

Arpilleras / Quilts that cry out, challenge and question

Catalogue

**Specially curated by Roberta Bacic for the Club de Madrid's
*First Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies:
building a world safe for difference, November 12-14***

**For comprehensive references visit
University of Ulster archive:
www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/**

*These are the challenges as expressed by the unmediated
voices of ordinary people and stitched together by
women of different countries using the media of
arpilleras/quilts.*

*Roberta Bacic, curator November 2008 Photos of quilts by Colin Peck © Roberta Bacic
Eva Gonzalez, assistant Photos of arpilleras by Martin Melaugh*

Arpilleras (pronounced "ar-pee-air-ahs") are three-dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. "Arpilleras" is actually from the Chilean tradition, an old regional pictorial appliqué technique from Isla Negra on the coast of Chile, whereby rags were used to create images and then embroidered on large pieces of cloth. Initially hessian, or in Spanish "arpillera", was used as their backing, and that then became the name for this particular type of quilt. Generally they are known as quilts or wall hangings. They are considered contemporary craft. Sometimes small dolls were made and added to make the three dimensional effect. Most of them were done in especially hard political times, in a particular context, and they reveal to us what the experience meant, since then. It is our task, at this conference, to approach the situations portrayed and also work for a present/future where those things do not happen.

"The Arpilleras are story tellers, for it is through them that these women have recorded and preserved the memory of a period of Chilean history that many others have chosen to forget"

This quote comes from Marjorie Agosín's book: ["Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love, The Arpillera movement in Chile 1974-1994"](#) with a foreword by Isabel Allende, 2nd edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, USA, 2008.

"Las arpilleras son como canciones que se pintan" "The arpilleras are like songs that one paints", said Violeta Parra, wellknown folk singer from Chile
http://www.nuestro.cl/notas/noticias/violeta_arpilleras.htm.

Arpilleras/ quilts that cry out, challenge and question

CHALLENGES	Name of the quilt/arpillera	size in meters height vs. width		hanging
I. Locating responsibility of social cohesion within government structures	Women chained to Parliament gates / Encadenamiento	cA	0.51 x 0.63	framed with glass
II. Create opportunities for minorities to be consulted	Council: listen to us! / Municipio: ¡escúchanos!	pA	0.50 x 0.50	textile
	We want DEMOCRACY/ Demandamos DEMOCRACIA	cA	0.37 x 0.47	textile
III. Monitor structures and policies to ensure they are supportive of social cohesion	A glass of milk for each child / Un vaso de leche para cada niño	pA	0.58 x 0.41	textile
IV. Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual	Truth & justice for the disappeared/ Verdad y justicia para los desaparecidos	pA	0.40 x 0.50	textile
	Create space for women's rights / Crear espacios para los derechos de la mujer	cA	0.37 x 0.50	textile
V. Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against	Who carries the external debt? / ¿Quién carga con la deuda externa?	pA	0.43 x 0.50	textile
	People need work / La gente necesita trabajar	pA	0.27 x 0.32	textile
	Prices are sky high, we are hungry/ Los precios están en las nubes, tenemos hambre	cA	0.19 x 0.23	textile
VI. Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for social interaction	Harmony between life and environment makes us happy/ La armonía entre la vida y el medio ambiente nos hace felices	cwh	1.22 x 0.82	Needs thin pole

VII. <u>An education system that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society</u>	We have no access to public services/ No tenemos acceso a los servicios públicos	cA	0.38 x 0.47	textile
VIII <u>Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society</u>	Simple life makes us happy / La vida sencilla nos hace felices	pA	0.41 x 0.50	textile
	Together we can build peace/ Junt@s podemos construir la paz	cA	0.37 x 0.47	textile
	Good bye Pinochet! / ¡Adiós Pinochet!	pA	0.42 x 0.51	textile
IX. <u>Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity</u>	We dance alone! Our men have been taken/ Bailamos solas pues han desaparecido a nuestros hombres	cA	0.50 x 0.37	textile
	We have to live behind doors /Vida bajo llaves	cA	0.38 x 0.47	textile
X. <u>Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities</u>	No to torture! / No a la tortura	pA	0.47 x 0.52	textile
	We demand the right to free expression/ Exigimos libertad de expresión	cA	0.37 x 0.47	textile

