



Betty Williams, Ireland - 1976
Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Ireland - 1976
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemala - 1992
Prof. Jody Williams, USA - 1997
Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Iran - 2003
Prof. Wangari Maathai, Kenya - 2004

united for peace with justice and equality

Declaration in Support and Solidarity with Mesoamerican Feminists Gathered at the Americas Social Forum

As women Nobel Peace Laureates we look with great hope to the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala, October 7th-12th, as an opportunity for thousands of concerned citizens and social movements across the continents to affirm their commitment to women's rights and gender equality. We are optimistic that a powerful message will be communicated to governments about the urgency of protecting and respecting women's rights and the feminist leaders who safeguard and promote them.

With great concern, we witness the deterioration of women's lives and the unraveling of the social fabric, particularly in Mexico and Central America. Millions of Mesoamerican women live in extreme poverty making them vulnerable to labor exploitation and forcing them, increasingly, to migrate northward to find a better life and leave behind their young children and families. Furthermore, with the privatization and rising costs of healthcare across the region, women's health and maternal mortality have worsened dramatically while one government after another proceeds to restrict and reverse reproductive rights. Violence has become a daily reality for the majority of Mesoamerican women. Femicide has grown at an alarming rate, as has the impunity with which the majority of cases are treated.

We commend the courage and determination with which Mesoamerican feminists have maintained their struggle against these and other injustices. Sadly, the response of many of the governments in the region in the face of just and legitimate demands of feminists has been one of repression, harassment, and political persecution, which sends a dangerous message to the rest of the world.

On previous occasions, we have spoken out about the increase of state-sponsored violence against Nicaraguan feminists in particular; harassment for protesting the impunity with which sexual violence cases have been dealt or for protesting against the criminalization of therapeutic abortion (even in cases where a woman's life is threatened.) More recently, we are troubled by the attacks against the well-known feminist, Sofia Montenegro, who fears for her personal safety.

The Nicaraguan government –known historically for its aspirations to social justice -- is instead intimidating the people and organizations that fight for the defense of human rights. We encourage the Nicaraguan government to stop its repression against the Autonomous Women's Movement and other activists. In particular, we express our solidarity with Nicaraguan feminists who find themselves attacked unjustly for in their continued defense of reproductive rights and basic freedoms.

We share with all of those gathered at this important Social Forum the passionate belief that indeed, Another World is Possible. And that world includes women's full equality and freedom from violence. We urge all those who have come together in the name of justice and peace to stand firm that women's rights and equality is at the heart of our dreams, and actions, for a better world.