

Peace Prize Nomination

Organisation's Name: Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz, 'Sembrandopaz'

Organisation's Country: Colombia

Organisation's Website: None given

Description of specific project, practice, or technique:

Sembrandopaz practices a strategy of openness to dialogue with institutional actors in the region. Each of the four communities with which Sembrandopaz works has been a victim of both individual and collective violence in the armed conflict in Colombia. The communities of Libertad and Pichilín in Sucre, and Mampuján and the High Mountain Zone in Bolívar, are going through processes of diagnosis, design and implementation of a plan for collective reparations with the local, departmental and national Unidad de Atención y Reparación de las Víctimas (Unit for Attention and Reparation of Victims). Each community shares a set of concerns about the plans for reparations. The Victims' Law of 2011 established the right to holistic, transformative reparations, and describes the specific parameters of individual compensation for losses sustained in the violence. All four communities are concerned that the reparations will not include individual compensation, and will primarily focus on social or economic rights guaranteed by the government, such as education and infrastructure, and will therefore not be holistic or transformative.

Because of these concerns, as well as the slow speed of the process, Sembrandopaz has developed a space called the Tripartite Working Group where community leaders, the Victims' Unit, and the local, departmental and national government officials can come together and dialogue about the reparations process on a general level. This space allows for a conversation that goes above and beyond the intensive details of the daily implementation of the reparations process, such as diagnostics, surveys and meetings, and allows for three groups, with Sembrandopaz as a dialogue facilitator, to discuss concerns with the overall policy and implementation of reparations, and look for creative ways to solve them. From these, four Tripartite Working Groups have emerged as initiatives to produce projects that address the need to put food on the table while reparations are carried out, to put pressure on the institutions responsible for different elements of the reparation plan to move more quickly, and to respond to ongoing security concerns in the midst of the reparations process. In this space, Sembrandopaz puts into practice its belief that the communities and the government are allies not adversaries, and can build strong accountable relationships through dialogue.

Information on organisation or agency including history and scope of its work:

Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz, 'Sembrandopaz' (Sowing Seeds of Peace) was founded in 2005 by internationally respected Mennonite peacemaker and human rights lawyer, Ricardo Esquivia. Ricardo was born on August 30, 1947 in Cartagena, Colombia. The son of an Afro-Colombian father and an indigenous mother, Ricardo spent his early childhood on the Caribbean coast. When his father developed leprosy and was institutionalized, Ricardo was taken to a Mennonite center for the healthy children of people with leprosy and was educated in their school. The Mennonite Church became Ricardo's extended family and nurtured his commitment to peace, justice, and non-violence.

From that small school in the interior of the country, Ricardo went on to study law in Bogotá, and then returned to the Caribbean coast to organize poor farmers in Montes de María. Accused of being a guerrilla ideologue for his community organizing, Ricardo, his wife and four children fled threats of violence, first to Cartagena and then to Bogotá. There, he founded Justapaz, the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action. He served as its Executive Director for 13 years, helping to develop displaced communities and build projects for sustainable economic development and peace education. In the early years, Justapaz was a key player in establishing the right to conscientious objection from obligatory military service, which brought Ricardo into conflict with the Colombian military and forced him to flee into brief exile in the United States.

In a country where Protestants are a small minority, Ricardo helped establish the Commission for

Restoration, Life, and Peace of the Colombian Council of Evangelical Churches (CEDECOL), for which he served as National Coordinator until 2010. In this capacity, he has facilitated the development of five regional commissions of pastors and lay leaders to help Protestant churches provide emergency assistance to the displaced, develop small-scale economic projects, and work with local leaders to build a grassroots movement for peace. He also has participated in national and regional dialogues with legal and illegal armed groups in Colombia.

In 2004, Ricardo moved back to the Caribbean Coast to form Sembrandopaz (SowingPeace), a small, non-profit, faith-based organization. Sembrandopaz works directly with displaced and formerly displaced communities helping them organize, learn their rights, and lobby or take direct non-violent action to demand those rights. What sets it apart in its human rights work is the willingness to dialogue with state institutions while at the same time encouraging communities to demand their rights from the State. While unabashedly on the side of the dispossessed, Sembrandopaz staff firmly believes in dialogue, respect, and bridge-building with the authorities.

The mission of Sembrandopaz is to facilitate the construction of values of a culture of peace through the conformation and consolidation of grassroots organizations, with the goal of supporting processes of integral sustainable human development within the populations of the Caribbean region in Colombia.