Three big quilts

A Quilt for the World, multinational (done by women of 35 countries for Beijing women's conference 1995)	wh	3.30 x 2.80	needs pole
Common Loss: 3000+ dead between 1969 and 1994 by Irene MacWilliam (4 panels)	wh	1,50 x 2,30	needs pole
Pathways of Life Quilt by a collective cross community women's group from Shared City Project	wh	1.65 x 1.65	needs pole

cA= Chilean arpillera

pa= Peruvian arpillera

wh= wall hanging

Irene MacWilliam from Belfast, four panel wall hanging quilt

Common Loss: 3000+ dead between 1969 and 1994

This powerful quilt has become the emblem for the exhibitions related to conflict that I have curated since 2007. Each piece of torn red fabric represents someone killed in the Northern Ireland conflict between 1969 and 1994. In creating the quilt, Irene did not differentiate between groups of people, as expressed in its name.

This quilt has touched the lives of many people from around the world. Although Irene did not suffer any personal tragedy as the result of the conflict, her sensitivity to the losses of others is inspiring. As the quilt began to take shape, people sent pieces of fabric to Irene. Cloth/textile arrived from such diverse places as the United States of America, England, Japan and Ireland.

In the context of the present exhibition, **it represents the tragedy of non fulfilment of the challenges** the Shared Societies Project has set itself.

To learn more about her work, visit her website: www.macwilliam.f9.co.uk or e-mail her at irenemacwilliam@hotmail.com.





Shared City Project's patchwork quilt, Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Pathways of Life

The *Pathways of Life Quilt* was crafted by the participants of the "Women into Irish History Group" between November 2005 and March 2006. Each square represents a significant event or place in the life of the woman who stitched it. These squares are like little snapshots and give us an insight into what influenced the lives of these women.

Many of the women had never sewn before; they came from different roads of life and different communities. Many will never sew again! But during the winter of '05 and the spring of '06 these women gathered together every Monday morning to stitch and chat and share a piece of their own history with each other. They helped each other design and craft the squares, creating history whilst sharing history. The result is a beautiful piece of art with a story in every square and a story in itself.

This quilt represents vividly challenge VIII which is '***initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society***'. This does not mean it does not touch directly the other challenges of the Shared Societies Project.

For further information contact Jeanette Warke at shared.city@derrycity.gov.uk



Chilean arpillera

Encadenamiento / *Women chained to Parliament gates*

These five Chilean women - who have on their chest the photo of a loved one either disappeared or imprisoned - have chained themselves onto the gates of the Parliament buildings. A group of people are looking at their action across the street. The cars keep moving.

This arpillera addresses challenge I: **'Locating responsibility of social cohesion within government structures'**. They have approached different government structures looking for answers, solution, action with regards their situation and they have not been heard.

Not having the corresponding institutions dealing with what has happened to them, they have taken it to the attention of Parliament and the general public in a desperate move to be heard. Press and international solidarity did take notice at the time.

This arpillera was made in the 1980's by one of the workshops run and supported by Vicaría de la Solidaridad. It was acquired in the context of international solidarity towards the cause of ending Pinochet's dictatorship.

You can still get arpilleras from www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl and other groups

Courtesy Sean Carroll, USA / Spain



Peruvian Arpillera, made by Elizabeth Basilio from workshop “Meeting Comunal” in 1987

Municipio: escúchanos! / Council: listen to us!

These Peruvian villagers have taken to the streets to demand that their local governing body guarantee their needs so as to be able to live a normal life. The banner at the front says, Communal meeting: Live Peru! and the other banners say:
The Mayor does not want to see us!
We demand solutions!
We have no sewage
We want water!
We want electricity!
We have no mobility!

This Peruvian arpillera addresses challenge II: **Create opportunities for minorities to be consulted.** These indigenous people have not been listened or consulted so they had to take to the streets. They proudly identify as indigenous by wearing their traditional clothing and plaiting their hair as seen in books about Andean people. They also identify themselves as “Meeting Comunal”, the name of their group. They have clearly decided to act as a group to solve their problems.

