Estamos emocionadas y seguras de que tenemos un gran compromiso. La comunidad está muy feliz. Se siente dignificada y representada. Nunca imaginamos que los tejidos que elaboramos para mantener la memoria histórica de nuestro pueblo, se iba a convertir en una forma de sanar las heridas de la guerra y menos que íbamos a ser reconocidas como agentes de paz.

Juana Alicia Ruiz Hernandez from Mampujan Colombia on receiving the 2015 Colombian National Peace Prize. Even though Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America, the country has been embroiled in a conflict for over half a century. Since its independence in 1810, Colombia has lacked national cohesion. The country’s three Andean mountain ranges act as a natural barriers to integration. As a result of that and the societal divisions by class interests, Colombia has historically suffered from a weak state with large areas of territory in which the government is unable to exercise effective control.

The Colombian Conflict began in the mid-1960s as a low-intensity asymmetric war between the Colombian governments, paramilitary groups, crime syndicates, and left-wing guerrillas such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the National Liberation Army (ELN), Narcotrafficking. By the 1970s about a dozen guerrilla groups existed. Because of the war, about 220,000 people are dead and around 7 million have been displaced.

For about the last 5 years the president of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos has negotiated with the FARC. In November 2016, congress approved a historic peace deal. However, 50.2% of the population rejected it through a referendum. The parties are working on a new peace deal and earlier in 2017, the government began negotiations with the ELN.

Despite the challenges, Colombians working for peace are an inspiration for the process of reconciliation and healing. A process of reconciliation requires the active participation not just of the government and the guerrillas but also a wider commitment.
support from other sectors of society. [Photo of Ricardo at a meeting with people] The support of society and business groups and their commitment to the process is key [Photo of group hug] to reimagine and rebuild the social fabric of Colombian society. [Photo of women outside sewing] Women’s groups, [Photo of group of women and girls holding the award] including the 2015 recipient of the Colombian National Peace Prize, have been central to this process by participating in [Photo of women and men sitting at a meeting] peace talks and reconciliation efforts. [Photo of people at a picnic table eating and smiling] These groups have sent clear messages that peace is possible only [Photo of women with balloons that have been written on] when people join together as a community. [Photo of women talking to a man at a table] Many women’s organizations have developed an action agenda aimed at [Photo of women by water talking] healing the victims of [photo of women at the National Peace prize ceremony] traumatic events through a peace pedagogy methodology. [Photo of an audience at a meeting in an outdoor shelter] The focus of these actions is “learning by dis-learning,” [Photo of crowd of people with balloons and Colombian flags] which aims to transform the long-standing culture of violence with a proactive integrated strategy of social justice and equal rights for all.[Photo of people in chairs and around a table] The business sector has played an important role both as a victim [Photo of people in country side talking] and benefactor of the violence. Because of [Photo of a diverse group of people] their economic and political resources, the participation of these sectors is key to the success of the reconciliation process.[Photo of people with Colombian flags] In the face of the challenges and opportunities [Photo of women with quilt] that the peace process brings to this sector there have been efforts to rethink and implement programs to [Photo of a people leading a community meeting at an outdoor shelter] absorb the ex-guerrilla fighters,[Photos of soldiers marching, then of people at a community meeting, and of small group of people talking to each other} create educational programs and provide resources to peace programs to improve human rights and the environment.

[Photo of the woman walking on a dirt road toward a building with a mural. On her shoulder is a quilt] The inter-disciplinary symposium focused on the Colombian [Photo of crowd at rally with signs for peace] conflict and transition to peace, with a series of [Video clips of speakers and interpreters] panel presentations, [Photo of quilt] “Weaving Memory and Reconciliation.” quilt exhibit, and quilt [Video clip of women cutting fabric] workshop. [Video clips of workshop facilitator and the workshop participants as they do different community building activities] The series of complementary activities explored the transition-to-peace process through multiple lenses of arts and the humanities to raise awareness and education in the MSU community. [Photos of symposium participants and speakers] Additionally, to increase collaboration and exchange between MSU and Colombian institutions, Colombian scholars and citizen representatives from key NGOs working for peace came to MSU [Photo of MSU brick entry sign] to build upon and expand our diverse networks [Photos of group looking at quilt squares they created, talking to each other, working on quilt square and group photo] with higher education institutions, civil society, peace organizations, business
and industry. Ultimately, we opened a path for a MSU study abroad program with the University of Cartagena [Photo of Galia Benitez at podium introducing the panel speakers at the table with their interpreters] focusing on undergraduate research and dissertation projects by graduate students working in related fields.

