

# Interview with Alejandra Vera: “Our health care system provides breast implants for men, but not for women with breast cancer”

<http://womensdeclaration.es/2022/01/04/entrevista-a-alejandra-vera-en-nuestro-sistema-de-salud-hay-garantias-para-poner-protesis-de-pecho-a-los-hombres-pero-no-para-los-canceres-de-mama-de-las-mujeres/>

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The director of the Colombian organisation *Mujer, denuncia y muévete* (Woman, protest and move)

## **WDI: What does your organization do?**

AV: We are a feminist network. We address violence against women, we fight women trafficking and prostitution. We also campaign so that women can identify all the forms of violence against their bodies.

We develop projects thanks to international cooperation funding. We apply for that funding so that we can implement our projects.

Our organisation is part of *Iniciativa Pro Equidad* (Pro Equity Initiative), which is an abolitionist organisation. We are abolitionists of prostitution, reproductive exploitation and gender.

## **WDI: What is your role in Colombian activism?**

AV: Personally, I have insisted on the fact that being a woman is not a feeling. Many fellow activists have been attacked because of saying the same.

Here in Colombia, a law entitles people to two identifications. It means that men can choose their male ID or their female ID when they go out. When it comes to healthcare, they use their female ID so that they have priority.

Besides, Colombia has one of the highest breast cancer rates in the world. Here, healthcare is awful, and it won't be improved. However, trans people do have access to healthcare to have breast implants.

I have achieved a strong activism actually. I am deeply involved in the unconstitutionality of it all. At the moment, I am the national agent of a law watching for the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

## **WDI: Could you please discuss that law with us?**

AV: It is the law 12/57 for the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

I have always talked about the reality of all women and girls, prostitution, domestic violence and misogyny. Those are the issues I always address, how women are sold and abused. My flag is abolitionism.

In Colombia, many fellow activists are afraid of coming out as abolitionists because they do not want to suffer everything I am going through. I am being called names like “transphobic”, I undergo harassment from LGBTI liberal organisations...

Yet, the worst is not the war between organisations, but the war between the Colombian State and us. The Colombian State has allowed all of that new language and a law saying a feeling is much more important than biological reality. Therefore, when a man gets up one morning and says he feels like he is a woman, the State says: "Poor man, he can't live, he needs some privileges, some attention, etc."

**WDI: Are women reacting against this?**

AV: In Cali, for example, some women complained about women toilets becoming mixed toilets. Men were filming and harassing women there. I protested about this, and it was considered a more serious problem. Some people and associations made YouTube videos saying my full name because I had taken that position on this issue.

**WDI: You told us your organisation had been sanctioned because of your critics to gender identity ideology. Could you tell us how?**

AV: We are located in a border land, with women trafficking and prostitution rising. We have a lot of international cooperation help. It gives us the necessary resources for our projects to continue, so that we can reach affected women.

There is a very well-known organisation called *Care*. I met them first in Bogota. We framed an initiative, a project based on women and girls' reality. There are many girls involved in prostitution, including pregnant girls, girls disappearing in trafficking networks, girls being murdered...

When we presented *Care* with a project about them, everything was fine. When *Care* was finally going to give us the funds, the US coordinator of *Care* called me and said he could not work with "transphobic" organisations. I asked him what was the reason for him to say we were transphobic. *Care* accused us of hate speech, saying that trans women were women, even more women than us.

That was awful because we already had chosen some priority women to receive these resources. Those women were already organised and everything was ready.

This event led to more organisations blacklisting us.

Still, if you study our projects, our organisation is the one which has rescued the highest number of women in this situation. That is a fact.

**WDI: How is the fight against women trafficking and sexual exploitation going in Colombia?**

AV: It is a tough fight. The pro-sexual and reproductive exploitation organisations are part of the Government or Government related Committees. They are a Trojan horse. *Care* takes part at the Government Committee against human trafficking. *Care* is the one who included in the Committee all of the pro-sex work, pro-curb crawlers, neoliberal organisations. At the moment, the Government is working on a law to legalise prostitution.

Look, such an important committee includes these people, who are against the human rights of women and girls.

**WDI: How are the 25<sup>th</sup> November celebration going there?**

AV: We have always led the 25<sup>th</sup> November. I was the first woman to make a banner on that day here, in my land. I was the only one to go out in anger about women's situation with a banner. After me, other women started going out. Now, there is a whole network of organisations claiming they are feminists, but serving patriarchy. They say I am judging them.

Well, we were on that 25N event, which we have always organised, when about fifty trans people arrived wanting to carry their flag in front of the march. We said it was a woman-only march and they were not allowed there. Some liberal feminist organisations arrived and supported them when we sent them to the end of the march. They were carrying banners saying "Sex work is work" and they were wearing high heels, they were half naked... they were defending everything that oppresses and damages us. They said that, that was "femininity".

That moment was complicated. I had to leave to avoid danger because some armed man arrived on motorbikes. Look how those organisations allow women to be at risk on such an important day. We are sure that all of that was done to hide and silence us, so that their crimes would become rights.

Everyday women are becoming more and more invisible. Here, countryside women and migrant women are being told that they should get pregnant and sell their babies because here surrogate mothering is legal.

**WDI: That is awful. Is prostitution legal too?**

AV: Prostitution is not legal, but nothing is done to stop it. Women are called "sex workers" and it is said that if they do not want to do anything to stop it, nothing can be done. People think that they are not chained, but free.

We talk to those women every day because we care about their mental health. Many of them have suicidal thoughts because they cannot stand sexual violence every day, all the time. There are 14-year-old girls who come to us with sexually transmitted diseases or pregnant, saying men get into their rooms and rob them, don't pay and some police officers simply watch girls being abused and even raped. There are awful dynamics here. We are the only organisation against all of that. The others support that.

Now, girls have assumed the regulationist language. They say "my body, my choice", "this empowers me", "my vagina, my business", etc. Do you know Colombia has the first porno university in the world? In Medellin. It is supported by the big pharma, by neoliberalism, by the pimp left wing and the pro-curb crawler speech.

**WDI: Would you say there is a direct relationship between those pro-prostitution groups, reproductive exploitation and pro-trans groups? Are they formed by the same people?**

AV: Of course, they are the same people. You see, how intersectionality is understood here? The Colombian State has given priority to the "rights" approach and the "gender" (that awful word) approach. Then, trans women give work to the State people. That is the inclusion.

Those people are the women secretaries, the women directors... they are in public service positions in the State. And they are the same people with pro sexual and reproductive exploitation organisations.

They are all the same thing, the same people.

**WDI: Are you saying that men who identify as women are defending men's interests in the name of women? Do you have some kind of support?**

AV: Here, the only people supporting us are the conservatives, the super Catholics. They make us work in those terms. Then, we are accused of being like them.

It is very difficult for women to go out and march. They are afraid of being judged. Saying you are a feminist is like saying you are an extremist. You are demonised on social networks, people mock you... misogyny from the population and the State is overwhelming.

**WDI: Do you have any hopes? How is the fight going to carry on?**

AV: We are going to see what happens with the new law for the elimination of violence against women. I will be representing women in order to have that law respected, to make it refer to human females. It should be more or less all-right. I am going to do a follow up on that law and watch that it is respected in every land. I will do it from the Congress, from the Chamber, that is where I am going to be.

I will be asking international treaties like the CEDAW to be respected. That is going to be my role for the next four years. It is going to be hard, but we will see how it goes.

**WDI: Considering Colombian outlook, how did you manage to obtain that Law 12/57?**

AV: The State did not summon any rural women, nor indigenous women, nor disabled women. However, two trans organisations were enrolled.

I thought, what is this nonsense? So, when we enrolled, I contacted all of those organisations on the field who had no idea about that and told them "give me your data and I will register you". Luckily, rural women, the descendants of the African, the disabled and our abolitionist organisation won. That is how we got to rule all of it. That is a big step.