



# OUR RIGHTS, OUR SAFETY:

RESOURCES FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



FIRST VERSION

# OUR RIGHTS, OUR SAFETY: RESOURCES FOR PROTECTION

*First version 2020*

## CREDITS:

### AUTHORS

**JASS -JUST ASSOCIATES-**

**Valerie Miller**

**Mariela Arce**

**Marusia Lopez**

### EDITORS

**Manuela Arancibia**

**Valentine Sébile**

**Alexa Bradley**

### TRANSLATION

**Kay Stubbs**

### DESIGN

**Aline Romero**

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**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR**  
ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



# PROLOGUE

Michel Forst,

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights defenders.

Around the world, women are leading struggles to defend and advance human rights. In fact, women human rights defenders have always been at the forefront of history working to improve people's lives. As teachers, citizen activists, caregivers, journalists, judges, or simply as community and family members, women are at the heart of change – from remote villages to the corridors of international power. Through grassroots activism, advocacy, human rights education and other activities, they engage with others to make a difference.

Women have not only supported and helped catalyze change efforts, they have been at their helm – embodying the collective power of feminist activism. Women have led the way in the fight for civil rights and freedom whether in the United States, during Arab Spring or in many other places. Standing against corruption and repression, many are now also leading movements to denounce the devastating effects of global warming and governmental inaction. They have challenged deeply-rooted social, political and economic systems and made people aware of the invisible dynamics of power,

exposing the related patterns of violence, discrimination, inequality and injustice.

For their work defending human rights and advocating for freedom, justice and social change, women and girls are targeted, vilified, and brutally attacked across the globe from Manila to Iran, from Chile to Zimbabwe. In the face of this violence, they continue to denounce human rights violations perpetuated by States, corporations, armed groups and other actors. In their efforts, some women define themselves as human rights defenders, some as activists or advocates and others name themselves in other ways. No matter their label, women who defend and advance human rights benefit from the protection of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. This important concept and tool was developed more than twenty years ago thanks to the mobilization and advocacy of civil society across the world.

In my report to the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2019, I recalled what my predecessors, civil society organizations and social movements have told

us repeatedly over the years: women defending human rights face not only attacks because they defend rights, but also because they are women. As women, they confront specific risks, and consequently, too often pay a high price for their human rights activism and for daring to challenge the belief that women should not engage in public affairs. Unfortunately, many public policies have been slow in developing gender-sensitive approaches to the protection of human rights defenders. Not only have they lagged in preventing the risks faced by women, but also in developing specific mechanisms to address existing threats and attacks. While the commitment of women to human rights movements continues, the power dynamics behind the scenes often limit their effectiveness and voice.

This new manual celebrates the different faces of human rights work and builds on the crucial contributions of women to the international human rights system. It serves as a tool to help people reflect on how defending human rights can affect women's security and well-being and why it is important to develop both individual and collective protection measures. Finally, it helps people bridge the gap between international mechanisms and grassroots communities, and create more effective strategies. It explains how women activists can use

protective instruments such as the UN Declaration on human rights defenders in their daily activities.

The Honduran activist Betty Vasquez once said, "It is not an option but rather an obligation to speak out, all of us together, to demand changes." As the attacks against women and their fundamental rights are on the rise in many places around the globe, it is more important than ever to support women human rights defenders, their movements and feminist organizations. For when human rights defenders are attacked, and, in particular, women rights defenders, we know that ultimately our democracies are in danger. It is our collective responsibility to listen to their voices, to support them and to join their efforts in promoting peace and human rights for all.

**Michel Forst,**

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights defenders.

# OUR RIGHTS, OUR SAFETY: RESOURCES FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

## Introduction:

Welcome! This guide is dedicated to all the women, girls, youth and non-gender conforming people who are fighting for their rights and for the creation of a just and mutually supportive world. You hold in your hands the first version of Our Rights, Our Safety: Resources for Women Human Rights Defenders, a manual inspired by the report that the UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst presented in recognition of the invaluable contributions of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and the importance of their protection and support. We want to invite to organizations, communities and women human rights defenders to give us your feedback to inform a revised version in 2021.

This manual was produced by JASS (Just Associates)<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders and the support of International

Service for Human Rights, Calala Fondo de Mujeres and Central American Women's Fund (FCAM). JASS is a multiregional feminist organization based in Southern Africa, Southeast Asia and Mesoamerica, that strengthens the voice, collective power and protection of women, their movements and their communities.

This manual is intended for people who work at the local and community level, and particularly for human rights activists and defenders who are facing various risks and forms of violence in their struggle to build a more just world. It contains information and educational processes born of the valuable experiences and knowledge of women and their movements in different parts of the world, and is designed to help deepen the vision, analysis and practices necessary to creating a safer environment for the defense of human rights.

