

Paz con mujeres

Boletín informativo



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Analysis of the Security Situation of Women Defenders in Colombia

By: Adriana Benjumea Rúa

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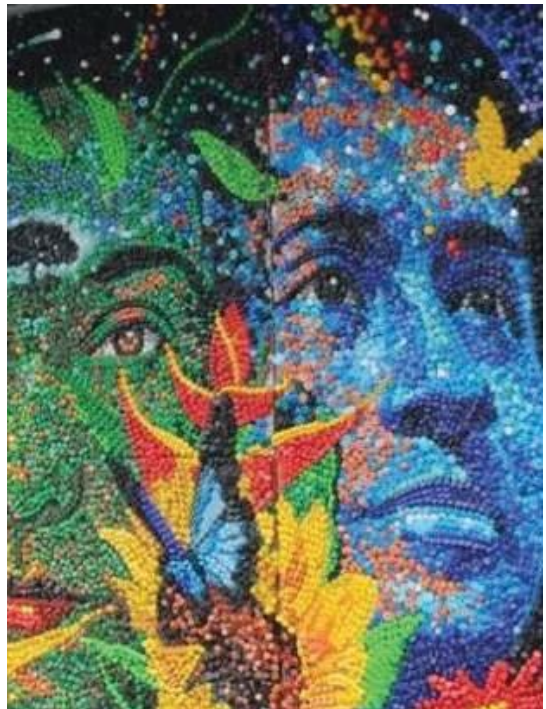
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Welcome

Pace with Women is a communication outlet dedicated to disseminate and recognize the diverse efforts women undertake to build peace in the midst of adverse conditions of the conflict and post-conflict. Based on this objective, we hope to invigorate some debates and public reflections, which may serve as a reference for other media outlets.

We understand peace building as a diverse and dynamic scenario, as a response to what occurs at the municipal, departmental, and national level, and in which women come together to rebuild the social fabric, strengthen local processes of peace and democracy, overcome poverty, and undertake processes of truth, justice, and reparation and to oppose the war and militarization of our lives.

This edition is aimed at showing the security conditions of leaders and human rights defenders in different Colombian territories, to share their efforts for peacebuilding, self-protection, artistic proposals for collective memory, and to increase the level of consciousness regarding its importance for the country.

We would like to extend a special thank you to the Project “Postcards for Memory,” which allowed us to publish its illustrations in this newsletter.

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Emilsen Manyoma

Emilsen Manyoma- Illustration: Carolina Parada

Who defends the defenders?



By: Adriana Benjumea Rúa

The expansion of the Clan del Golfo, new threats from the Águilas Negras, the increase in FARC dissidents, the strengthening of BACRIM, and the usurpation of the criminal brand are some of the headlines that fill conversations of defenders in the country these days. This is a difficult panorama at the national and territorial level, which impacts the social, political, community, and activist work of women defenders in different ways as their visibility and the strength of their actions increase.

Legislative advances have been insufficient to prevent the assassination of leaders, the number of which now surpasses 300 during the two years since the signing of the peace agreement in Colombia between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC guerrilla. According to reports the National Ombudsman presented in March this year, on average, every nineteen days a human rights defender is assassinated in Colombia. According to the most recent Corporación Sisma Mujer newsletter (September 2019), the percentage increase of assassination of female leaders and human rights defenders in recent years was 133.3 percent, between 2016 and 2017, and

14.3 percent between 2017 and 2018. From 2016 to 2018 the total increase was 166.7 percent*

Security and protection of leaders has not materialized in effective public policy designs, programs, and applicable strategies that can respond successfully to the risks they face and prevent leaders from being assassinated. The Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace sought to harmonize existing legislation to protect the lives of leaders and human rights defenders, but in practice, after the signing of the Agreement, the risk for women who defend others has not reduced, by contrast, it has increased exponentially.

Normative production, in spite of its lack of applicability and effectiveness, has been swift. Decree 4912 of 2011* which in its article 50

* Corporación Sisma Mujer: Comparative Analysis of the Assassination of Leaders and Human Rights Defenders in Colombia. Most recent revision: September 5, 2018.

