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Medio Ambiente

COP16 'We will not save the world with the current rules of the game': Bibiana Aido, UN Women Representative for Colombia



Bibiana Aido, UN Women Representative for Colombia

FOTO: UN Women. Miguel Varona

In an interview with EL TIEMPO, Aido said she hoped this summit would include women's voices in decision-making.

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The presence of women at COP16 was key to understanding the problems faced by those who dedicate their lives to preserving the environment, and also to understanding how the effects of climate change can exacerbate gender inequality. EL TIEMPO spoke with Bibiana Aido, UN Women Representative for Colombia, who explained the importance of women having real spaces of participation in the negotiation and decision-making scenarios of this summit.

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(Lea esta historia en español, aquí)

Why is it important to talk about the impact of climate change on women at an event like COP16?

Because, unfortunately, women suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change. The data tells us that. For example, 70% of poor people suffer from land degradation, and the majority of them are women, along with girls and boys. They are 14 times more likely to die in a natural disaster than men. In other words, there is a lot of data that tells us about these major impacts on women, but they are not involved in the decision-making. What we are asking here is that their visions, their voices, be taken into account. Not taking care of women is not taking care of the earth.

So what do you expect from this summit?

We know that we are not going to save the world with the current rules of the game. What we have to do is change the rules, and to do that, those who have never been at the table have to be at the table. We are talking about women, indigenous peoples, and especially Afro-descendant women and youth.

The key is for women's voices to be at the center of decision-making, and unfortunately that is not the reality. The majority of companies, for example, multinationals related to agriculture and forestry, none of them are run by women in Colombia.

Globally, only 15% of environment ministries are headed by women. Here in Colombia, we are lucky to have an environment minister who is a woman and also the president of COP16, but this is not the norm. So what we want to demand is that women's voices are at the center, that they are taken into account, because without women there is no sustainable development.

How is the UN supporting women in Colombia to be at the center of the COP talks?

We are supporting more than 100 women's organizations so that they can carry out their advocacy and demand that they be present in the decision-making process, that there be more data that shows the differentiated impact of climate change on women, but also data that shows their potential as agents of change, as saviors of development.

What kind of projects do you have?

The "Women Changing Their World" project, which we are carrying out with the support of Germany, or the Prodefensoras project, which is now entering its second phase. Thanks to the support of Norway, or the support we receive from Sweden to highlight the work of women human rights defenders.

Through these projects, we are trying to create protection networks, because we know that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for territorial defenders, and it cannot be that defending life costs lives. These projects seek to strengthen these women's organizations, to create protection networks, and also to support their livelihoods, their empowerment, and their political and economic autonomy.

Where do these projects take place?

With the "Women Changing their World" project, we are working with Germany, mainly in Magdalena Medio and Cauca, through a competitive fund for civil society. It is a transparent and open call, so that the organizations, not only the big ones, but also the grassroots organizations -

because we want to reach the small ones that never have access to resources - can generate and have their own advocacy exercise, so that we can articulate with both local and national institutions, so that they have greater strength when it comes to generating protection strategies.

The idea is to support their initiatives. We understand that without them nothing can be done for defenders. It is their projects that we support directly through these competitive funds to strengthen their structure and organization.

How many women have you been able to support and what is the projection of this impact?

Last year we reached 60,000 women in different parts of the country. We always try to focus on the places where women's rights are most violated. In this sense, the territory is our focus, our main point of action. Although our main office is in Bogotá, we try to have a broad territorial presence. We are in Nariño, Cauca, Chocó, the whole Caribbean corridor, and our main objective is to promote substantive equality between women and men, with a special emphasis on women's economic and political autonomy and livelihood.

And part of that, of course, for us is the role of women human rights defenders. Our main motto is: let's defend women who defend life, and in this sense we will continue to move forward with the support of all our allied partners who make this work possible.

Has the UN identified methods to protect environmental women?

They identify them. We do a lot of exercises and processes so that they can share experiences within the same territories in Colombia. For example, in the Prodefensoras program, we are in Chocó, Antioquia, Nariño and Cauca. There are many exchanges and networks among them to find out what are the best practices, what works in some territories and not in others.

We also create networks at the regional level that allow us to learn what women defenders are doing in Brazil or even in other parts of the world where armed conflicts also directly affect women's lives. In this sense, for example, in many cases it does not work for them in the territories to have an armored car at the door or to be surrounded by bodyguards. They prefer to create their own protection networks, safe environments, women's dignity houses, safe shelters, and work among themselves to strengthen their leadership so that they can generate their advocacy with a certain visibility, because we also know that the communication of these activities that they develop in the territories can also be an element of protection.

What are the consequences of the fact that so few resources are allocated to women environmental defenders? According to a recent report, less than 1% of global funding for climate change is allocated to women?

This is a problem because the views and voices of women cannot be taken into account, nor can all this accumulated experience. If they are the saviors of development, because they are not only the most affected by climate change, but also the ones who can be part of the solution, and their perspective is not taken into account. Clearly, we need to find a way to empower these leaders so that their views are on the table, and with less than 1% of official development assistance going to empower these leaders, that will be impossible.

