

## **SPEECH – El-Hibri AWARD/RECOGNITION (WASHINGTON, 15 OCTOBER 2014)**

We know so many people, committed to justice and peace from the day they are born until they die, who never receive recognition but repression and violence instead. Why they are not here? Because of the social order that negates the principle of “recognition as equals”<sup>1</sup>. We struggle against that!

With this recognition, we now have a privilege, and the task is to share it. So Carlos Moreno is here, representing the families of victims of the current war in Mexico, who struggle courageously for truth and justice. In the struggle for justice and truth, I also find inspiration in the little I know of the life of IbrahimYahia El-Hibri (1936-2007), who dedicated his financial resources obtained from telecommunications and biotechnology to support poor children, particularly the orphans from the war in Lebanon, and to promote education for peace and nonviolence.

This recognition from the El-Hibri Foundation completes a circle in my life. In August 1993, I participated in a nonviolent action of interposition for peace, placing our bodies between the warring parties in Bosnia in order to prevent the genocide of Muslims and to end the siege of Sarajevo. During that same year, the work of our ecumenical community in Cuernavaca with street children increased. Four months later the war broke out in Chiapas with the Zapatista cry of "Enough!" (¡Ya basta!) and also our group called “Thinking Out Loud” (Pensar en Voz Alta) emerged. Now in 2014, all of us involved in these "experiments with truth" receive recognition from an ecumenical Muslim foundation that was born from humanitarian work on behalf of orphaned children of war in Lebanon. This is very moving for me and a source of great joy. I am deeply grateful to the Good Spirit that it is an ecumenical Muslim foundation that extends this recognition to an ecumenical Christian.

It also gives me great joy to be recognized here along with three young scholars who work for peace. I deeply believe in working with young people, not just to remain young ourselves but because of their ability to challenge the established order and the normalization of the inhuman.

### **1-Who are we?**

Personally, the last thing I would have imagined is to be here, but as the Tao says: if you are going to the north, walk towards the south; or as a great teacher of nonviolence in Mexico, Father Donald Hessler, used to say: “God has a great sense of humor”.

The first question that arises from this recognition is: Why me/us?

It is a pleasure to know of previous winners, whose work is so valuable, and that there was a broad and pluralistic selection process that included organizations and individuals with deep knowledge of the subject. It’s very clear to me that many other persons who were nominated could just as well be here instead of me. I would also add that the highest form of recognition in the almost 30 years of group work in the field has always been the social reproduction of young

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Piaget. *El criterio moral en el niño*. México, Ed. Roca, 1985, pp. 9-90

people, children, and adults whose struggles and lives have taught us so much and who have been able to learn and apply strategies and actions for peace and nonviolence and to teach them to many others.

It is good to start with the 'truth': I'm just only one among many who are struggling together. Certainly I am passionate about this culture and the groups I work with, and most of all about my wife Myriam and my son Joaquin who are the beginning and end of everything for me.

I would like to mention those groups that have been particularly important in my work and commitment to social justice. First, Service for Peace and Justice (SERPAJ), a Latin American organization working for peace and nonviolence especially with the poor and marginalized, and joined in México with the women of the Grail. Second, the Collective "Thinking Out Loud" with whom, together with the Program for Research on Social Change (PICASO) from Argentina, we have conducted research on the human cost of war and militarization in Mexico. With SERPAJ and Thinking Out Loud, we have also carried out nonviolent direct actions, participated in peace camps, and assisted with the autonomous education process of the Zapatistas in Chiapas. Third, "Walking Together" an alternative education project with street children in Cuernavaca. Fourth, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) founded by the poet Javier Sicilia and the victims of war in Mexico. Fifth, the Peace and Nonviolence Youth Team of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Finally, for the last four years I have worked closely full-time on peace and nonviolence with IF and the Appleton Foundation.

Behind this culture, serving as teachers and pillars, are the example and ideas of Father Donald Hessler, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Mandela, Thich Nhat Hanh, many nonviolent revolutions, Juan Carlos Marin, Jean Piaget, the Zapatistas, Las Abejas and Bishop Samuel Ruiz, families of victims of the war in Mexico, and the children, families and workers who live on the streets. I am the one called upon to be here in the flesh, but as you can see there are many people in these collective experiences of what we call "ant work", which is the name of a graphic-novel style booklet we did about the war in Chiapas. This is undeniably a recognition of the collective work of many, united in outrage at the injustice and in the happiness we find in learning and struggling together.