The background of the slide features a stylized illustration of various hands and protest signs. At the top, several hands in different skin tones (brown, tan, purple) are shown holding up light blue rectangular signs. On the left side, a hand in a blue sleeve is raised, and another hand in a purple sleeve holds a white sign. On the right side, a hand in a brown sleeve holds a white sign, and another hand in a red sleeve holds a white sign. At the bottom, more hands and signs are visible, including a hand in a purple sleeve holding a white sign and a hand in a brown sleeve holding a light blue sign. The central text is contained within a light blue rectangular area.

# OBJECTIVES

## THE MANUAL SEEKS TO:

- Celebrate the struggles of women and feminists and help human rights defenders feel part of a global women's movement for social justice.
- Contribute to a greater understanding and analysis of the violence faced by human rights defenders and promote collective and feminist protection strategies based on knowledge and experiences in different regions of the world.
- Help WHRDs identify different ways in which the UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst's Report on women defenders can be used as a resource for advocacy and analysis to enhance their collective power and protection.

# METHODOLOGY AND CONTENT

The manual is based on a participatory educational methodology with a gender perspective – Feminist Popular Education (FPE). FPE strengthens creative thinking, critical awareness, participation and solidarity, and personal and collective power to build just societies.

In this manual, participants will recognize the value of their own experiences and knowledge of the context, women's rights, and protection, among other topics. They will deepen their knowledge through the reflections of other women and organizations in different contexts, as well as from other sources of research and information. Through a process our Latin American colleagues called conscious raising, participants will collectively question and critically analyze their experiences and context to broaden their perspectives and shared understanding.

The manual contains five modules, in addition to the introduction and this methodological section:

1. CELEBRATING WOMEN'S STRUGGLES
2. WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO DEFEND OUR RIGHTS
3. WHY ARE WE AT RISK?
4. POWER AND PROTECTION TO CONTINUE IN THE STRUGGLE
5. WE DEMAND GREATER SAFETY FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS!

Using readings from the different sections of the Special Rapporteur's Report on Women Human Rights Defenders, each section combines exercises, activities, and readings with discussion and analytical steps that lead to learning and critical reflection. The manual can be used in workshops, reflection groups, meetings and even for individual reflection.

This manual is a dynamic tool that must be adapted to the conditions, contexts and resources of each group and each participant. This means that:

- Considering that it is aimed at human rights activists and defenders from a variety of contexts and issues, it is important to adapt the content to the conditions and identities of the participants. The facilitators will need to search for information, examples and analysis that are relevant to the reality of the group.
- For each module and exercise, we have indicated an approximate time, which should also be adjusted to each group's needs and size.
- The exercises are designed to be done in diverse groups of women and non-gender conforming persons, should they be from the same organization, from different organizations, from women-only organizations or from mixed groups. The needs and interests of the group should be prioritized, and the most useful content of the manual should be adapted accordingly.

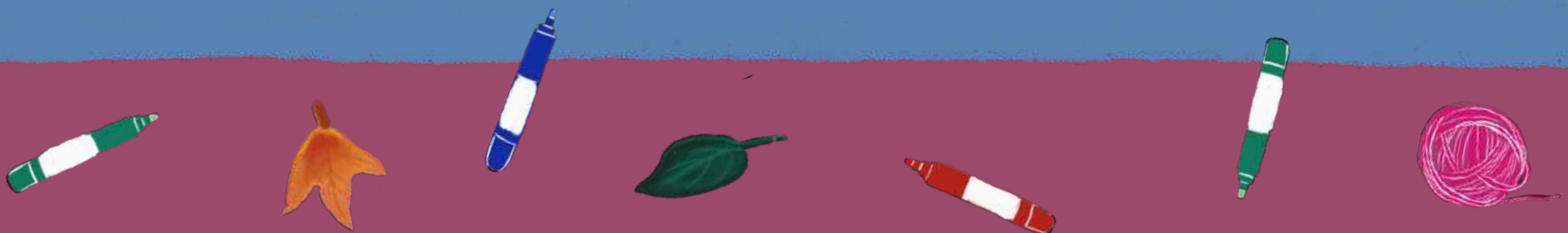




The role of the facilitator is key to using this manual. The facilitator is in charge of creating a safe environment, encouraging participation, and conducting discussions and reflections – sometimes adding questions and information to support more relevant knowledge and action. Throughout the manual, the facilitator is identified with this image:



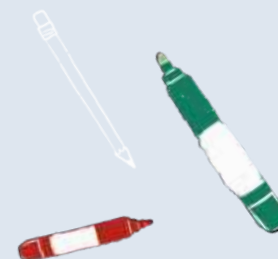
We hope that you will enjoy each session and, above all, that this tool will strengthen the power and protection of those who are working for a better world.