This arpillera uses unusual colours, though it keeps the classical pattern of mountains at the back and a big shining sun that shines for all.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean arpillera

Demandamos DEMOCRACIA / We want DEMOCRACY

This Chilean arpillera was made in the late 1980's in one of the workshops supported by the Catholic Vicariate of Solidarity in Santiago de Chile. The women have come together to protest the lack of democratic participation and have decided to make public their demand. They display a banner – held by three young people – which says “Democracy”. You can see that the women are holding onto each other with linked arms and have formed three rows. The small, crowded houses indicate a poor neighbourhood.

The police car shown does not seem to intimidate them and they carry on with their action. They seem sure that their claim is a valid one and that its achievement could help to improve their social conditions.

This Chilean arpillera addresses challenge II: **Create opportunities for minorities to be consulted.** This group of grassroots people feel and think that they have not been consulted and have come together to demand democracy, which they believe will allow them to participate. In the time of the dictatorship, democracy, as a right to participate, was something you had to struggle for. Previously, Chile was a country used to taking part in political decisions and voting as an entitlement.

You can still get arpilleras from www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl and other groups.

Courtesy of Sean Carroll, USA / Spain



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the 1990s

Un vaso de leche para cada niña / A glass of milk for every child

This Peruvian arpillera is divided into three clear-cut periods of time. The top section – **yesterday** - shows women inside their homes, happy as their children enjoy drinking milk. It depicts content family life. The next picture – **today** – shows women out in the streets walking to the Council buildings. The children are not in the picture. The women have gone in pairs marching and carrying three different banners:

Solution – we want milk for our children; That we never are out of it. They show a peaceful attitude by flying embroidered white doves above their march. The third section reads **Always** and shows the women walking with glasses of milk which they are bringing home to their children.

This arpillera stands for challenge III: **Monitor structures and policies to ensure they are supportive of social cohesion.**

The women are stating that they will be happy at home and in their communities and supportive of policies as long as they are heard in their needs and they can get on with their lives. The demand they are making is very concrete and reasonable.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean arpillera

Verdad y justicia para los desaparecidos / Truth and justice for the disappeared

This Chilean arpillera was made by one of the workshops of the Association of Detained and Disappeared and acquired in Santiago in 1991. It was probably made in the late 1980s, shortly before the end of the dictatorship.

This arpillera follows the classical pattern of mountains, sun and action. Women have taken to the streets to denounce the disappearance of their dear ones. Directly affected women carry banners with pictures of their missing ones. Others have joined their struggle demanding **Justice and truth**. In the centre of the piece you see women carrying a big banner which reads: **Where are the disappeared?** Passers by are looking at their action. It seems to suggest that they are paying attention to the topic of the protest and not to the protestors themselves.

This arpillera stands for the implementation of challenge IV: **Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual.**

Chilean's Truth Commission and follow-up bodies had as their core mission to find out what happened to each disappeared person and to try to find the remains of the bodies when possible, or at least be able to tell their next of kin what happened to the missing person. Reparations have been put in place for directly related relatives of the acknowledged victims.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the 1990s