[Photo of Juana with participant and then video clip of Juana speaking and the interpreter. The symposium’s featured speaker was Juana Ruiz, [Headshot of Juana] leader of the women’s collective, Mujeres Tejiendo Suenos y Sabores de Paz,[Photo of Juana with women and girls and quilt] Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace [Photo of Juana with women and quilts in Colombia], recipient of the 2015 Colombian Peace Prize. [Photo of women and others at the Premio Nacional] This group [Photo of women in Colombia sewing] of women sew quilts and tapestries to address trauma[Photo of Juana and another woman holding quilt squares] they experienced related to the conflict and then [Photo of Juana sitting on ground with fabric] begin the healing process. [Photos of quilts] Juana brought quilts from a series about the peace process and from a series about slavery.

[Photo of movie poster of We Women Warriors] Viewing and discussing the film, We Women Warriors, kicked off the symposium events. [Video clips of audience from symposium] Faculty, undergraduate and graduate students gathered to discuss the documentary that [Video clips from movie We Women Warriors] follows three indigenous women who use nonviolent resistance to defend the survival of their people caught in the crossfire of the Colombia conflict.

[Photo of Galia Benitez introducing panel at symposium] Assistant Professor Galia Benitez continued with those themes the next day. [photo of Galia, Emily Holley, and Elvira Sanchez Blake She incorporated symposium speakers into her two Madison seminar courses.[Video clips of quilt workshop and Ricardo speaking] Opening the morning was a panel of Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas, a human rights attorney and founder of the NGO, [Photos of Ricardo working in Colombia, leading a meeting, group photo with people] Sembrandopaz, Juana Alicia Ruiz, [Video clip of Juana speaking] leader of Mujeres Tejiendo Suenos y Sabores de Paz,[Photo of Juana and others in countryside with quilt] and Rosa Jimenez from the University of Cartegena.[Video clip of Rosa speaking]

[Video clips of Joni Starr leading the quilting workshop and participants] The speakers focused on the importance of relationship building, community and inclusivity.
[Group photo of quilt workshop]
[Video clip of audience at symposium] In talking with the Madison students and then again later to a broader MSU and community audience, Ricardo [Video clip of Ricardo and interpreter speaking]described the distrust among the community, corporations and state. [Photos of country side] Years of deception and alternative facts bred distrust. [Photo of men at a laptop in countryside] Elites took advantage of the people’s distrust.
The war became an excuse to violate human rights. All the different stake-holder groups strive for self-preservation which they have done through creative means. However, he works to now channel that creativity to finding ways of working together for peace. His group Sembrandopaz tries to open spaces for dialogue for trust building to reunite people who have been alienated. He stressed the importance of building relationships to affect change. In difficult times, he holds fast to his faith because with God, one is never alone. Ricardo closed by inviting attendees to get involved and described different opportunities. For example, grant proposals to international organizations often need to be submitted in English. Cyberspace allows for more involvement. A student could translate an electronic document from an MSU dorm room for his group back in Colombia. About 20 people signed up to volunteer.

Juana’s presentations to the students and broader audience in her featured presentation included her faith perspective that serves as the foundation for her work. In 2000, her village received news that the FARC had orders to exterminate everyone in Mampujan. The priest reassured them they would not. A radio order came through changing the FARCs orders. However, the next day, the paramilitary group, the AUC, accused Mampujan of collaborating with the FARC guerrilla group. After assassinating 13 villagers, the AUC forced every community member was out of their homes. Juana has witnessed the cycle of physical, social and cultural violence. They found that by helping others heal, move past the wounds and desire for vengeance that they were also healed.