# CELEBRATING WOMEN'S STRUGGLES!

## OBJECTIVE:

Participants reclaim and affirm their histories of activism, understand the concept of Defenders and identify themselves as part of a global women's movement struggling for human rights.



**ESTIMATED  
TIME**

5 hrs / 30 min

## The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

*While often overlooked, women have been in the vanguard of social change throughout history. In 1956, 20.000 women of different backgrounds mobilized in Pretoria to protest apartheid. In 2016, on what became known as “Black Monday,” thousands of women and children took to the streets in more than 60 cities in Poland and were able to end the total prohibition of abortion. In 2017, women and girls launched the powerful #MeToo movement, which continues resonating throughout the world.*

*Women from diverse backgrounds promote and protect rights in varying contexts. For example, there are women demanding gender equality, indigenous women fighting for land and environmental rights, rural women claiming social-economic rights, trans women speaking out against discrimination, lesbians calling for equality, migrant and refugee women defending their rights and security, homeless women demanding their right to housing, women seeking justice for the disappeared, women defending freedom of choice and corporal autonomy, women promoting rights related to digital technology, other-abled women struggling to lead an independent life, and women who are involved in peace processes.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

## MATERIALS

Flipcharts, markers, colored cards, music and materials for the River of Life (see below).

# SESSION 1. 2 + hours

In celebration of our history and the women who have inspired us.

**Activity:** River of Life to reflect on our stories of activism.

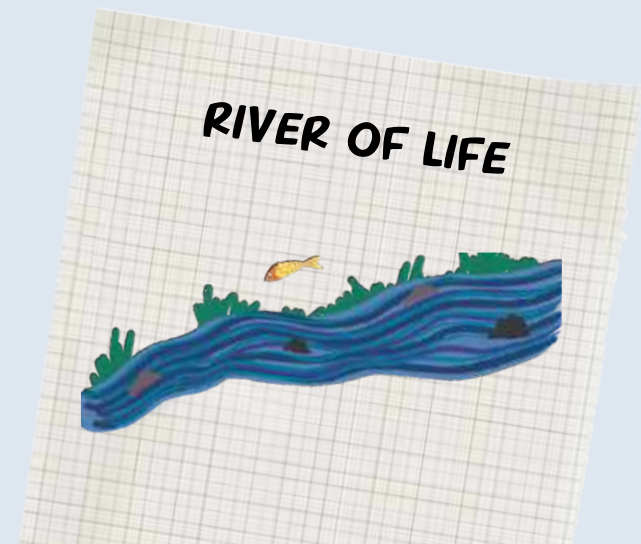


## Introduction:

Throughout the world, women are defending their lives and those of their families, as well as the very existence of their communities, rivers, forests, and, indeed, the entire planet. This struggle is part of our identity, of who we are as individuals and as community. Our ability to draw on our personal and collective histories of struggle and the stories of women who have helped and inspired us is essential to developing the strength and power necessary for our work to bring about change.

## Step 1.

Ask each participant to draw a river on a sheet of paper which will represent their individual "River of Life". Since our lives are never straight lines, the river will inevitably have some curves to it, some boulders, rapids, and a few quiet spots along the way.



# Step 2.

Using available materials (colored markers, seeds, ribbons, or anything accessible) ask participants to identify some important moments in their history and place them along the course of the river:



- The moment when they first became concerned about human rights:

**When and how did I begin defending human rights?**

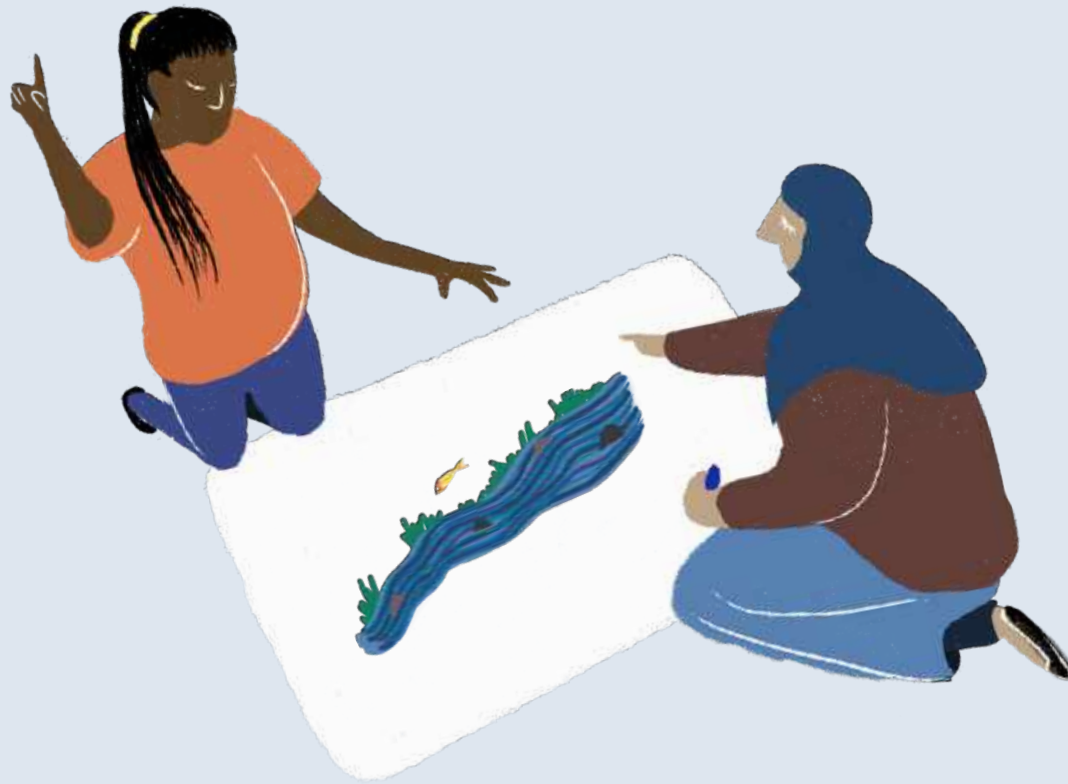
**How did discrimination mark my life?**

(as a woman, an indigenous person, a person, of African ancestry, a member of an oppressed class, a non-gender conforming person, a migrant, etc.)

- The most significant moments in their history as activists:

**What local, national or global situations (an unfair or unjust situation, a war, a natural disaster, a popular uprising, etc.) marked my activism?**

**What organizations, activities or strategies in which I participated made me feel proud?**



## Step 3.

Participants form pairs and share their river drawings. Then, in plenary they present one or two reflections that arose during this conversation.

## Step 4.

Continuing in plenary, the facilitator acknowledges the common elements and encourages reflection on the question:

What things from my own history did I discover or reaffirm?



## Activity: Mural of Ancestors to deepen our stories.

### Step 1.

Participants divide into small groups of no more than three persons and discuss the following question:

What woman inspired my struggle and commitment to justice, life, and human rights? How?

Each participant writes that name on a colored card.



### Step 2.

In plenary, share the name and a brief explanation of each inspiring woman. Designate a dedicated space to post their names and create a mural. Collectively reflect on:

Why is it important to recognize the contributions of other women who preceded and inspired us in our struggle?

The mural can be left in a fixed place and complemented with photographs, quotes, or additional items that help others get to know and honor these women.

To delve further into a discussion of Ancestors, you can find the Mural of Ancestors tool developed by JASS in English and Spanish by typing "Mural" in the We Rise search box at: <https://werise-toolkit.org/en/search>

The mural features the word **WOMEN** in large purple letters at the top center. To the left of this word is the word **STRENGTH** in maroon letters, accompanied by a pink square and a blue marker. Below **STRENGTH** is the word **GRANDMOTHER** in black letters, with a red square and a yellow marker nearby. The mural is decorated with several photographs: a black and white photo of a woman in a white top, a black and white photo of an elderly woman smiling, a black and white photo of an elderly woman with a scarf, a black and white photo of a woman in a yellow top pointing, a black and white photo of a woman in a hat and scarf, a black and white photo of a woman holding a sign that says "VOTES FOR WOMEN", a black and white photo of an elderly woman with a headscarf, and a black and white photo of two women in long dresses. There are also several colored squares (pink, red, yellow, cyan) and a pair of red scissors at the bottom right.

# SESSION 2. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

Are we human rights defenders?

**Activity:** Creating statues to begin forming a definition.

## Step 1.

Who is a human rights defender?

With their bodies, each participant forms a statue that reflects an important attribute of a human rights defender. One by one, the group tries to guess the meaning of each statue. Afterward, the participant explains what they meant by their statue.

## Step 2.

The facilitator writes the ideas on a flipchart and asks if there are other important attributes that may be missing.





# Activity: Group reflection to deepen the definition of a Human Rights Defender.

## Step 1.

Participants read the following text, either individually or as a group. While reading the text, these questions should be considered:

How do these reflections on the nature of defenders relate to the group's ideas that were expressed in the previous discussion?