The formula for these "experiments with truth" (as Gandhi would call them) is simple: Knowledge (rooted in reality)/reflection/consciousness raising + action (whether in solidarity/support or in struggle) + collective/community work.

## **2 THE STATE OF POWER IN MEXICO IS WAR**

If this recognition is about peace and nonviolence, why talk about war and violence? Both realities are part of the same complex process, with different but inseparable faces, and you cannot build one without knowing the rules of operation of the other. The big challenge we have always had is to link these seemingly opposing but complementary sides in action and reflection, the latter being the first nonviolent weapon that an individual or a group has.

To receive a prize for peace in a country with a growing war poses many challenges. Mexico is a

country beset by “acts of war”<sup>2</sup> against all social sectors, whose most visible face is the human cost: the executed, disappeared, kidnapped, displaced, wounded, unjustly imprisoned, extorted, threatened, and the victims of many other crimes aimed at the control of people and of the material resources of specific territories within the country.<sup>3</sup>

The official image of a "war on drugs" is false. In reality it is a war within capitalism (a very big business) for the monopoly control of illegal merchandise, with opposing groups that are carving out their own territory and that increasingly are characterized by the interconnection between organized crime, the business sector and the apparatus of government at all levels, including the armed forces.

This war mixes at least three types of violence:

- A war where Mexicans kill Mexicans; such clashes cannot be denied.
- A “mass extermination” (in official figures, more than 100.000 people dead in 5 years and 27,000 missing from 2006 to the present)<sup>4</sup>.

This mass extermination extends beyond the immediate victims to their families who have been denied justice and who are often themselves criminalized, threatened and even killed. Yet we have seen them go from great pain and social isolation to become heroic defenders of human rights, forming numerous organizations focused on the demand for justice and for the truth about what happened to their loved ones.

- The first two types of violence obscure the traditional "targeted killing" of social activists, defenders of territory and human rights, journalists, etc. For the MPJD, it is essential to keep in mind examples of our own victims and their struggle to demand truth and justice: Pedro Leyva, Nahua indigenous community of Ostula which is fighting for its land and autonomy, killed in Ostula on October 6, 2011. He was scheduled to participate in the 2nd Dialogue with former President Calderón a week later on October 14. Nepomuceno Moreno, father and exemplary activist who searched for his missing son. Nepomuceno was killed in Hermosillo on November 26, 2011. Trinidad de la Cruz, highly respected leader in Ostula, kidnapped and executed on December 6, 2011 in his territory while participating in a human rights accompaniment mission organized by the MPJD. On that same day, in Petatlán, Guerrero, Eva Alarcón and Marcial Bautista of the Organization of Peasant Ecologists of the Sierra del Sur (OCESPCC) were disappeared. During that same period, in the Purepecha autonomous county of Cheran, which had been very close to the MPJD since its founding, several villagers were killed, including Urbano Macías and Guadalupe Jerónimo. On October 22, 2012 in Chihuahua, two founders of Barzón were treacherously murdered. Ismael Solorio and Manuela Solís were fighting for their land and water. They had participated in the first march of the MPJD from Cuernavaca to Mexico City, when the movement was founded.

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<sup>2</sup> Juan Carlos Marín. *Los hechos armados. Argentina 1973-1976. La acumulación primitiva del genocidio*. Buenos Aires, Ed. La Rosa Blindada, P.I.C.A.S.O., 3ª. Edic., 2007, p. 47

<sup>3</sup> See “The Bourbaki Report. The human cost of the war to build a drug-trafficking monopoly in México (2008-2009)”: <http://www.serpajmx.org/#!THE%20HUMAN%20COST%20OF%20THE%20WAR%20/zoom/c9vn/i1v4v>

<sup>4</sup> Raúl Flores. “Arranca la búsqueda de desaparecidos” in *Excelsior*. México, 23 febrero 2013.

