international organisation - together with three other victims from different countries - has been possible thanks to the commitment of Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad. Their focus is on the victims of sexual violence and our rights.

It is hugely important for those of us who have been victims of this crime during armed conflicts to be at the centre of the decisions being made and the action taken. It is not only a right that we should be closely involved with this topic which concerns us so personally, but it is also the only way to counteract the social and institutional practices that have stigmatised us. I believe that putting victims at the centre of action in this area is essential for the effective design and implementation of reparation programmes. This is the way to take account of our needs and proposals, and to promote empowerment processes. These will enable victims to represent themselves and to talk about this crime, which too few people want to hear about and discuss. As Dr Mukwege has said, **the silence of victims only benefits the perpetrators**. Breaking this silence allows us to heal and is a benefit to wider society.

I am part of the Global Survivor Fund because I dared to speak out. I have spoken about what has been done to me and I began to seek justice. In so doing I met other victims from my country and elsewhere. I learned from them, and without realising what I was doing at first, I began to defend our rights, including demanding that our proposals for reparations be taken into account. It is this central role for victims that inspires the work of the Global Survivor Fund, which has projects in over 20 countries. In addition, on a personal level, it is very important for me to be part of a board that includes key figures such as Dr Mukwege and Nadia Murad, experts and practitioners in the area of reparation requests, and governmental representatives. We share common values such as favouring the advocacy of women's rights, as well as gender-aware and human rights approaches to the design and implementation of interim reparations.

I am aware that I am privileged thanks to my being able to participate in prior discussions and consultation processes about the creation of the Global Survivor Fund. **Participating in these international spaces has been another learning experience, which continues to be 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 that early reparations be made; an idea we initiated with a group of 72 indigenous women who had decided to condemn sexual violence. These women could not read or write, so we suggested the introduction of a literacy programme to improve their access to justice. As a result, the 72 indigenous victims are not only now literate, but they are no longer stigmatised by their families and communities.

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

Each of them participates in the justice system and other organisational processes, as well as developing their leadership skills.

From these concrete and positive experiences, we have managed to enable a diverse range of other victims to support the proposal for early reparations. They also participate 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 leading the development of reparations proposals. We proposed the construction of a centre specialising in holistic care, a proposal we drew from the experience of the Panzi hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This development had the support of Dr Denis Mukwege and the Mukwege Foundation.

I was able to lead these processes, with the support of the knowledge and experience of other victims in different countries, and the knowledge shared by the experts of the Global Survivor Fund board. I am sure that my participation in this board has also been useful. We have learned what needs to be done in terms of reparations. Now let's do it for ourselves!