What is similar?

What is different?



# Are we human rights defenders?<sup>1</sup>

Today, many women activists identify themselves as human rights defenders. Others combine this form of identifying themselves with other designations, such as a land rights defender or environmental defender. Still others prefer not to use the term rights defender at all. They may want to heighten the visibility of their movement (trade unionism, feminism, anti-racism, etc.) or perhaps, in their context, defining themselves as a human rights defender or activist does not convey the full meaning of their work or the term may be risky.

While all these options are valid, we want to share with you what the definition of human rights defender means and how it can be used to strengthen your work and protection. This way, you can have additional criteria to decide whether to use it or not and in what contexts it may be useful.

**Defending human rights is a right.** The definition of a human rights defender is based on the recognition that the promotion, defense and protection of human rights is a right in itself, as set forth in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. All persons have the right to express their opinions, speak out, organize and denounce injustice.

## Who is a human rights defender?

Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, offers some important elements:

The term “human rights defender” refers to any person who, individually or with others, acts to promote and protect human rights. For example, a defender may:

- Take action to raise awareness of human rights;
- Insure that human rights are respected and fully enforced;
- Prevent and/or respond to a human rights violation.

Human rights defenders are defined, first and foremost, by what they do, by their actions, not by who they are. No specific training is required. There are, however, some minimum criteria: carry out non-violent action, accept the universality of human rights (someone who defends certain rights, but denies women’s rights or discriminates against certain minorities cannot be considered a defender) and defend rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments of the universal system of human rights.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Forst. How are human rights defenders defined? <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/en/content/how-are-human-rights-defenders-defined>  
Alda Facio. Activist, Feminist or Defender? Or: Activist, Feminist and Defender! (text in Spanish)

**What is the usefulness of this definition?** Calling oneself a human rights defender can be useful in certain contexts and for certain purposes. Alda Facio, the Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, offers us some ways to use and leverage this definition to strengthen and protect our activism:

- Calling yourself a defender is not incompatible with recognizing yourself as an activist, feminist, trade unionist, lesbian, transgender or other identity. It implies also connecting oneself to a human rights framework that women themselves have built.
- It implies taking action with the knowledge that the State has a legal obligation to protect all persons who defend the most diverse rights, as well as the obligation to protect us and not attack us for our work. It allows us to use the existing international regulatory framework and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders when we are subject to threats or attacks because of our work.
- It gives us the opportunity to use a common language among those of us who defend human rights, which strengthens our struggles.

## Step 2.

After reading the text, form groups to reflect on the following questions:

How does this text relate to the ideas that were expressed in our previous discussion?

Do we feel identified with the definition?

Why or why not?

In our context, would it be helpful to call ourselves human rights defenders or something else?

What other terms do we use to refer to persons who fight for equality, peace, justice, etc.?

## Step 3.

The facilitator summarizes the core ideas and creates an initial definition with which the group feels identified.



### **HUMAN RIGHTS** **DEFENDER**

**A WOMAN HUMAN  
RIGHTS DEFENDER  
WHO INDIVIDUALLY OR  
WITH OTHERS, ACTS TO  
PROMOTE AND PROTECT  
HUMAN RIGHTS.**

# SESSION 3. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

We are part of a global movement!



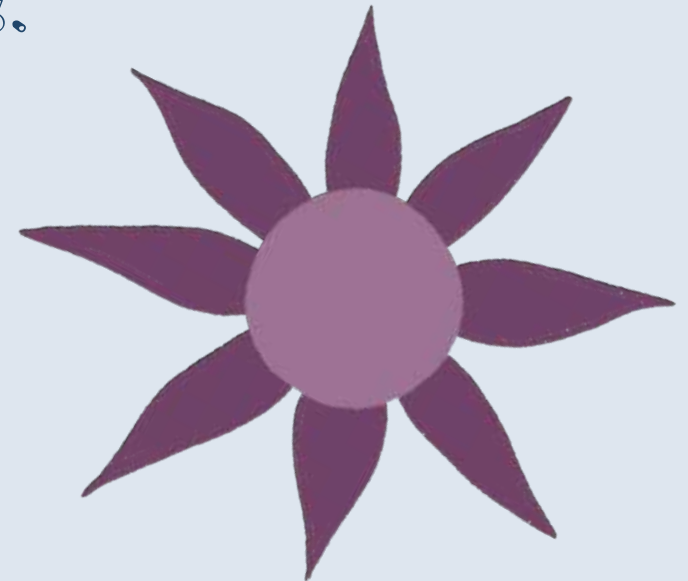
## Introduction:

Today it is crucial that we recognize the stories of women's struggles not only in our own countries but around the world as well so that we can appreciate and learn from them. Affirming the long history of women's struggles, current efforts take on different forms of activism that drive various agendas for change. Over the centuries, we have come together with the commitment to improve our societies.