**Decree “which organizes the Prevention and Protection Program for the rights to life, liberty, integrity, and security of persons, groups, and communities of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Protection Unit.” The Decree also creates the Committee of Risk Evaluation and Measure Recommendation – CER, REM, for Women, and designates the participation of four delegates from women’s organizations in the space in which risks are evaluated and measures for the protection of women leaders and human rights defenders are recommended, and in which institutions, international organizations, and representatives of women’s organizations participate to guarantee the relevant approach.

refers to the obligation to develop a differential gender approach regarding prevention and the protection of life, liberty, integrity, and security; and Resolution 0805 of 2012, which contemplates a Specific Protocol with a Gender Approach and the Rights of Women, have not been effective persuaders to prevent threats against and the assassination of defenders. The norm has not fulfilled its labor of eliminating the risks of those who defend life and the right to political and social action. The norm is even less sufficient in that it does not have the human, technical, economic, and political resources for its application.

In line with the former, on August 10, 2016, prior to signing the Peace Agreement, the government issued Decree 1314, which creates the Inter-sectorial Commission for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, with the objective to coordinate and guide the formulation, implementation, and follow-up of the Comprehensive Guarantees Program. The decree, which the government issued thanks to the work of defenders and organizations committed to the issue, was read as an expression of institutional commitment, although, to date, the State's will has not extended to the adoption of robust measures that persuade the different armed groups that view defenders as targets.

The work of women exercising visible leadership in Colombia has gone hand in hand with struggles against injustice, reclaiming land, the search for disappeared persons, and for peace. Today, their struggles are seen as dangerous because their social and political work threatens different forms of oppression. Today, trans leaders, representatives from ethnic communities, women who fight for humanitarian agreements, those who demand justice for victims of the State or who have supported political parties with leftist social policies have been threatened or lost their lives in a context in which the hope of the implementation of peace led them to believe it was possible to dissent without dying.

government, which took office in Colombia on August 7, 2018, are enormous with respect to protecting women leaders. According to what is currently known, its actions will seek to provide applicability to the content of the Comprehensive Guarantee Program for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, incorporating differential gender and territorial approaches. Today, human rights defenders in Colombia face a humanitarian crisis, which puts the Government under international spotlight. Today, more than ever, the government must respond to women at risk, not only through the adoption of material measures (methods of communication, cell phones, security schemes, bullet proof vests), but also through complementary measures that the law also contemplates and with the greatest deficit (health attention, income generation, education).

This situation continues to demonstrate that it is necessary to create security conditions for the development of the work of leadership and defense of human rights, recognizing that women leaders and defenders face serious and different risks, not only as a result of their work, in particular in the context of the armed conflict, but also for the implications of being a woman in a patriarchal society, which continues to discriminate against and violate their rights simply for being women. These factors, which have led to the recognition of women as subject to special protection, require constant recognition and guarantees for the effective enjoyment of rights. They must be ethical, political, and legal imperatives that the Government is called to fulfill.





Mural **Avanz de Tejedoras de Vida de Putumayo**

“Being a woman leader is doubly complex because it defies the patterns”



Interview with Nancy Sánchez, Coordinator of la Alianza de Tejedoras de Vida By:
Gabriela Eraso Villota

Alianza de Tejedoras de Vida of Putumayo is an association that brings together 65 women's organizations from this border department and, for thirteen years, has promoted respect for human rights with a gender perspective. For this work, the organization is receiving threats from actors whose objective is to end leaders who defend their territory. In the face of government incapacity and will to guarantee the safety of defenders in Colombia, these women are seeking new strategies to continue their struggles.

Nancy Sánchez, coordinator of the Alianza de Mujeres Tejedoras de Vida, explains the protection measures that they, together with other allies, are proposing to guarantee their own safety and continue with their work as peace builders. According to Nancy, these measures require more political will than military equipment or security schemes.

¿How is the context for defenders and leaders in Putumayo evolving?

Nancy Sánchez: What we are living here in Putumayo is very complex. New armed groups have been identified, the presence of Mexican cartels in the area, paramilitaries, and others who call themselves dissidents of the FARC. There is a lot of movement from many actors, including drug traffickers and paramilitaries who continue to commit crimes from prison (...) We have identified people who have returned to the area of Bajo Putumayo because these corridors are strategic for any type of illegal economy, which has led to a series of threats against women. Here it is a mix of everything, between drug traffickers, dissidents, and paramilitaries who continue their policy of exterminating leaders.