All of these were exemplary human beings in the history of Mexico. They gave everything they had to the struggle for justice. In not one of these cases has justice been done.

Another example of targeted killing is Guerrero where, in just the latter part of 2013, about 20 social activists were killed. Currently there is a truly national drama unfolding in Guerrero: at least three Ayotzinapa student teachers, who are known for their social activism, were killed along with three bystanders on September 26 in Iguala, and 43 remain missing.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, the apparatus of power has imprisoned activists with impunity, in some cases planting evidence. These include social movement leaders such as Mario Luna and Fernando Jiménez from the Yaqui tribe, which is resisting the construction of the Independence aqueduct in Sonora; Nestora Salgado, Marco Antonio Suástegui, Arturo Campos, Gonzalo Molina, Bernardino García, Angel García, Eleuterio García, Abad Ambrosio, Florentino García, Benito Morales and Samuel Ramirez of the community police force known as the Regional Network of Community Authorities (CRAC) in Guerrero; Enedina Rosas and Juan Carlos Flores for their leadership of the resistance to the Huexca gas pipeline (Puebla-Tlaxcala-Morelos); Francisco Santíz, a Zapatista prisoner; and Dr. José Manuel Mireles, leader of the self-defense forces of Michoacán.

Thus, in today's Mexico the actors most determined to try to “stop the war” and resist its inhuman outcomes have been the two main types of victims: communal and individual social activists. They include peasant and indigenous communities as well as urban neighborhoods that resist unlawful dispossession of their lands, culture and natural resources by large transnational mining, timber, and water companies, mega-stores, etc. In Mexico today, there is a large number of local resistances that are deeply nonviolent and that are becoming more interconnected but who have not yet reached the stage of non-cooperation and civil disobedience.

This situation of war and extermination is closely related to a growing economic crisis. Mexico has an economy characterized by very high levels of informal employment and unemployment. Consequently it is not surprising that organized crime generates more than 600,000 direct jobs and comprises one of the principle sources of employment in the country.<sup>6</sup>

The mechanisms that have shaped the process that has unfolded have been several. A central one has been the installation of “social prejudice” (the first stage in any war); that is, to arouse the suspicion that a person or specific social identity is “involved in something” or “must have done something”, and that “if he/she is a delinquent, it is good that he/she was killed; that makes one less.” Such attitudes are projected onto anyone who is killed, kidnapped, disappeared, extorted, to name a few examples of the human cost. In this way, the victims are demobilized and left totally vulnerable. It also promotes an attitude of “nothing happens to me because I don’t do anything, so I had better not get involved.” In Mexico this stigma has been especially heavy for the poorest and most marginalized urban and rural young people. This also has had repercussions

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.serpajmx.org/#!/grid/c9vn>: Colectivo “Angela Esperanza”. *El estado de la guerra en México hoy*. México, 4 julio 2013; y *El ‘exterminio selectivo’ en México hoy*. México, 12 diciembre 2013. Note: An English translation of the December 2013 report, *The Selective Extermination in Mexico Today*, is available at this link. See also Luis Hernández Navarro. “Ayotzinapa y la matanza de Iguala” en *La Jornada*. México, 30 septiembre 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Israel Rodríguez. “El narcotráfico, el que genera más empleos: 600 mil, afirma experto” en *La Jornada*, México, 2011; Roberto Garduño. “Ocupa el narco tres veces más personal que Pemex” en *La Jornada*, México, 27 febrero 2013.

in everyone's social life: the isolation, the constant distrust, the closing in on oneself, and the progressive loss of public spaces, the "street", which was the product of a very long process of conquest as a place of freedom, protest and social equality. Now the street is the "territory of crime done with impunity". The most common phrase we heard during the caravans organized by the MPJD to different parts of the country was: "I cannot leave my house." The story of many disappearances begins with, 'He went shopping, or to work, and never returned.'