## Activity: The flower of our struggles.

### Preparatory step.

The facilitator draws a big flower, with a large center and equally large petals, leaving space to place cards within each of them.



## Step 1.

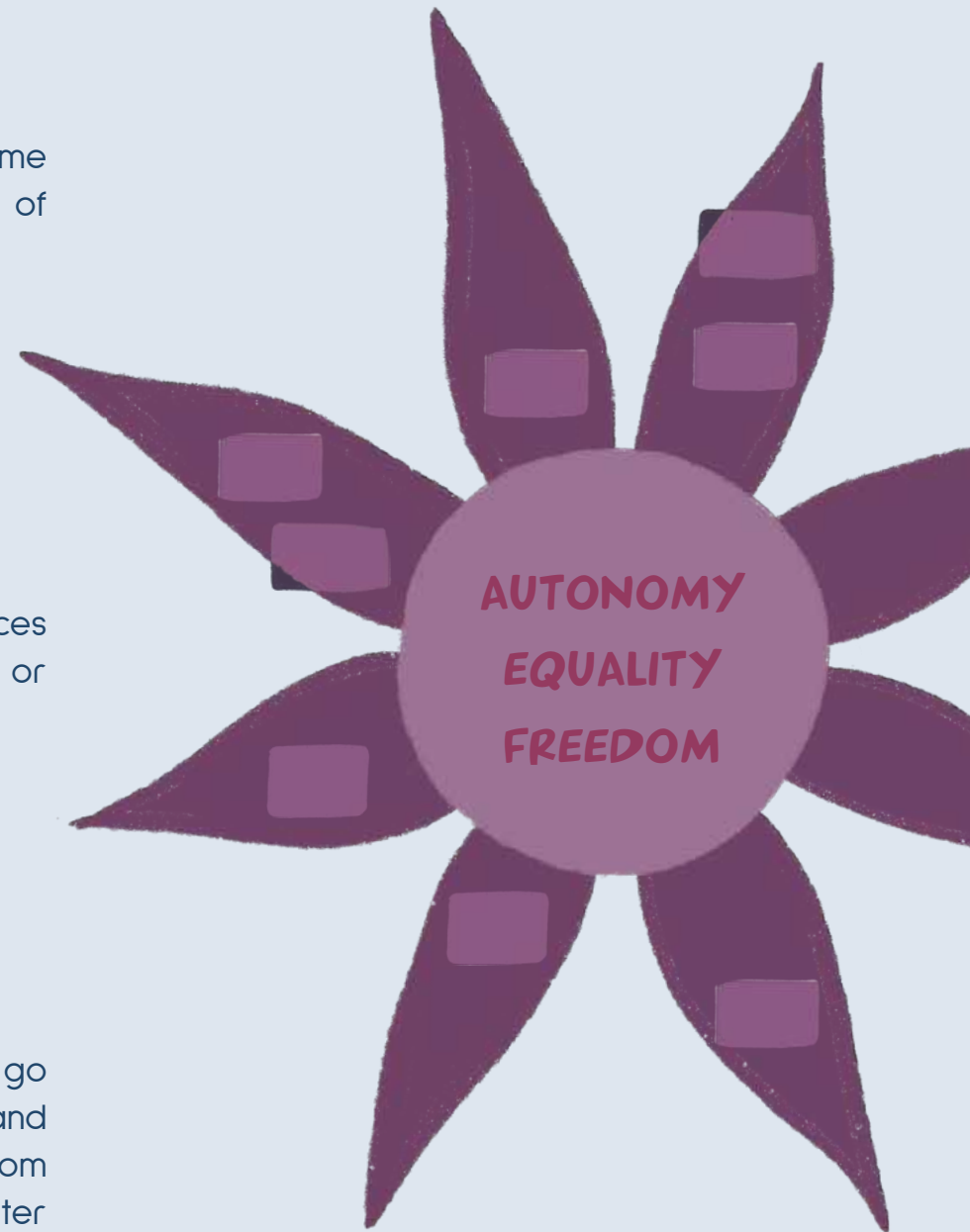
Individual work: On a colored card, each participant writes the name of a struggle that they believe has contributed to the strengthening of women's and human rights movements.

## Step 2.

In plenary, each participant reads their card and the facilitator places it on the petals, seeking to place together those that are similar or refer to the same struggles.

