

## Magic of sewing stories: *Arpilleras* of Latin America

One of the more traditional forms of cultural expressions of women in Latin America is the *arpillera*. Women work their magic to create stories with bits of cloth, needle and thread.

In Chile, the *arpilleras* are small wall hangings with figures superimposed on the cloth to create scenes full of vitality and movement which serve as political statements. *Arpillera* means burlap in Spanish and since the backing cloth is often of burlaps or other feed or grain sacks, the finished work has come to be called *arpillera*.

Making *arpilleras* is not just a means of earning income, it is also an outlet for the woman's feelings, a means of social, artistic, metaphorical and political expression.

The *arpilleristas* are also involved in the political realities of their life and their country as expressed with truth and fidelity in the *arpilleras*.

The themes vary. Some recurring ones are the Andes,



Each *arpillera* is a small scene from the life of the woman who creates it. Just as women's lives have been torn to pieces, the *arpilleras* also consist of scraps of leftover materials put together slowly and in sorrow.

the neighborhood, the houses, signs of those missing, either disappeared or in exile, illustrations of the pick up work the women do to earn a little money, working as street sweepers, washing clothes, working as maids.

The *arpilleras* often show the health center, the child feeding centers, the closed school,

lack of water and light, the church and dreams of a better future.

The *arpilleristas* provide a vision of the world that brings a message of peace and hope.

**Source:** *Scraps of Life, Chilean Arpilleras*, Marjorie Agosin, translated by Cola Franzen. Zed books, London, UK, 1987.