The political-military justification for war as a "war on drugs" is another mechanism of the process. It began with President Felipe Calderon, who took power in December 2006, and it has been supported by almost all mainstream media and especially by the United States. The Calderón government associated the idea of "peace" with "security" through the continual seeding of insecurity and terror among the population and the imposition of an armed and militarized peace, where the armed forces increasingly took on tasks of the police while disregarding the human rights of the individual. The current Mexican government of Peña Nieto seeks above all to promote the image of "Mexico in peace". It omits reference to the ongoing war and attempts to demonstrate that the tally of deaths and disappearances has diminished, despite the fact that civil society groups continue to document the fallaciousness of such claims.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most difficult epistemological obstacles in the struggle for peacebuilding, which is closely linked to the previous two mentioned above, has to do with the ability of the authorities and the apparatus of power to install in the masses, especially through mainstream media, "social infantilism" through what Jean Piaget would call "peripheral thought"<sup>8</sup> (predominant in every society) where all the attention is put on the apparent final result (in this case, the number of homicides), thus shifting the focus away from any reflection on the process (how was this result arrived at?). This is also complemented by the image of the authorities as a kind of "big brother" to whom we delegate our identity through messianic and magical-religious thought that the authorities know best and will take care of me. These are essential elements for the construction among the population of a "blind obedience to authority and to any order of punishment that we are requested to implement [against anyone else]".<sup>9</sup>

In the face of these challenges in Mexico, we are now undertaking as a preventative strategy many public workshops and nonviolent actions around the various ways in which such prejudice is installed, the mechanism of creating a scapegoat, social polarization, and the unleashing of the spiral of violence and impunity. One aspect of the struggle for peace with justice has been how to assist in rebuilding the social fabric and to slowly reclaim the streets, so that, for example, children can play freely in the park for a couple of hours or go out on the street alone in front of their homes, or so citizens can have discussion and organizing forums on the street. These are not easily obtained objectives in Mexico today.

Given the scale and proportion of violence in Mexico (and the presence of a relatively new

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<sup>7</sup> Fernando Camacho. "Tramposo manejo de cifras de desaparecidos" in *La Jornada*. México, August 24, 2014, p. 4. Also see expanded report in Fernando Camacho. "Con estrategia perversa, el gobierno minimiza las desapariciones forzadas: ONG" in *La Jornada*. México, August 15, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Piaget. *La toma de conciencia*. Ed. Morata, Madrid, 1976, pp. 256-258

<sup>9</sup> J.C.Marín. "Conocimiento y desobediencia debida a toda orden inhumana. Prologue by Myriam Fracchia" in *Cuadernos de NoViolencia*. Cuernavaca, Universidad Autónoma de Morelos (UAEM), Secretaría de Extensión, 2014

player, organized crime, that is extremely violent and enjoys near-complete impunity), it has not been easy to build mass direct actions in open spaces that directly confront the authorities, although the MPJD caravans and actions in many communities and neighborhoods have sketched out way to move forward in this struggle. This is a time when much of this social energy is in motion. People are trying to understand what is happening in order to break the feelings of helplessness and to take action. Therefore, the research and production of knowledge is more necessary than ever as a nonviolent tool in view of the unprecedented violence that we are facing.

So I come to share questions, and to learn about alternatives, rooted in peacebuilding and nonviolence, to the inhumanity that we face in Mexico:

How can we end the different forms of violence in Mexico, given the near-total impunity of the authorities, and do so through active nonviolence?

What have we learned that can be shared and might be helpful for those struggling?

### **3-EPISTEMOLOGY OF PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE: OUR CONTRIBUTION**

The work for peace - whether in education, in culture or in its construction - is full of paradoxes, of contradictions deep within ourselves, with the Other, and in the action of the social order on us. Thus, peace is built more on contradictions and questions than on certainties and answers. Awareness of this situation is the starting point of all epistemology of peace and nonviolence:

- I want my teenage son Joaquín to obey me at the same time that I teach young people to "disobey inhuman orders";
- For over a year now, I've been saying in forums and in articles that in Mexico it's necessary to speak less of peace and to speak more of justice ... and now I am receiving a peace prize;
- While I have tried to follow the path of nonviolence and conscientious objection to military service, those who have taught me most about nonviolence are from an armed military, the Zapatistas, where I and others have been students of the dignity, wisdom and firmness of these indigenous communities that are building one of the most original and radical experiences of what Gandhi called "Constructive Program."
- Mexican society, in large numbers, is asking for more police or army to protect them while at the same time, in each criminal gang there are policemen, former police or active or retired military.