## Step 3.

After all the cards have been read, participants discuss what should go in the center of the flower to join the petals. What are the values and political commitments that link these various struggles of women from around the world? The facilitator writes the main ideas in the center of the flower and then summarizes.



# Activity: Reflection on photographs

## Step 1.

The facilitator shows the following photographs to everyone and gives them some time to look at them. To energize this moment, a song that is symbolic of women's struggles can be played in the background.



Millions of women in the Spanish state joined the demonstrations and the strike called by feminists for March 8, 2018.



In December 2019, thousands of older women congregated in Chile to sing "The Rapist is You", a song that decries violence against women and denounces patriarchy.





In January 2019, millions of women in India formed a 620-kilometer "human wall" to demand gender equality in that country.



In August 2018, thousands of South African women protested the violence toward women and the LGBTI community with the exhortation "Total Shutdown."



## Step 2.

At the end, the facilitator asks,

How do these movements inspire us?

What does it mean to us to be part of a global women's movement?

### Activity: Chants and songs.

To conclude, ask a few participants to share some of the chants or songs that they use in their demonstrations for women's rights or other causes. Everyone repeats the chants out loud to feel and express the energy of collective power!



# WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO DEFEND OUR RIGHTS!

## OBJECTIVE

To become familiar with and recognize not only national and international laws and instruments that protect our rights as women and as human rights defenders, but also strategies that can help make our rights a reality.

ESTIMATED  
TIME

4 hrs / 30 min

## MATERIALS

Flipcharts, markers,  
colored cards

### The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

*13. The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders sets forth the rights of human rights defenders and stipulates that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

**Note for the facilitator:** For this topic, prior to the session the facilitator should do some simple research into the laws protecting human rights in the country in which they are conducting the training: for example, whether or not the government(s) have signed and ratified the international conventions and standards for women's rights; whether there are laws or protocols for the protection of human rights defenders, etc., and how women and their movements helped get these laws passed.



# SESSION 1. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

National and international legal frameworks that protect women's rights.

## Activity: Recognizing our knowledge and contributions.



### Introduction:

We will explore the contributions that women have made to the enactment of laws and policies favorable to our human rights. First, we will recognize and share our knowledge about these efforts. As you will see, this activity will be a challenge for all of us since women's contributions and public participation are not always sufficiently visible and valued.

### Step 1.

In pairs, participants respond to the following questions, using different colored cards for national and international levels of engagement.

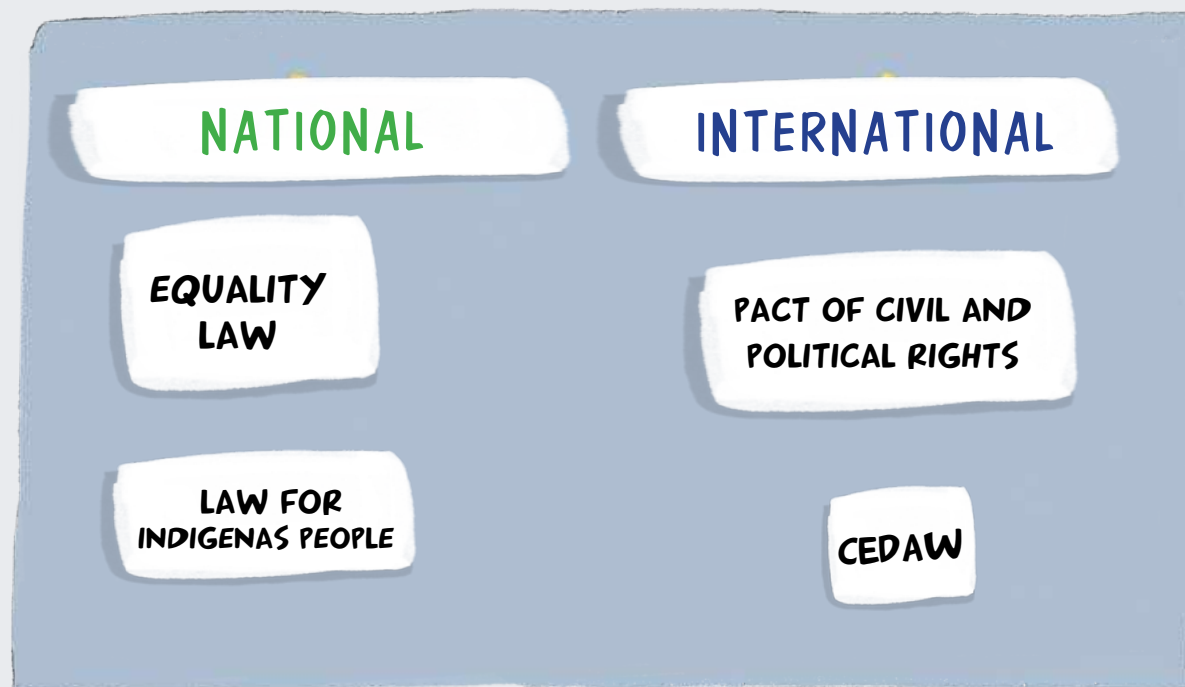
Do you know of any national human rights laws or policies to which women have contributed? If so, can you mention one? (Write it on a card.) How did women contribute to its creation?

