

## “The Killarney girls” Arpilleras

The Killarney girls of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, have been sewing arpilleras with support from Northern Ireland quilters for the last two years. The girls were all victims of government demolitions in 2005, losing their homes and all their possessions, during a nationwide "clean up" exercise that saw 500,000 Zimbabweans evicted and another million losing their jobs in the informal sector. The two large arpilleras in this exhibition depict their experiences. The girls meet every week and share time and fun while improving their sewing skills. They are now exploring ways to make their sewing income generating to help support their children.

This collective work has been facilitated by Shari Eppel, who works for Solidarity Peace Trust Zimbabwe [www.solidaritypeacetrust.org](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org) From conversations held while sewing, Shari recounts: “The girls have no comprehension of what the demolitions were about, and say they think the government was trying to kill people by taking everything away from them; not sure myself if I understand what it was all about.”

The process of creating this arpillera has enabled these women to share their stories, with confidence and purpose, to audiences far beyond the Killarney settlement. The arpillera ***The day we will never forget*** was exhibited at the University of Massachusetts in February/March this year which certainly empowered them. As Shari points out, these girls, similar to their arpillera, are at the start of a new journey: “Finishing a project has certainly given them an incentive, and they are all showing up for the group these days. We have just finished our second project and have also started making postcards which we would like to sell to raise some funds.”

This exhibit will be on display from 22<sup>nd</sup> August until 28<sup>th</sup> October 2012. It is part of a continuous series of arpilleras and quilt exhibitions in the Verbal Arts Centre curated by Roberta Bacic, which started on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and led up to International Women’s Day 2009 and beyond.

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/exhibit/vacquilts.html>



Photos by Shari Eppel

