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”I am the wall!“ – TO DO Award Human Rights in Tourism for ”Fundación Renacer/ECPAT Colombia“

Since the mid-1990s the NGO has been fighting against sexual violence and the exploitation of children and adolescents in Colombia

Seefeld, 13/02/2020 – The “TO DO Award Human Rights in Tourism“ in 2020 will be awarded to the NGO “Fundación Renacer/ECPAT Colombia“. With a broad-based campaign “¡La Muralla soy yo!” – “I am the wall!“ the Colombian NGO has over the past 25 years brought together different players in the fight against sexual violence and the exploitation of children and adolescents.

“La Muralla“, a protective wall in Cartagena built during colonial times, now encloses the old city centre of the Caribbean metropolis. As a World Heritage Site it attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists. In the 16th century the Spanish used the wall to protect gold and resources. Today, “La Muralla“ is the symbol of a unique strategy by all the players in the city – civil society, tourism associations, hotels, beach vendors, taxi drivers, parasol rentals, youth organisations, schools, police and the office of the public prosecutor – seeking to protect what is most important to them: the city’s girls and boys. They all proudly say: “¡La Muralla soy yo!“ – “I am the wall!“

Success in the informal complementary tourism sector

When in 1996 the NGO “Fundación Renacer/ECPAT Colombia“ began to conduct their first research on the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, it soon became evident that many children in the city suffered violence and neglect in their families and were affected by organised crime, sexualised violence, and drug trafficking. It became evident that seafarers as well as tourists, both domestic and foreign, represent a danger for the children. Sex with children and minors became an everyday reality in exchange for money, clothes, or small gifts. The tourism industry had ignored the issue for a long time.

With the project “¡La Muralla soy yo!“, “Fundación Renacer“ initiated a broad-based child protection strategy in 2008. The foundation raises awareness of the problem among those at the forefront: taxi drivers, street vendors, masseurs, and the staff of parasol rentals. The protection of children is always on the agenda. Hotel managers and staff also get training. All over the city “Renacer”

has trained social workers and school teachers and also reached hundreds of young people directly. In the first half of 2018 alone, as many as 80 persons were arrested in the context of sexual exploitation of minors.

Strengthening the strengths of children

“Now we know that we have rights and that nobody can deprive us of our rights“, says a 17-year-old girl who gets trained in child protection at school and now sensitises young students herself. One of her classmates adds that it was important to him to learn how sexual contacts get initiated in real life and on the Internet, and how to defend himself. “Renacer“ also offers courses for parents. Following initial scepticism, over the past ten years as many as 112 companies in Cartagena signed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism and are actively implementing it.

The NGO’s work has been showing effects far beyond the country‘s borders: Together with ECPAT International and UNICEF, ”Fundación Renacer“ invited to the ”International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism“ in Bogotá in 2018. For two days, more than 400 participants discussed new strategies in the fight against sexual exploitation. A “Call for Action“ now calls upon all players internationally to increase their efforts, as with the growth of tourism more and more children fall victims to sexual exploitation.

The public award ceremony will take place on 5th March 2020 at 16:30 at Palais am Funkturm on the ITB trade fair grounds. Representatives of the project will be present to receive the award. After the award ceremony, the Institute for Tourism and Development will invite participants to a reception. There will be opportunities for interviews with the award winners.

Please also visit us at our information booth at ITB in hall 4.1, stand 242. Meetings can already be arranged.

Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung (Institute for Tourism and Development) focuses on development related information and education in tourism. In this context it brings out publications, organises international contests, offers training and seminars for people employed in the tourism sector, carries out tourism research and consultancy, and is involved in dialogue on issues related to tourism development.

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