**What reflections can we share from our modest experience that are not simply information but rather concepts for building useful knowledge to educate and to struggle better?**

1. For twenty-one years, in any course of peace education I teach, I put a strong emphasis on what I would call "epistemology of peace." I start the course with one of the most difficult - if not the most difficult - task for the human species: "to think" ... in a way that is original (Fromm<sup>10</sup>) or autonomous (Zapatistas, Piaget, Marín), to be able to make "observable" in us the process of the construction of our own "identity", and how the inhumanity of the social order -

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Fromm. *El miedo a la libertad (Fear of Freedom)*. Ed. Paidós, p. 232

totally normalized by the construction of ignorance - is being installed in part of our bodies that we reproduce without awareness. Konrad Lorenz<sup>11</sup> has a very challenging image about our species: "We are the missing link" (between animal and human). In that sense, from a cultural and social perspective, humanity is still more a desire, a project, than a reality: one out of six people in the world do not know if they will eat tomorrow; there is genocide on every continent even today...

Therefore, the biggest challenge in education for peace and nonviolence is in building processes and mechanisms of cooperation, and in particular to increase the individual and collective capacity to think independently, in order to move us forward in the long process of humanization of the species.

2. If someone asked me, what is the most essential task that unites us in the path of "humanizing the species", of nonviolence and the culture of peace, I would say that it is building three principles that for me are the essence of this culture:

a) Promote and build the "disobedience that is proper to inhuman orders" (*desobediencia debida a las ordenes inhumanas*) as Juan Carlos Marín<sup>12</sup> insisted. This implies an enormous difficulty and complexity. It must be constructed from knowledge and reflection, and not instead from the teaching of other "orders"<sup>13</sup>. "Disobedience is the final means to put an end to a tension. It is in no way easy."<sup>14</sup>

b) Have the ability to "humanize the Other". Get to know the logic of his/her individual process in order to de-construct (through reflection and /or action) the inhumanity that is in his/her body and identity.<sup>15</sup>

c) Consider the "means" like "ends". The relationship between ends and means is as intimate as between the seed and the tree. Gandhi said: "A good tree cannot come from a rotten seed."<sup>16</sup>

3. An assertive construction of the "principle of reality" is the key to a good start. It must be made from some kind of empirical objectification of reality (the diagnosis). In this way we can avoid falling into "recipes" of nonviolent action or routine action mechanisms that correspond to other realities. It will prevent mistaking illusion with hope. It will help clarify where our body is located, whether in the terrain of solidarity with those who struggle or in the same terrain of those who are locked in confrontation with a particular adversary who is opposed to their goals. In Mexico today, many sectors of the population, due to the drama of violence they experience,

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<sup>11</sup> Konrad Lorenz. *Sobre la agresividad: el pretendido mal (On Aggression)*. México, Ed. Siglo XXI

<sup>12</sup> J.C.Marín. *Conversaciones sobre el poder. (Una experiencia colectiva)*. Buenos Aires, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Instituto "Gino Germani", 1995, p. 34. The Final Declaration of the XXII Congreso of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología, in Concepción, Chile, in October 1999, stated: "So we postulate the urgency of collaborating in the construction of moral judgment that makes possible a rupture with forms of acritical obedience to authority, making observable and promoting the disobedience that is due to any inhuman order."

<sup>13</sup> Elías Canetti. *Masa y poder*. México, Alianza Editorial 494 p.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Millgram. *Obediencia a la autoridad (Obedience to Authority)* Bilbao, Descleé de Brouwer, 1980, pp. 152-153.

<sup>15</sup> J.C.Marín. "Conocimiento y desobediencia debida a toda orden inhumana" op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> M. Gandhi. *En lo que yo creo*. México, Mérida, Ed. Dante, 1985, p. 114.

have had to go not through solidarity to social struggle but from the apathy to the struggle, and it has not been easy. Not distinguishing these stages can activate the mechanisms of helplessness, fear or terror.

