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Laudatory speech, September 21 in Verden: Gulnara Shahinian and Democracy today Armenia are awarded the Anita Augspurg Prize "Women rebels against war".

Ladies and gentlemen,

dear friends,

dear Gulnara,

We are celebrating for the second time the Anita Augspurg Award "Women rebels against war". Today, exactly 161 years ago, the women's rights activist Anita Augspurg was born here in Verden. Her memory is cherished by many dedicated people here, in Munich, where she lived and worked for many years, and internationally as co-founder of our organization of the "International Women's League for Peace and Freedom" more than 100 years ago

With this award we want to honour and encourage women who are committed to combating militarism and war and strive for women's rights and Peace.

On behalf of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom, I want to thank all those who made this award ceremony possible. My special thanks go to:

- Mayor Lutz Brockmann,
- Annika Meinecke, the city representative for equal opportunities
- members of the City Council of Verden,
- all employees of the Town Hall,
- all supporters, especially the donors
- our international guests from Ukraine, Kirgistan, Italy, Sweden, Georgia who are with us today because we have an international meeting of the Civic Solidarity Platform of OSCE this weekend in Hamburg
- and last but not least Irmgard Hofer , German president of WILPF in the name of all present WILPFers

Before I talk more about our award-winner, I would like to begin by reminding you the life and legacy of Anita Augspurg, with a special focus on 1918, exactly 100 years ago. Why:

Kurt Eisner combined the Revolution at the end of WW1 (which started in Bavaria for Germany) and the establishment of Councils/Sovjets with the introduction of women's suffrage. Anita Augspurg was thrilled: now everything seemed possible, for which she had fought for so long. Suffrage in her eyes as an instrument of social change and liberation from patriarchal constraints:

What was she particularly interested in:

1. Social situation of girls and women (dependence of maids and factory workers, sexual abuse, lawlessness, no study / high school possible for girls, education and training ...)
2. Democratic participation (in the sense of today's UNRes 1325/WPS agenda) – she was not a party woman, had difficulties with socialists, but also nationally-minded women's associations)
3. Peace and disarmament, international relations, non-violence (cancellation of armaments costs, stop of arms deliveries, disarmament, cross-border solidarity, League of Nations as international arbitration institution)

There are many parallels to the life and commitment of Gulnara Shahinian:

First, to her life:

Gulnara was born in Yerevan, Armenia, where she studied English and Russian, gender and cultural studies at the European University in Budapest; in Cambridge / USA, St. Petersburg/Russia, Yerevan and Stanford / USA she acquired further academic qualifications in conflict resolution, human rights and criminal law.

She has more than 20 years of experience in peacebuilding, gender and human rights work:

She has worked on the Global Initiative Against Organized Crime, the UN Trust Fund on Slavery, as a Counselor of the Council of Europe and the International Labor Organization / ILO on trafficking in human beings, modern forms of slavery and forced labor and many more. She is an internationally recognized expert and consultant on child labor, always has a critical gender perspective on all exploitative situations and is very constructive and solution-oriented. She has drafted a roadmap against slavery and forced labor, the recommendations of which have been implemented by many governments, Mauritania, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Kazakhstan. She has written country reports for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Shadow Reports for CEDAW, worked on the EU Human Rights Charter and the Istanbul Convention as an

expert on violence against women. She has trained, published and participated as a key note speaker in international conferences.

In 1996 she founded Democracy Today Armenia as a NGO focusing on peace building and conflict transformation, political engagement and elections, and gender studies. Research results are tested for their suitability for practical application and implemented in numerous projects, especially in rural areas. One focus is on the participation of women and young people. DT promotes and supports democratic processes, strengthens the role of women and invests in building a gender-sensitive and inclusive society, the protection of the rule of law and human rights.

Gulnara is the soul and energy source of DT and a wonderful team worker full of humour. She is well-connected throughout the Caucasian region and Armenia and combines grassroots work with her international feminist outlook.

The Caucasus, is and has always been an ethnically diverse region, home to more than 50 nationalities – with a lot of tension and conflict. Horrifying events – you remember the genocide almost exactly 100 years ago - remain in the collective memory of Armenians and partly of the world –the debate in the German Bundestag in Berlin in the last year is just one example. Power and interests put an end at least since the 90s to an integrated regional common vision. Women who have played an important role in peacemaking, building societies, and reconciliation in the Caucasus in the past, seemed at first to be largely invisible in these processes. All the more important in 2011 was the networking of people and activities, e.g. with partner organizations from Azerbaijan and Georgia, to found the "Women of the South Caucasus for peace - peace begins at home". From 2016, international organizations from various parts of the world (Syria, Iraq, Colombia, Cyprus, Serbia, Germany, Palestine-Israel, USA, Italy) were invited to an annual conference to share their experiences in peace-building and the protection of human rights and human rights to exchange views of interests in their respective region and to develop solutions and perspectives. The conference is accompanied by an award ceremony for young women in peace processes. The aim is to publicly acknowledge their contribution to peace and to encourage them to continue assuming responsibility in their community and the wider world in which they operate, thus creating a network that can intervene in times of crisis and conflict.

In 2017 and 18 I was able to convince myself of the high quality, full of wonderful encounters and shared suffering and joy.

In May 2018, the country's further democratic developments was threatened. Tanks rolled in the city, police and military were alerted to fight the popular uprising against the self-empowerment of the president. Civil society, and amongst them many women, increasingly joined the march of the opposition and ever-growing demonstrations – starting from the capital city of Yerevan – in all parts of the country.

The young women trained by Gulnara and Democracy today were in the forefront of the protest chains with their children. Everyone is proud of that. As one of the representatives of these young and committed women we have Anna Ishkanian with us. Finally, the military withdrew. The media, previously an organ of the ruling party, began to speak about a “velvet revolution” of love. Thus recent political events have strengthened the vision of a democratic peaceful Armenia. This enthusiasm must now be carried forward into the upcoming elections. The women are of particular importance - they will and must use their suffrage.

You can see the connections to Anita Augspurg:

The dedicated fighter for women's rights, which draws a bow from the social situation of girls and women to democratic participation and finally as actors in peaceful change.

Gulnara Shahinian and her team are worthy winners to continue this important work! We are proud you are here! Congratulations!