One of the issues being discussed at COP16 is how to mobilize resources to protect the environment. What should be the ways to close the gap you mentioned?

There needs to be more commitment and responsibility from developed countries. There needs to be more commitment from those who are putting more pressure on the environment and climate change. In that sense, we hope that this COP16 can have concrete agreements that allow us to move in that direction. We know that we have three COPs in the last quarter of the year. It is important to have links between them and not to look at this problem in isolation. I believe that we cannot address biodiversity loss by looking at climate change on the one hand and gender inequality on the other. They have to be addressed together.

There is also something very important about building alliances. These issues are so complex that we cannot approach them from just one angle. It is important that we create synergies between institutions, international cooperation, official development assistance, the role of the private sector, the role of academia, the media and civil society as a whole.

We have to be very clear that the planet can live without us, but we cannot live without the planet, and that there is no Planet B. In this sense, we have to take care of it, because we cannot do without it.

What is the main challenge that Colombia faces in solving the problems of women environmentalists?


The main challenge is that women cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. Obviously, there is a lot of diversity among women in the country that needs to be considered and taken into account when making decisions. This intersectionality and the special focus on Afro-descendant,

black, raizal and palenquero women, indigenous women, young women, LGBTI women, of course, requires a special look so that no one is left behind.

Editor's note: This text is an artificially intelligent English translation of the original Spanish version, which can be found [here](#). Any comment, please write to berdav@eltiempo.com

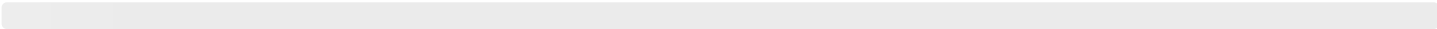
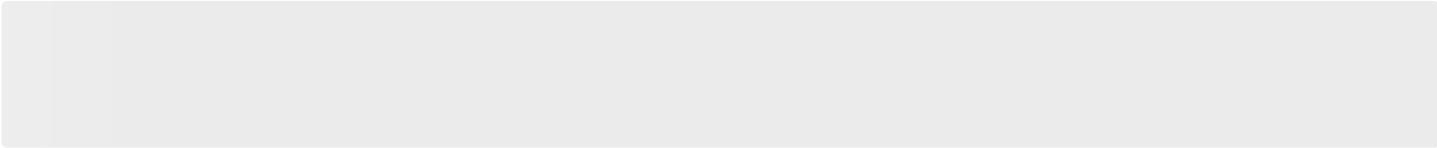
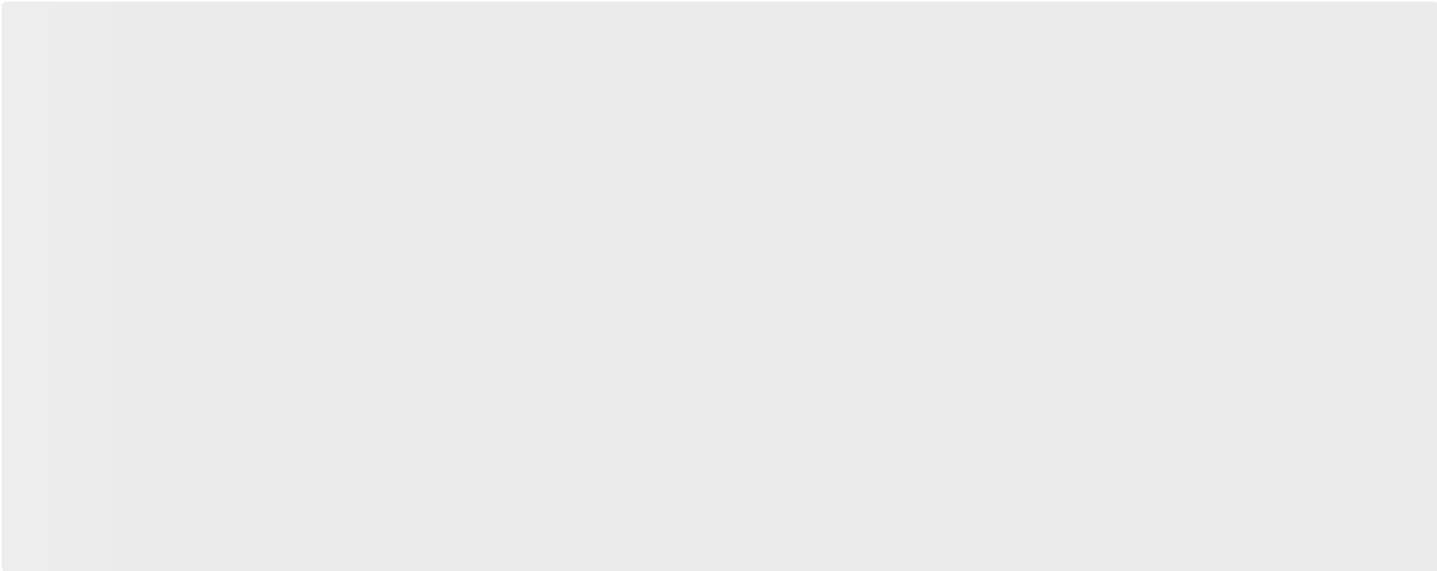
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