Crear espacios para los derechos de la mujer / Create space for women's rights

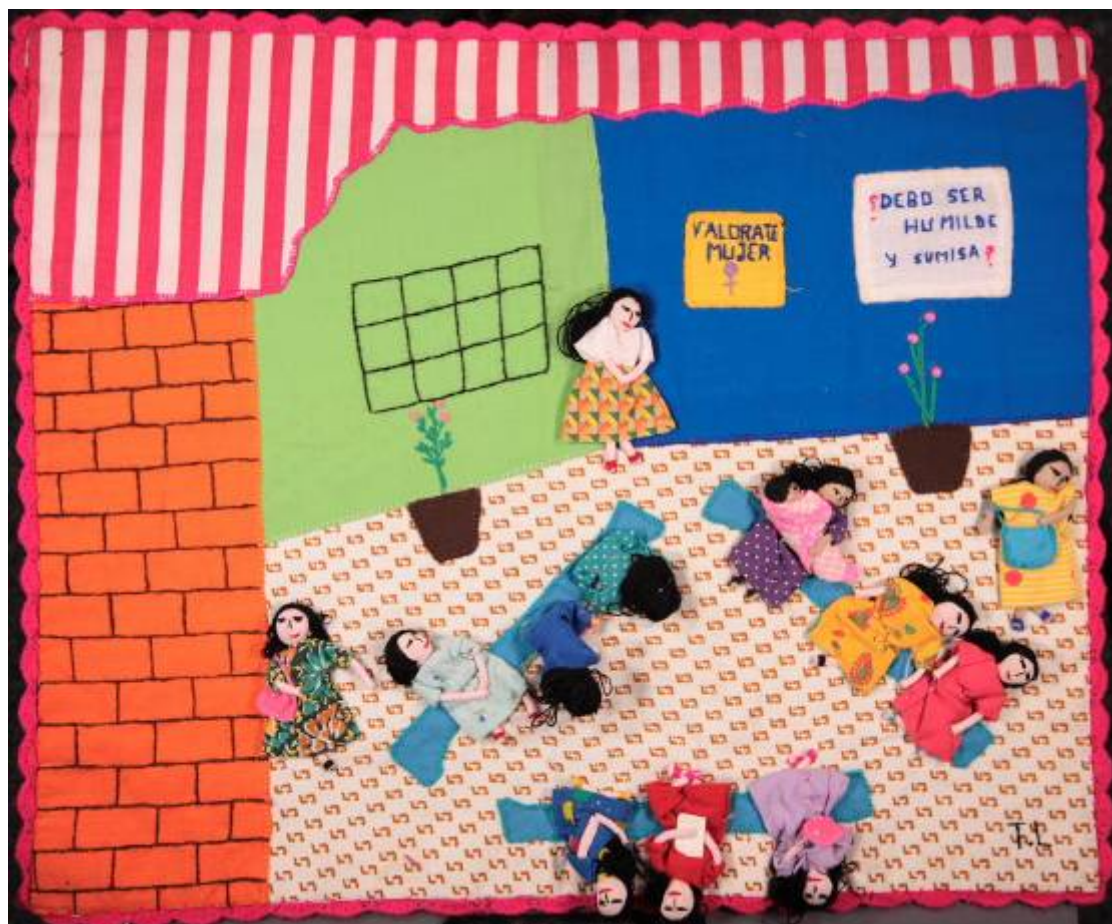
This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes as the only way.

The action in this arpillera takes place in an enclosed space. Women are having a workshop on women's rights and empowerment. On the back wall you can see two posters. One says: **Woman, value yourself!** The other says: **Should I be humble and submissive?** If you look at the women, they seem like they are downtrodden. They are sitting in a circle. Two are so bent that you can not see the faces. One is standing in a very awkward manner. Three are reading something that we can imagine relates to women's rights.

However, this arpillera shows women who have already made a space to deal with their issues, a preliminary step to dealing with those issues.

This arpillera relates to challenge IV: **Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual.**

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the late 1990s

¿Quién carga con la deuda externa? / Who carries the external debt?

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

The action in this arpillera takes place in the open air. A group of women, all with black hair are holding on their shoulders a very big bag which has on it the \$ sign and on each side the word **external** and **debt**. Another set of women, a bit below the first group, is outside their small neighbourhood homes. Each of them holds a handbag that, by the movement the women are making, seems to point out that they are empty. If you look carefully at these women they all seem annoyed or angry, expressed by the way the mouths are stitched.

In contrast, the right hand side of the arpillera shows a couple embracing each other. The woman is blond, the man red haired. They are in front of their big home, which has a car parked in front of it and they seem to be talking about holidays in Miami. They look relaxed, smiling and content.

This arpillera expresses some of the issues for challenge V: **Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against.**

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean arpillera

La gente necesita trabajar / People need work

This very small Chilean arpillera was made as far back as 1975. There is no record as to which woman or workshop did it. The only available information is that it was brought to Spain by a priest who got it from another priest in Chile. The Spanish priest gave it to his sister who engaged in solidarity activity with women groups in Chile and acquired other pieces in the late 1970s.

The action in this arpillera takes place in the open air. Two women and two men are standing in front of their little homes. They seem to be talking about their present working situation. The fact is that the Municipality has a sign stuck on its main door that reads: **NO VACANCIES**.

As in most arpilleras, it shows the mountains of Chile and a strikingly bright sun coming out.

