WACC-SIGNIS Human Rights Award 2007

July 2007

The WACC-SIGNIS joint award for a film dealing with human rights has gone to to *A Massacre Foretold*, by Scottish director Nick Higgins. The award was presented by Peter Malone (SIGNIS) and Philip Lee (WACC) during the conference on ‘Peacemaking in the World of Film: From conflict to reconciliation’ which took place at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, 19-22 July 2007.

The documentary recounts the massacre on 22 December 1997 of 45 Mayan men, women and children by an armed force in the village of Acteal, Chiapas, Mexico. Paramilitaries murdered innocent villagers while a Mexican army unit stationed not far away turned a blind eye.

From the beginning of 1995, the Mexican Army and Government-backed forces were carrying out a low-intensity war against Mayan sympathisers of the Zapatista movement. Towns and villages that supported the aims of the Zapatistas faced harassment, the rape of women, beatings, murders and the theft of grain and farm tools. Repression escalated throughout 1997, culminating in the Acteal massacre.

In recent years SIGNIS has been focussing on ‘Media for a culture of peace’. WACC is also in the final year of planning for its Congress on ‘Communication is peace: Building viable communities’, which takes place 6-10 October 2008.

The day after the massacre, Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, issued a statement calling it a true crime against humanity, underlining the fact that the victimised group had ‘specifically made known... its commitment to civil, peaceful, non-violent means to achieve their goals, even while living and working in the heart of an area where violence dominates.’

*A Massacre Foretold* premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in August 2007. Nick Higgins is hoping it will be screened on network and cable television worldwide. He also plans to show it in Mexico at the scene of the crime. For further information see: www.massacreforetold.com