What leadership faces the most risks?

N.S. Among those leaders who receive the most threats are, for example, men and women who lead processes of coca crop substitution (...) and women's organizations that lead processes to bring the State to territories that have been dominated by armed actors.

In a context of armed conflict, women are disproportionately affected by all types of violences. Here, being a pretty woman and being young makes one a military objective for all armed actors or drug traffickers. Additionally, here we live in illegal economies that intensify these patterns of violence against women.

And being a woman leader is doubly complex because it defies these patterns, it defies these local powers and obviously this defiance brings greater perversity to the violence against them. Thus, the question, why did they use forced disappearance against Deyanira?* Why didn't they simply kill her as they are doing with so many people? Why didn't they let her family locate her body and grieve? Why use such a perverse crime that not only affects the family, which is living in death, but also affects all leaderships and the organization?

In this zone of Bajo Putumayo, there are many women's organizations that have assumed the leadership of connecting all these downtrodden communities that were victimized during the armed conflict, and they are the channel to bring programs like the Victims' Unit and the Land Unit, international cooperation, United Nations agencies... They are well-recognized leaders in the zone that affect these armed actors. In Tejedoras de Vida, we filed many complaints affecting various leaders; 14 were threatened via phone. At first they seemed to be extortions, but later they were also threatened because of their leadership.

*Deyanira Guerrero Tovar is a leader and member of the organization of El Placer, municipality of Valle del Guamuez. Member of the Alianza de Tejedoras de Vida, she has been missing since May 2 of this year. Deyanira had received threats through pamphlets circulating in Bajo Putumayo. <https://bit.ly/2K6wDrc>

What is your opinion of the actions and protection measures the government has adopted?

N.S: I have a double version: on the one hand, I'm completely against hard protection measures from the UNP (National Protection Unit) that don't work at all. Giving a leader as an alternative an armored car or a vest or bodyguards doesn't make any sense, and it's very masculine. Maybe for male leaders this modality is accepted, this spectacle every time they go from one place to another or having armed men accompanying them. This gives them power.

In the case of women leaders, especially rural ones, having a bulletproof vest creates more risk. So, I think in this the government should rethink its strategies with a gender perspective.

On the other hand, in institutions such as the Attorney General and the National Ombudsman, the gender liaisons and those responsible for women's security propose interesting actions to integrate the vision of women leaders into these protection measures.

We have a very interesting process led by Sisma Mujer that has connected us with all this institutionalism. We are experimenting here with a pilot project of a security roundtable for women, developing with them what alternatives for protection could improve the security of women in many places here in Putumayo.

What protection measures does the Alianza propose?

N.S: We are in this process of creating a participatory mechanism where women develop their protection initiatives. As a result of what happened to Deyanira, and led by Sisma Mujer, Sisma convened the Roundtable for Guarantees and Security in Putumayo with a gender perspective, and from this meeting, here in Puerto Asis, which was July 5 and 6 this year, we came up with the idea to create a Working Group on Follow Up of Women's Security Situations, with the participation of all the women's organizations, indigenous representatives, Afros, las Tejedoras, from the Route, other organizations, and the strength of the women here.

In these meeting we did an exercise identifying what they consider to be risks and what they think would be appropriate security measures. We are working in this, but it is a mechanism we think that together with State institutions, like the Ombudsman, the Attorney General, the departmental governments and representatives, we can create communication channels and more effective action plans against potential acts of violence or threats to women leaders. In this way we are trying to develop a more comprehensive protection strategy not limited to these hard mechanisms of military or police forces.

In this Working Group, in coordination with, for example, institutions and the community, we came up with ideas like a security network using Whatsapp, to give recommendations or make early alerts. There are a lot of ideas that came out of this first meeting and that we will work on during the second meeting. I think we have to hone them and show there are simple and not overly complicated alternatives to improve security.

To this end, among the proposals women identified for their protection, they proposed, for example, things that may be very easy for the State, like lighting in an area so women passing feel safe. For example, an Afro woman told us, "put a light where women and girls have already been raped." Or expand cell phone coverage in a truly complex are where

serious things are happening. These are things that can be done, and that are more political will than anything else.

I'm tired of traditional security mechanisms; I don't want to send another complaint regarding threats because these complaints go to all the offices here in Mocoa, are sent to Bogotá, and come back to me four months later asking me where the threat is and what measures we have taken for security? Often I feel powerless because I don't have any recourse to get a woman out in a difficult moment, or have the available budget to accelerate protection and save lives. One of the most urgent needs is to have an emergency fund for women and their families. They don't leave alone, ever! This is a gender perspective and we have to consider these types of options as well.

How has your community received these initiatives?

N.S: Well women's organizations responded strongly to the Security Working Group. A lot more women than we thought would attend came to the first meeting, with great interest, really concerned about what is happening in their communities. We are building it; we have to give it teeth, tools, and power to respond to the challenges of Lower and Mid Putumayo.

How do you deal with the fear and risk of being defenders?

N.S: What do we do to deal with the fear? I'll have to get back to you on that one.



“When you get started as a leader, you have to stay until the end”



Interview with Eulalia Escalante, member of Narrar para Vivir

By: Leire Otaegi



Escalante liderea de Narrar para Vivir

Eulalia Escalante - Leader of Narrar para Vivir

If violence marked its past, resilience and bravery are present in Montes de María. Located between the departments of Sucre and Bolívar, the numbers show the intensity the violence reached in this sub region of the Colombian Caribbean. Its wounds still fester. Massacres, deaths, disappearances, displacement, sexual violence... Paramilitaries, guerrilla, drug traffickers...

With horror and fear governing these lands, in 2000 the women's collective Narrar para Vivir was born. Women victims and/or survivors of all the armed actors who find the necessary oxygen to move forward through the word. With a strategy of women's civil resistance, eighteen years after they have become a reference in peacebuilding in Colombia. Eighteen years later, they continue to receive threats and be targets of the armed groups who seem to fear their words.

Ana María Cortés - Illustration Felipe Rodríguez



Led by Mayerlis Angarita Robles, today other women leaders have followed their steps in Narrar para Vivir. Women convinced that together they will not allow themselves to be ended. Their voices resound and relentlessly they continue to demand their rights from an indolent State that insists on repeating its past errors, leaving Montes de María abandoned to its fate.

A commitment which has placed these women in the line of fire of these armed groups. One of these other voices from Narrar para Vivir is that of Eulalia Escalante.

How did you become a human rights defender?

I am a victim of sexual violence, and I have always said women should talk, that they should not remain silent, that they should tell their stories about what they experienced as a result of the armed conflict; because sometimes it seems that it is a crime for women to speak, but through telling they also release their pain. I am a person who wants women to narrate and tell so the world knows that in Montes de María there was also sexual violence by armed groups.

What is it like to defend human rights in Montes de María?

It is very dangerous. Sometimes there are threats and you have to leave. But I have always said that when you get started as a defender you have to go until the end, because the bad people don't want you to talk, that women defenders say what is happening in the territory. So when you speak the threats come. This is what they don't like, that you talk, that you tell what is happening. And, well, I got started and I'll keep going until the end.

What are the main risks women defenders face in Montes de María?

Even taking our lives, even that... The pamphlets... And as a woman, we're terrified, but we have this duty to defend the rights of women, of children... We were talking about how women are brave because we keep talking, and we cannot be silent for any type of threats or if they are tormenting us. Sometimes women think about our children, which is what terrifies us a bit, but we also give them strength; we tell them what is happening in our territory so that they also have the strength to take look out for themselves.

Is it harder for women to be defenders than for men?

Yes, because sometimes we apay even with our bodies. They sometimes stigmatize us and in the territory we are more branded as guerrillas; like they call us in the pamphlets: guerrillas. They do not know that we are the voices of women who have died for wanting to talk, and these voices were not heard. This gives us encouragement to keep talking. We don't care about the threats, we only care about talking.

Threats to silence the word

In her ten years of work in *Narrar para Vivir*, Eulalia's name had never been included in one of the threatening pamphlets that attempt to extinguish the voices of Colombian defenders. Until July 4 this year, the day on which her name appeared together with those of three other colleagues on a pamphlet signed by the *Águilas Negras*.

"I like this because it's in my blood. I like defending the rights of women, more in the sphere of sexual violence because it is something that as women it marks our lives and marks our bodies. But I had never been in a pamphlet, the first time. I told my husband and children that same night, but I haven't wanted to tell the rest of my family. They don't live with me and they are people who might get scared. They will tell me not to keep going out of fear, but we all have something written in our lives, and we are going to die at any time. I am not scared of death. I keep fighting," she states resolutely.

The organization has a collective security plan and the police undertakes rounds and visits. A protection without guarantees, according to Eulalia. "When you are threatened, sometimes not even the plans work. You have to be the one to take self-protection and self-care. I go home early; I don't say where I am going, even to my family. If I go out on one street, I return using a different one. Sometimes I dress one way then I will change how I dress; I dye my hair a lot, things like that."

For Eulalia the turning point when persecution and threats against defenders in Montes de María intensified is clear. "Since the national elections we have seen everything related to the leaders, because before everything was quiet. In Montes de María, which was so hard hit by the violence, by paramilitaries, we live with this unease that this could start happening again."

Her message for the new Colombian administration is also emphatic. “I would suggest it continue with the topic of the Peace Agreement. Why? Because with a peace agreement that opened up opportunities for us to continue thinking about our rights, to keep living, for *campesinos* return to their territories in the countryside, that they open roads during evening ours, because here in Montes de María, at six the roads were closed, and buses couldn’t pass, and today we can travel at any time without problems... And to defend all these women leaders who are working for human rights. This is the most important: respect the peace agreements.”

Although her loved ones advise her to leave the area if the threats continue, for Eulalia this is not an option. “It has also not occurred to me to go away. I’m going to stay in my territory,” she assures.

In response to whether she would like us to omit any information from this Corporación Humanas newsletter, she responds emphatically, “print it all.”



Sandra Yaneth
Luna

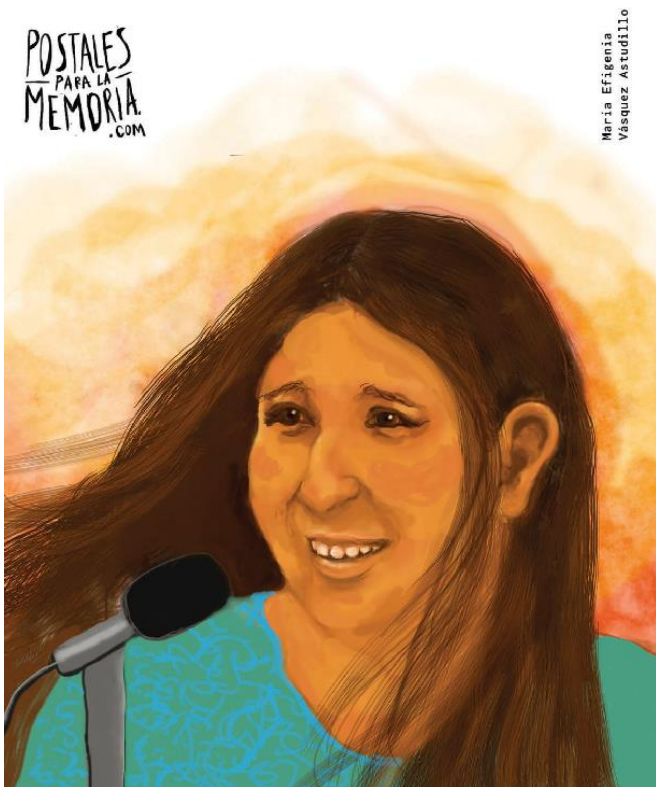
Illustration:
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Margarita
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Felipe Rodríguez





María Efigenia Vásquez
Astudillo

Illustration:
Juliana
Baquero



Liliana Astrid Ramírez
Martínez

Illustration: John
Fernández



Giving faces to numbers



Project: “Postcards for Memory”

By: Leire Otaegi

The project “Postcards for Memory” stems from a fateful week in Colombian history, the product of indignation. One week, that of July 4, 2018, in just two days, four social leaders were assassinated, three of them women. Ana María Cortés, secretary of the presidential campaign of Gustavo Petro, was assassinated in Cáceres. One day later, three leaders lost their lives: the social leader Luis Barrios Machado in the municipality of Palmar de Varela, Atlántico; leader Felicinda Santamaría, in the municipality of Quibdó, Chocó, and Margarita Estupiñán, the president of the Community Action Board in the El Recreo neighborhood, located in the Vaquerío *vereda*.

A slow burning extermination sparked the indignation of a large part of Colombia, where the assassination of human rights defenders is becoming just another note in large media outlets. In this context, a group of artists and graphic designers began to think of a project to channel the accumulated pain, rage, and indignation. From this, the project “Postcards for Memory” was born.

“This was the moment we said, ‘we have to do something.’ We wanted to find a vehicle different from traditional media to carry this message (...) With some friends we were already discussing this issue and thinking about how we could address it and increase the visibility of these stories because we really felt that what was happening was getting lost in the news. It has been a long time; this is not from this year. They have been killing leaders since 2016 and they are not taking the necessary measures. Media outlets don’t say anything about it; the government doesn’t respond like it should... So we thought about another way to make this crisis visible, not only here in the country, but outside as well. We started to research the topic. First we did it with these four social leaders, we made these illustrations and we thought about the call for participation,” explains Johana Silva, a 31-year-old graphic designer and illustrator, who everyone refers to as Jo, explains.

Initially, “Postcards for Memory” worked with one person researching, another writing, and another illustrating. But the team, originally made up of five people, realized that 80 percent of the volunteers who responded to the call did so to illustrate.

“So we decided to open the call for people to join, to choose a defender or leader and begin to illustrate. We began researching with the little you find on the internet, because this has been one of the biggest obstacles we have had, that there is not a lot of information about the leaders. It is a topic that is not addressed much and the traditional, big media doesn't do it much,” Jo explains. She is currently leading the project together with the web developer and designer John Sanabria.

"At first we had more than 300 leaders and we realized that it was going to be impossible. We set the goal of having 150 leaders illustrated. We have set September 23 as the last day to receive illustrations because we have been doing this for two months and we want to close it, at least for this first phase. We do not want to stop at having people illustrate leaders; we want to start to make other materials with these postcards. We want to print them; we want to send them to different places in the world, so that in other places they know what is happening here in Colombia. We want to organize the topic of expositions. So we need to close this part to be able to organize all this. People have also written us to say they would like to make t-shirts, which is something we are not doing because we would like this project, which started as something much smaller, and we didn't think it would be so well received, we would like it to serve to collaborate in a real way with leaders or the families of assassinated leaders,” Jo explains.

In the era of the internet and social networks, this project recovers a form of communication that has fallen into disuse. “We thought it was a nice thing because, even though it is very sad, it is a way to cause a greater impact. Returning to the

traditional form of postcards, and that they reach many people in other countries. Even here, in Colombia, we have realized that a lot of people are not really aware of what is happening. Like they become numbers, and what we wanted is for them to stop being numbers, to tell the struggle of each leader, why they were fighting, to see them as real people and not just another death. It is something very important for us, to rescue the struggles of these leaders.”

Johana confesses that in spite of being less numerous as compared to men assassinated, the stories of women leaders have had a greater impact among the illustrators. “The volunteers have connected so much more with the stories of the women. We have the profiles open for people to choose and illustrate, and with some women leaders a lot of people have connected; I don't know if it's because they are women. This project began as a result of the assassination of AnaMaría, Felicinda, and Margarita. Women have also had a key role in this issue of social movements.”

For this illustrator residing in Medellín, artistic expressions are key to reach young people. “I think it is a very useful platform. It is also very easy to portray all this pain and this indignation through art, in this case through illustration and drawings. I feel that through art you can reach new generations, so they know their history, because, as the saying goes: people are condemned to repeat their history if they don't know it, and in the end, the history of our social leaders is a part of ours, of all of us,” she concludes.

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Edición especial sobre lideresas y defensoras de derechos humanos en Colombia

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