This arpillera confronts challenge V: **Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against.**

Courtesy of Rosario Miralles, Spain



Peruvian arpillera

Los precios están en las nubes, tenemos hambre / Prices are sky high, we are hungry

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

The action in this arpillera takes place in the open air in a small country village. A group of women, all with black hair and wearing traditional clothing, are sitting on the ground. They seem to be selling the products they produce in their small holdings. They have a few eggs on a piece of traditional weaving, often used as blankets or shawls. They are holding a banner that says: **We are hungry** and linked to this one is another banner that asks: **What do we do? We do not have enough money.**

The mountains are at the back and the sun is shining. We can see a few clouds high in the sky. Each cloud has stitched on it the name of one of the products that has become unaffordable for them and which are part of their basic needs: **sugar, oil, rice.**

This arpillera relates to challenge V: **Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against.**

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean wall hanging

La armonía entre la vida y el medio ambiente nos hace felices / Harmony between life and environment makes us happy

This Chilean wall hanging was made in one of the workshops of Isla Negra in Chile. It belongs to a traditional craft that dates much back before the political arpilleras that grew from this folk tradition. It was acquired in a crafts shop in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2000.

This very colourful wall hanging shows busy day to day life. Everyone seems active, happy and intense. Human beings are together with natural elements such as domestic animals, trees and birds. One can also see small homes, the church, a children's play-ground, some narrow streets with cars and fences separating the houses. The sky is bright blue, the mountains just a silhouette and the sun is depicted red.

It depicts a view of how happy life is envisioned by ordinary people. It wants it to add joy to the home that will have it on one of its walls.

This wall hanging relates to challenge VI: **Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for social interaction.**

Courtesy of Roberta Bacic & Clem McCartney, Chile / Ireland



Chilean arpillera

No tenemos acceso a los servicios públicos / We have no access to public services

This Chilean arpillera was made by a community workshop set up by a Protestant Church in the shanty towns of Santiago. It was done in the late 1970s and acquired by a Swiss couple involved in solidarity work with Chile. They also bought other pieces which they brought to Europe and gave as presents to friends. In this way they also created awareness of what was going on.

We can also date it by the direct reference to Monica Madariaga, Justice Minister from April 1977 to February 1983, who personally drafted the Amnesty Law. It exculpated from criminal responsibility all persons who committed crimes, were accomplices in crimes or covered up crimes committed between the day of the military coup, September 11, 1973 and March 10, 1978, when the state of siege was lifted.

Though it does not refer to the amnesty law as such, it clearly shows the day to day situation of disadvantaged people and also makes direct references to the causes of the situation. The crosses stitched on the doors of health facilities, university, the Supreme Court, building sites, and others show that ordinary people do not have access to these services. The woman minister is shown at her desk, next to it the words: **Minister of Education, betrayal to the fatherland**. It also says: **What is this?** The only other characters are people having to dig with their spades to survive.

This arpillera exposes the reality behind the failure to meet challenge VII not being met: **An education system that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society.**

Courtesy of Heidi and Peter Gessler, Switzerland



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the 1990s

La vida sencilla nos hace felices / The Simple life makes us happy

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

The action in this arpillera takes place mainly in the family garden. Everybody seems very busy doing domestic and garden chores. They look content and each member of the group is doing something. The textiles and embroidery are colourful.

The people also seem very friendly to each other. You can see it in their smiles. They have used little dolls to give life and perspective to the different characters they represent.

This arpillera shows what challenge VIII aims at: **Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society.** It highlights what many people want out of life.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the 1990s

Juntas podemos construir la paz / Together we can build peace

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

This is an arpillera that shows only women. They are symbolically standing around the globe, letting us know that they represent the voice of women from all over the world. They are holding hands and declare: **WE WANT PEACE** and they also express the way they think this can be achieved by saying: “**Let us hold hands**”.

The women have also embroidered peace symbols so as to make sure their message gets through.

This arpillera shows what challenge VIII aims at: **Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society.** It is insightful and pertinent for the Forum as it gives hints on possible approaches that could be taken to achieve the challenge.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean arpillera

¡ Adiós Pinochet! / Good bye Pinochet!

Women have gathered in the streets of a modest neighbourhood to express their opinion and confront the situation that they see is keeping them, and their community, from having a better life. We can see that they are impoverished as they have to no electricity supply in their little houses and have to steal it by attaching electrical cables to the source. In spite of this they depict their homes with bright colours and the classical mountains and sun are there.

They are divided into two groups, each carrying a banner. One says: **OUT PINOCHET!** The other reads: **Good bye Pinochet!**

This arpillera says that the impediment to fulfil challenge VIII, **Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society**, resides in the government and requires that Pinochet leaves so that the country can heal itself.

