

UNHCR Presents Nansen Refugee Award to Courageous Colombian Women



Geneva, September 30 (NNN-RHC) -- A courageous Colombian women's rights network was in the spotlight on Monday, as it received the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) prestigious Nansen Refugee Award in Geneva for its outstanding work to help victims of forced displacement and sexual abuse. The group, known as 'Butterflies' is active in one of the most violence-ridden corners of Colombia, the port city of Buenaventura. Here, illegal armed groups battle over territory and women are often caught in the crossfire. The Butterflies network of volunteers risk their lives to help women and their children in danger. Since it was established in 2010 Butterflies has helped an estimated 1,000 women and their families.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, presented the award and Nansen Medal to three representatives of the women's rights group; Gloria Amparo, Maritza Asprilla Cruz and Mery Medina.

Praising their dedication, he said: "Every day they [Butterflies] put their own lives at risk – in order to rescue abused and displaced women and children. Butterflies are truly a grass root organization and they help the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable region."

Drawing on only the most modest of resources, the women go about their work on foot or by bus or bicycle. As cautiously as they can, they move through the most dangerous neighbourhoods to help women access medical care and report crimes. This work, deep inside the communities, helps them reach the most vulnerable women, but also brings with it danger and threats from the illegal armed groups.

The Nansen Refugee Award, marks its 60th anniversary this year, and is UNHCR's top humanitarian honour. It also includes a medal and \$100,000 to fund a project linked to their work.

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