

# UPF Munich

## Peace Work in Columbia

by Robert Bentele

On Saturday 18 November 2017, the Universal Peace Federation Munich held an afternoon event dealing with the protracted peace process in Columbia.



Laetitia, a peace activist and student from Salzburg, who has worked with the Austrian branch of the well-known International Fellowship of Reconciliation, gave us an account of her work in this South American country.

She started off by showing us a video of reports and interviews with people from a village that had been oppressed by violent strife.

Laetitia lived for about one year in different Columbian communities, above all in rural areas, where along with other activists, she worked as a so-called protection supporter. These were communities that until recently had been coerced into involvement, often with armed groups and sometimes leading to fatalities.

With the support of the Austrian branch of the Fellowship for Reconciliation, violence-free zones were established where the local people could initiate various agricultural, educational or social projects. And these projects gained international recognition by the installation of international, of course unarmed, protection supporters who also kept protocols and reported what was going on.



Laetitia had to make her way by bus, horse and sometimes boat to the most remote areas and villages which were often inaccessible by road.



The listeners could feel Leticia's deep love for this country and its conflict-burdened people and her investment to bring a lasting peace, and gained a deep respect for the amazing courage which such work repeatedly demanded.

The establishment of peace requires not only involvement from the big political stage, but above all, people and NGOs who are willing to make an ongoing on the spot commitment with their love, willingness to sacrifice and strong moral values. Just as international concerns often bring their problems to Columbia, so is international support needed to solve those issues and their repercussions.

Laetitia gratefully received donations from the audience for her work, and discussions and questions continued over refreshments.