This arpillera was made by one of the workshops run and supported by Vicaría de la Solidaridad. It was acquired in the context of international solidarity to end Pinochet's dictatorship.

You can still get arpilleras from www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl and other groups

Courtesy of Sean Carroll, USA / Spain



Chilean arpillera

Bailamos solas pues han desaparecido a nuestros hombres / We dance alone! Our men have been taken

This Chilean arpillera was made by one of the workshops of the Association of Detained and Disappeared and acquired in Santiago in 1991. It was probably made in the late 1980s, shortly before the end of the dictatorship.

In this arpillera we can see women dancing "Cueca" the traditional Chilean dance. Cueca, is danced in pairs - an important fact considering the dance is meant to represent the different emotions and stages of romance.

Here the women dance alone as their husbands, sons, brothers, or lovers have been disappeared or exiled, so they continue the dance, wearing the image of their loved ones over their hearts. "The dance represents a denunciation of a society that makes the bodies of victims of political violence disappear, denying them a proper burial and silencing their mourners. Through *la cueca sola*, the dancers tell a story with their solitary feet, the story of the mutilated body of a loved one. Through their movements and the guitar music, the women also recreate the pleasure of dancing with the missing person." Their courage and determination has inspired people all over the world, including musician Sting, whose song has been taken up by many other artists including Joan Baez and Holly Near.

This arpillera exposes a situation where people were pushed to the limit. It was a common occurrence in Chile because during the dictatorship challenge IX was not present: **Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity.** Specifically this piece shows what happened to people who had different political views.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Chilean arpillera

Vida bajo llaves / We have to live behind doors

This Chilean arpillera was made by a community workshop set up by a Protestant Church in the shanty towns of Santiago. It was done in the late 1970s and acquired by a Swiss couple involved in solidarity work with Chile.

Campamento San Jeronimo was one of the many squalid settlements established by poor families in the outskirts of Santiago. This arpillera shows the mountains, but not the sun.

This arpillera shows graphically how people in these poor neighbourhoods had to deal with their problems and it also exposes those problems. Everything had to be borne in silence, discussed behind doors. To find out what is going on, we have to open the doors that cover different episodes. So, we see three ill children having to share one bed; a couple discussing where they could find work; two women worried as many children are awaiting a bowl of soup from their soup kitchen and they are worried it will not be enough for all of them. The woman who is washing clothes is saying how much she is missing her husband.

This arpillera exposes a situation where people were pushed to the limit, which was a common experience in Chile during the dictatorship. It exposes the non-achievement of challenge IX: **Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity.** Specifically, this piece shows what happened to poor people who had different political and social views and could not express them publicly without being persecuted.

Courtesy of Heidi and Peter Gessler, Switzerland



Chilean arpillera

No a la tortura / No to torture

This is one of the most visually startling pieces in the collection. Set against a simple black background, this arpillera speaks unapologetically about Chile's history of torture.

Torture is a difficult subject. According to the Valech Report, thousands of people were subjected to some form of torture during Pinochet's regime and 35,868 approached the Commission. The majority, 27,255 people, were officially registered as victims of torture.

This arpillera, made by survivors graphically depicts their experience of being tortured. It shows these people in a dehumanized way, their features not recognizable and signals that this inhuman experience was not only lived by single individuals, but by significant groups of people. It is striking that the woman who made this arpillera willingly talks about the past.

This arpillera contrasts sharply with the intentions of challenge X: **Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities**, which has not been taken into consideration.

Courtesy of Marjorie Agosín Chile / USA



Peruvian arpillera

Exigimos libertad de expresión / We demand the right to free expression

This Peruvian arpillera was made by the Micaela Bastidas group in Pamplona Alta, Lima in 1992.

The action in this arpillera takes place on the streets. A group of women and men are demonstrating to express their immediate needs. They are marching together and carry two banners. One says: **We demand secure work** and the other reads **Solution to our problems**. Instead of being listened to, they are being sprayed with water by a police car so that they disperse. Two policemen are pulling a person by the hair and beating him/her. Another group carries a banner saying: **No to repression**. We also see people looking at what is going on from the windows of the neighbouring flats.

This arpillera exposes what happens when challenge X: **Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities** is not adhered to.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany

