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Commemorating 16 Days of Activism in Guatemala

By: Erin Treinen



Guatemala City, Guatemala — Guatemala has one of the highest levels of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The country has been plagued with violence, particularly gender-based violence, throughout its history and present.

Gender-based violence can be prevented by key actions such as carrying out awareness-raising campaigns, providing education and economic opportunities for women, creating and socializing denunciation routes to report incidents of intrafamilial and gender-based violence, strengthening justice systems, and empowering survivors through healing sessions and legal support.

[Tejiendo Paz](#) carries out such initiatives alongside civil society organizations, Guatemalan government departmental delegations, and local government entities to prevent gender-based violence and provide psychosocial and legal assistance to survivors.

Funded by the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), [Tejiendo Paz](#) (or the Peacebuilding Project in English) works to reduce social conflict and violence and to strengthen social cohesion in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. [Tejiendo Paz](#) is implemented by Creative Associates International, in partnership with [PartnersGlobal](#) and [ProPaz](#), reaching 130 communities in 15 municipalities.

While [Tejiendo Paz](#) works to prevent violence and increase social cohesion 365 days a year, the project recently held special activities during [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence](#) that illustrate its multifaceted approach to strategically preventing gender-based violence.



16 Days of Activism is an internationally recognized campaign that begins on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until December 10, Human Rights Day. An organizing strategy used by individuals and organizations around the world, 16 Days of Activism calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

In the spirit of the 16 Days of Activism, *Tejiendo Paz* held activities to increase the visibility of gender-based violence in Guatemala, amplify the voices of women affected by the violence in its many forms and highlight the project's work in gender-based violence prevention.



Healing together: Association Miriam incorporates the Mayan worldview as a starting point to heal survivors of GBV, creating a sense of community among them through activities.
Photo by: Karen Chang

Private dialogue with survivors of gender-based violence

On November 23, in Santa Cruz de Quiche, *Tejiendo Paz* and partner civil society organization Association Miriam hosted a private dialogue with survivors of gender-based violence. Participants analyzed and reflected on the history of International Day for the Elimination of Violence and the current GBV statistics in Guatemala, discussed the challenges and achievements of three women leaders who are part of ancestral authority organizations, and heard the stories of four survivors of violence and their culturally relevant processes to heal and move forward. This activity increased the

visibility of the reality of GBV in Guatemala and collectively brought women together to discuss ways to address and prevent violence against women.

Presentation of community reporting route in Comitancillo

On November 25, *Tejiendo Paz* facilitated an event to present the community reporting route of Comitancillo, to denounce cases of intrafamilial, sexual and gender-based violence. In the Community Vision of Comitancillo, local leaders, authorities, women and youth prioritized intrafamilial violence as a trigger for conflict. In response, members of the Municipal Network for the Protection of Children, Teenagers and Youth of Comitancillo worked together to create, validate and socialize the



A clear route to denounce violence: A woman holds a printed copy of the community reporting route.
Photo by: Peacebuilding Project

community reporting route, supported by *Tejiendo Paz*. Leaders from community women’s groups attended the activity to commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and received printed copies of the reporting route. The reporting route has now been socialized and validated among Comitancillo’s local public-school teachers, Municipal Development Council, community authorities and leaders of women’s community organizations

Preventing violence against women, obstetric violence and racism: A dialogue with midwives



Honoring the energy of the day: Leaders from the National Movement of Midwives *Nim Alaxik* hold a brief ceremony to honor the Maya energy of the day, before participating in a dialogue around obstetric racism and violence.
Photo by: Karen Chang

On December 5 in Tecpán Guatemala, *Tejiendo Paz* held a dialogue between 23 members of the National Movement of Midwives *Nim Alaxik* on themes of obstetric violence and racism as well as the prevention of gender-based violence.

Sharon Van Pelt, Vice President of the Communities in Transition division of Creative Associates International joined the event. “What stood out to me most was both the breadth of the *comadrona* (midwife) movement and the depth of their support for women’s health that builds the *cosmovision maya* and profound spiritual guidance into the critical care they provide,” says Van Pelt.

Van Pelt and Sara Barker, Chief of Party of *Tejiendo Paz*, participated in the activity which included a short Mayan ceremony to honor the spirit of the day, a discussion of cases of violence and discrimination endured by midwives, and a presentation of a short video that highlighted the work of Guatemalan midwives.



“Their role in building peace is clear – they are mentors and educators in the communities they serve,” says Van Pelt. “The national movement of midwives (*Nim Alaxik*) connects women across a plethora of communities and indigenous populations who advocate and help protect women’s rights, including the right to live free from violence, and teaches them how to mitigate conflict.”

Following the dialogue, Van Pelt and Barker presented the midwives with training modules that covered topics related to human rights, peacebuilding, the role of midwives, and indigenous identity and practices.

“Partnering with this important movement builds a groundswell of informed and active citizens across its 22,000 members (and growing!), who multiply that knowledge via training and support to hundreds more women,” says Van Pelt.

Leveraging the role of midwives: Midwives are recognized as ancestral authorities in their communities and hold an important role in the prevention of gender-based violence.
Photo by: Karen Chang

Dialogue about the right of women to live a life free from violence

On December 5, *Tejiendo Paz* hosted a dialogue between Guatemalan government institutions and local leaders and youth to strengthen interinstitutional coordination for an effective response to violence. Participants included representatives from the departmental Office for the Protection of Indigenous Women, the Municipal Women’s Office, the Presidential Secretariat for Women, the National Women’s Office of the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, the Attorney General’s Fourth Special Prosecutor’s Office for Women’s Affairs, leaders, and members of the [Youth Voices for Peace Network](#).

Participants learned current statistics around violence against women in Guatemala and committed to training their staff to more effectively refer survivors of violence to psychological, social and legal support.

Panel Forum about bias-based violence against LGBTQI+ women

On December 8, *Tejiendo Paz* hosted a panel forum with participation from three members of the LGBTQI+ community including a lesbian woman, a bisexual woman and a transgender woman who shared their experiences and perspectives on the prevention of gender-based and bias-based violence. Representatives from LGBTQI+ organizations participated in the activity.

Tejiendo Paz is deeply committed to preventing gender-based violence in the Western Highlands of Guatemala and providing culturally relevant care to survivors, not only during 16 Days of Activism but also throughout the other 349 days of the year.