Elvira Sanchez-Blake, associate professor of Spanish, discussed Juana’s work. Sanchez-Blake connected with Juana and other women’s groups in Colombia as part of a Fulbright project related to using artistic media to deal with trauma and transform from victim to advocate. Juana and other women formed a network where they sewed. The collective creation of tapestry was cathartic and allowed women to reclaim their voices and begin to heal.
memories as part of reconciling and moving forward to building peace. [Video clip of Emily Holley speaking at symposium] Including the voices of the victims in the peace process [Photo of woman holding her quilt square in Colombia] creates opportunities, contended Sanchez-Blake, [Video clips of Elvira speaking at symposium] for a more effective agreement and sustainable peace.

[Video clips of audience and speakers at symposium] Symposium audience members were moved by Juana’s and Ricardo’s presentations. Many in the audience were from Colombia and are at MSU as students, many on Fulbright Fellowships. [Graphic listing the student organizations] They, as well as other student organizations including, La Comunidad, undergraduate and graduate Spanish clubs, law student groups and centers, students from social work and the MSU Counselling Center, helped publicize the event. [Video clips of symposium audience and speakers] One attendee from Colombia remarked how important this discussion of issues is and how it does not happen in Colombia.

Symposium speakers also included students and scholars who studied the effects of the conflict on different aspects of society. Galia Benitez and her students, Betsy Borre and Quincy Kittle presented on how the business sector. [Photos of different groups of people at meetings in Colombia] They found that industries did not have much influence on the peace process but that while some industries, such as livestock and transportation, suffered due to the conflict, others benefited.

[Photo of Rosa Jimenez] Rosa Jimenez, director of the University of Cartagena’s [Photo of woman and child in countryside] Observatory for Forced Displacement, has served as a voice for many [Video clips of Rosa speaking at symposium] displaced people throughout Colombia. [Photo of University of Cartagena] As a public university, she and colleagues can be a part of [Photo of meeting in conference room] government’s efforts to address problems related to the conflict. She asserted that many Colombians [Video clips of Rosa speaking at symposium] are direct victims of the conflict but all Colombians are indirect victims. [Video clips from We Women Warriors] For example, the effects of so many children not receiving [Photos of women and children] formal education ripple into the [Video clips from We Women Warriors] economic, social and cultural sectors for the role the [Photo of women and children with Premio Nacional] children could have had as they grew up. Education is a key strategy for the peace process. [Video of Rosa speaking at symposium] Jimenez contended that if people can learn a culture of war and violence, they can learn a culture of peace.[Photo Rosa with colleagues in Colombia]

[Photo of Constanza Lopez] Constanza Lopez’s, from the University of North Florida, presentation demonstrated Jimenez’s point. [Video clips of Constanza speaking at symposium] Lopez shared the
work of youth in Medellin and Bogota who rejected violence and promoted social change through art. [Photos of murals in Medellin] For example, in Medellin’s Comuna 13, a group of youth [Photos of young people speaking and with murals] formally rejected the cycle of violence and crime in favor of beautifying the community with painting murals, artistic graffiti, and planting gardens and supporting others to do the same. They transformed and reinvented their previously notorious crime and violence ridden community.

[Photo of Alejandro]
Looking to the future, Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola, from the University of Michigan, [Video clips of Alejandro speaking at symposium] moved to the macro level. The Colombian Congress will [Photo of signed but rejected peace agreement] vote on the revised peace agreement as opposed to having a public referendum. [Photo of government officials talking about the peace process] He, along with Rosa Jimenez, and Elvira Sanchez-Blake, [Video clips of Rosa, Elvira and Alejandro speaking at symposium] outlined challenges the country faces including a [Photo of people at what appears to be military camp] disengaged majority of the population. All speakers [Photo of men working in a garden in countryside] stressed the importance of participation from citizens from [Video clips from We Women Warriors] all backgrounds and sectors as critical for [Photo of women outside watching a soccer game on television] effective and sustainable peace and reconciliation.

[Photo of women and children crying]
As a gesture of support for the Colombian people, MSU Assistant Professor Joni Starr, [Video clips of quilting workshop] facilitated a quilting workshop. Participants designed quilt squares based on what they learned from the symposium events, their thoughts and hopes for reconciliation, cooperation, and, ultimately, peace.