Sembrandopaz has experience working in the areas of education, government and civil society, prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace and security, agricultural development and alternative agriculture, tourism, general protection of the environment, food security, humanitarian relief, support of grassroots organizations, generation of income for socio-economic integration, and the betterment of quality of life of vulnerable populations and those at social risk.

Sembrandopaz describes its theory of change through the metaphor of a bird. Like a bird, a community needs certain things to get off the ground. It needs two wings, an economic wing and a political wing. Without one, the bird cannot fly, the community cannot prosper. For this reason, Sembrandopaz works with communities to strengthen both of these wings at once. However, without two feet to stand firmly on, what is the use of flying? For this reason, Sembrandopaz bases its work in communities on firm foundations of ethics and aesthetics. Communities must be grounded on strong ethics of non-violence, cooperation, and imbuing human life with value. A strong, vibrant community must also recognize the aesthetic beauty in life—culture, music, art, the environment—to give meaning to its economic and political endeavours. Sembrandopaz works to transform communities in a holistic way, taking into account the factors that ground and move the community toward peace. Only through this holistic approach can communities achieve deep and lasting transformation of which political, economic, cultural, and social rights are interwoven.

Currently, Sembrandopaz works closely with four displaced or formerly displaced communities on the Caribbean coast as well as the High Mountain Movement of Montes de Maria, which is composed of 52 rural hamlets. Additionally, Sembrandopaz is the coordinator of the Mesa Sucreña de Paz (Sucre Peace Roundtable), a civil society group in the province of Sucre, and the Mesa de Garantías de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos, a civil society group that interacts with government entities on behalf of human rights workers in Sucre. On a regional level, Sembrandopaz is the coordinator of the Comisión Ciudadana de Reconciliación y Paz del Caribe, a civil society alliance with representatives of seven provinces of the Caribbean region of Colombia.

Describe the context in which the organisation works, analyse the conflict, and indicate how this analysis has influenced the peacebuilding work of the organisation:

Colombia has the longest running armed conflict in the Americas and is generally recognized as having the second largest number of internally displaced people in the world. Despite the fact that the Colombian government and the largest of the guerrilla forces, the FARC, are currently at a negotiating table in Havana, human rights violations continue due to the impunity of the military.

Indeed, being a human rights worker in Colombia is one of the most dangerous professions. According to Human Rights Watch, Colombia is the country with the 'worst human rights record in the western hemisphere'. According to national watchdog group Somos Defensores, thirty-seven human rights defenders were killed in Colombia between January and June of 2013, making it the most violent six-month period on record for humanitarian workers in the country. The area on the Caribbean coast where Sembrandopaz focuses its work is one of the most severely affected by the conflict due to the half dozen different armed groups who fought for control of the territory and population in recent years. Over seventy massacres resulted in death, destruction and the displacement of thousands. The city of Sincelejo, where Sembrandopaz is based, has a total population of 230,000 people of which 90,000 are displaced.

Precisely because the civilian population in the countryside was caught in the crossfire between the various armed groups and subsequently displaced due to massacres in their communities, Sembrandopaz focuses its peace work on these same peasant communities. One of the additional problems during and after their displacement was the lack of state presence in the region. When farmers returned to their communities after a period of displacement, they did so on their own without government support. Despite the fact that there are laws that theoretically help victims, the reality was that these laws were rarely implemented. Part of Sembrandopaz' mission is to educate people about the laws that benefit them, such as Law 1448 on Victims and Land Restitution, the differences between victims' rights and rights of the general population, and how to access other government programs. Sembrandopaz believes that the communities and the state institutions are 'shores of the same river' and therefore should work as allies instead of adversaries. However, when bureaucracy or lack of government gets in the way, Sembrandopaz also teaches people how to organize to peacefully demand their rights. An example of this:

In 2012, after nurturing a capable and tenacious leadership in the displaced afro-community of Mampuján, staff of Sembrandopaz supported their initiative to peacefully march to the provincial capital of Cartagena to present their demands for financial reparations as victims of the armed conflict- and marched with them. For three days in the tropical sun, over five hundred men, women and children marched to the Governor's Palace in Cartagena. The march received favorable press coverage that contrasted with most Colombian marches and protests that end in violence. Because of this march, the community of Mampuján was the first displaced community in the country to receive financial reparations.