4. Accumulate moral force. This is the first major battle in a social struggle, winning the dispute over the moral challenge inherent in the conflict. This has to do with the ability to "create ruptures" (intellectual-moral-epistemological) in themselves, the wider society and the adversary.

5. In social struggles we have experienced the power of small communities or grassroots groups, which, if they are built from knowledge and moral strength (and not simply from volunteerism), can become "moral weapons"<sup>17</sup> (collective and individual). If these "moral weapons" manage to connect up with more people, especially the community that is directly affected, and publicly expose the truth of the objective of that struggle, the spaces of social struggle can be extended to unimagined levels. Examples from our own struggles include Casino de la Selva, Barranca de los Sauces, Alpuyecá, solidarity with the Zapatistas and other indigenous communities, the MPJD and the "Walking Together" alternative school.

This enlargement of bodies and spaces of social struggle is a key step in getting a substantial part of the "moral reserve"<sup>18</sup> of society to put their own bodies, whether in a massive way or selectively, in the street or in other spaces appropriate for confronting the oppressive power (with nonviolent actions that are proportional to those of the adversary!).

The moral reserve of a society appears in situations of great injustice and inhumanity when it is essential to build and clearly define, both for the society at large and for the authorities, a "moral limit" with regard to violence and impunity that it will not allow to be crossed. In Mexico, in recent years there have been four massive cries of moral outrage: the "Enough" of the Zapatistas in January 1994; the "We Are Fed Up" of Javier Sicilia and the victims of this war in March 2011; the "I am # 132" in 2012 from youth demanding democracy; and finally the "No More" in 2013 from Dr. Mireles<sup>19</sup> and the self-defense groups in Michoacán.

However, with the increasing spiral of war in the country in recent years, the "moral reserve" has been absent from the streets in the cases of: the murder of Beti Cariño and Yyri Jaakkola, two social activists on a humanitarian mission to the Triqui region (Oaxaca) of San Juan Copala on April 27, 2010; the slaughter of 49 children in the ABC daycare in Hermosillo; the slaughter of 72 migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, on August 22, 2010; the slaughter of 16 students in Villas de Salvárcar, in Ciudad Juárez, January 31, 2010; the slaughter of 52 people at the Casino Royale in Monterrey on August 25, 2011 ... Letting these events pass without a massive and public outcry of "Enough!" has endangered the moral limit of Mexican society, which up till now has impeded, at least to some degree, the growth of the war, the violence and impunity in the country.

6. Concerning nonviolent actions, Donald Hessler used to say that "nonviolence is the most violent form of violence, but instead of using weapons that seek to destroy the enemy, it wants

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<sup>17</sup> J.C. Marín. *Conversaciones sobre el poder. (Una experiencia colectiva)*, op.cit., p. 25

<sup>18</sup> Pietro Ameglio. "La reserva moral mexicana sale a la calle" en *Proceso*. México, 17 abril 2011

<sup>19</sup> José Gil-Olmos. "Sólo el pueblo puede defender al pueblo" en *Proceso*. México, 24 noviembre 2013.

the adversary to become aware of what is just and to change.” Gandhi, in a sense, complemented this idea by saying: "We cannot wait 30 years for someone to change. That’s why we use nonviolent action." And here there is a key point, too often overlooked, with regard to the forms of action: the radical nature of an action is not determined by the instruments/arms used (which are often fetishized) but by the type of action, its location, the actor to whom it is addressed, and, above all, its relationship to the intensity of the actions of the adversary.

Finally, I want to reiterate my gratitude to my wife Myriam and my son Joaquin, true pillars of my life; to my colleagues who have taught me so much and with whom we have shared so many thoughts and actions about building peace with justice and nonviolence; to the Good Spirit, ecumenical and universal, that accompanies us very patiently amidst so many weaknesses and so many possibilities on this long road of humanization of the species; and to the El-Hibri Foundation and its founder for their generous commitment to peace and ecumenism. The recognition of this prize calls all of us to renew our efforts to learn from and be closer to the most impoverished and to the victims of violence, who in turn are the richest in dignity, truth and courage to fight.

Pietro Ameglio Patella  
Washington, October 15, 2014