

## **Proyecto Ija'tz**

The non-governmental organization „Proyecto Ija'tz“ awards scholarships for school and university to gifted young Guatemalans whose families cannot afford to offer them higher education. The scholarships are primarily given to young Mayan people with a Christian background and sense of responsibility, who show above-average performance at school and want to remain in Guatemala and contribute to the country's development.

Proyecto Ija'tz was founded in 1992 by the German journalist and political scientist Maria Christine Zauzich. “Ija'tz” is the word for “seed” in the Maya language Kaqchikel – or “Samenkorn” in German, which is the name of the German partner organization. The name was chosen as a reference especially to the seeds of corn/maize: In Mayan mythology, corn is regarded as sacred, it represents growth, wisdom and life. “Proyecto Ija'tz” wants to sow the seeds for a peaceful transition in Guatemala – through education for individuals from the Mayan people. They are enabled to convey the values of a peaceful transition and to contribute to the integral development of the Guatemalan society.

This year (2017), 60 young people from 13 regions throughout the country are enrolled in the scholarship programme (31 female, 29 male). A central pillar of the programme is individual facilitation and supervision both in academic education and personal development. Most of the scholarship holders grew up in remote villages, many of them have experienced violence in their families, and especially the girls often have to fight hard for their formal education.

“Proyecto Ija'tz” offers each of them a counselor: someone with a degree in the same specialty, who can help with problems at school or university. The scholarship agreement also includes that all stipendiaries perform social work in their home communities – at least 100 hours per year, connected to their field of studies. Additionally, “Proyecto Ija'tz” organizes an accompanying curriculum of tutorials and workshops for such topics as oral and written expression, studying techniques, sexual education etc. This aims to level the structural deficits of the education system especially in rural areas and to encourage critical thinking, self-reflection and responsibility.

In the course of the years, more than 450 young Mayans have completed their school or university degrees with the help of an Ija'tz scholarship. Today, they work as doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, accountants etc.