Following up on the successes of Mampuján, Sembrandopaz played a pivotal role in the creation of the High Mountain Movement, made up of formerly displaced peasants from 55 villages in Montes de Maria. Historically, this area was coveted and fought over by half a dozen legal and illegal armed groups. Due to the presence of these groups, and their occupation of certain villages, the people of the High Mountain Zone deeply mistrusted one another. For decades, people of these communities did not associate with one another, much less work together on common goals. Sembrandopaz has helped these communities overcome their mistrust and learn to work together as an effective, non-violent peasant organization working for the rights of all community members. In April 2013, this group, inspired by the positive outcome of the Mampuján march, organized a similar peaceful march of over one thousand peasants, who formerly refused to even speak to each other. Given the success of Mampuján, and the positive press coverage the High Mountain Movement was receiving, the governor and his cabinet met the marchers en route and negotiated on the spot to avoid the embarrassing publicity of having one thousand disgruntled peasants arrive at the Governor's Palace. While the agreements fell short of the ideal, the community leaders achieved certain concrete accomplishments and gained important skills in direct negotiating with government officials. They are now seen as a serious political force in the region.

Impact of the organisation or agency's work, including credible policy and advocacy influence that contributes toward peace:

As mentioned above, the High Mountain Movement, along with other communities in the region, considers Sembrandopaz its principal accompanying organization. Sembrandopaz' support of

the movement has often consisted in promoting small and large-scale acts of reconciliation among leaders and communities that had been previously divided along the lines of the armed conflict. Strong prejudice was created between communities that were subjected to violence by the guerrilla and others by paramilitary or military forces, and Sembrandopaz has supported community efforts to recognize prejudice, fear and distrust, and dialogue with the purpose of building a resilient, diverse movement that is inclusive to all members of the region, no matter their histories. Only a year after their nonviolent mobilization, this movement is considered the primary voice for the rural region of the municipality, and has moved rural and victims' issues to the forefront of the municipal and departmental government agendas. Furthermore, Sembrandopaz has been instrumental in bringing various different actors to the negotiating table to encourage dialogue about policy development in the region. Sembrandopaz has strong relationships with the Victims' Unit of the national, departmental and local government, and maintains constant dialogue with them about the implementation of victims' reparations. In that and other efforts to promote better policy, with and within other organizations and branches of government in the region, Sembrandopaz consistently seeks spaces for active and substantial participation from community organizations in the planning and execution of projects. For example, Sembrandopaz brought together the departmental Victims' Unit, the municipal Agricultural Extension Office, leaders of the High Mountain Movement, and a representative of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) to develop a municipal agricultural project that focuses on cooperative and direct marketing of locally produced agricultural goods.

Tell us a story about this organisation or agency's peace work:

In June 2013, the leaders of the regional Non-Violent Movement of the High Mountain Zone realized that a huge percentage of participants in the movement were youth, but there was little attention being paid specifically to them. They invited Sembrandopaz to accompany them in creating a parallel youth organization whose basic mission is to recognize the youth population in the region, get to know them, their opportunities, obstacles, and life dreams, and form community-based groups in a regional network that make proposals and advocate for the youth in the region. The organization requires equal participation by young men and women in leadership and promotes participation by young women on all levels. Sembrandopaz works in training the group in good organizational practices, as well as participatory processes and leadership skills. Additionally, Sembrandopaz implements a Transformative Education curriculum with the group to promote learning and reflection on themes such as nonviolent strategies, conflict transformation, human rights and dignity, and advocacy.

The youth in the movement are very focused and motivated to work for the good of their communities. At the time of the formation of the group, the co-coordinators, a young man and young woman, with many other members, had been pursuing options to work or study outside their region, but had been held back by lack of financial resources or complications in paperwork. For example, in Colombia, all young men are required to serve in the military, but there is an exemption for young men who are victims of the armed conflict. Because of a lack of government presence in the region, many young men have not been able to access the legal route to receive their waiver of service, and so are prevented from studying or working in all formal institutions, where the waiver is a requirement. These youth have enthusiastically jumped into the organizing work with their communities, as it not only allows them to stay living on their land with their family and friends, but also creates a space where they can demand that rights and opportunities be guaranteed in their communities. Instead of leaving to chase opportunities far from home, they can stay firm and pull opportunities toward their communities for a collective benefit for all.