Do you know of any international human rights instruments to which women have contributed? If so, can you mention one? (Write it on a different colored card.) How did women contribute to its creation?



## Step 2.

The responses are shared in plenary and the cards are taped to the wall, distinguishing the national laws and policies from the international ones. This discussion provides the basis for the following activity.



**Activity:** Participatory presentation to expand and deepen knowledge

## Preparatory Step:

The facilitator develops a presentation on the following text using as references the previous research that was prepared on national laws.

**Note:** The following text is divided in three parts. At the end of each part, there are a few questions that the facilitator can ask the group after presenting the section's content. To make the presentation more dynamic, the facilitator can write the central ideas and illustrations on newsprint or project them on a PowerPoint screen that everyone can see. A song or poem might be used to motivate the group.

# Step 1.

The facilitator gives the prepared presentation and asks the group the related questions after each part. An optional Power Point presentation can be found at this link:

[https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/presentation\\_our\\_rights\\_our\\_safety.pdf](https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/presentation_our_rights_our_safety.pdf)

**WOMEN** → **ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY**

- **LAWS**
- **RULES**
- **PROTOCOLS**

**HOW WOMEN FOUGHT TO GET THE VOTE?**

# WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

## First part

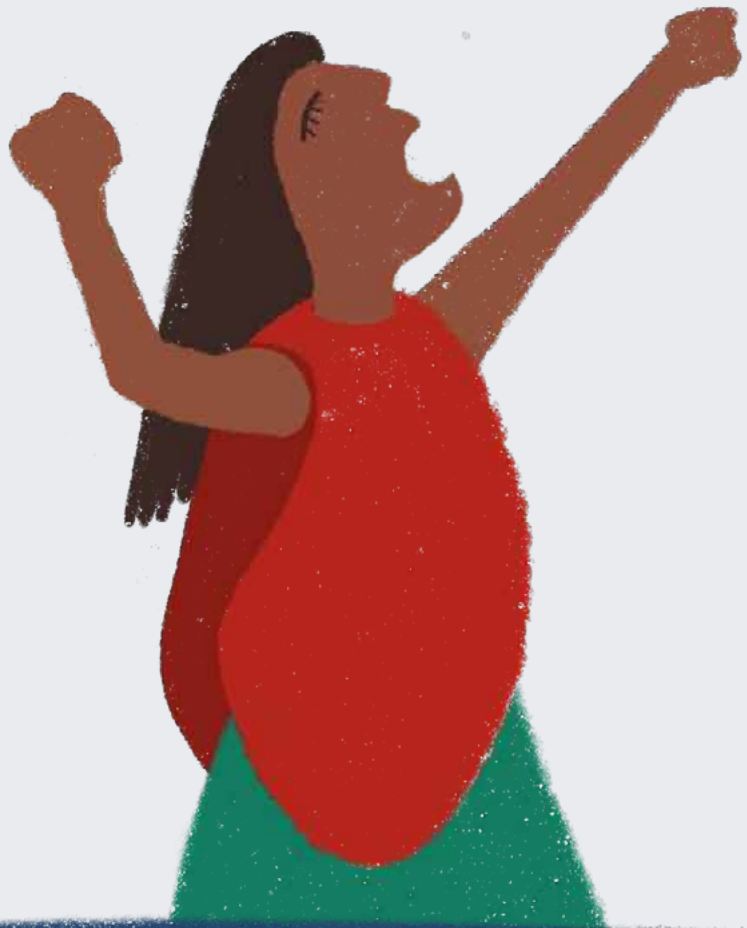
Women contribute to the construction of laws, standards, protocols and various mechanisms for advancing human rights. While our governments often fail to respect our rights or comply with the laws that protect them, it is important to remember that no law supporting women's rights has been passed without a previous struggle, without women who have raised their voices, organized and challenged power and traditional norms. For example, we need to remember the decades of struggle carried out by millions of women around the globe to obtain the right to vote, country by country, each victory inspiring the efforts of others.



### QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:

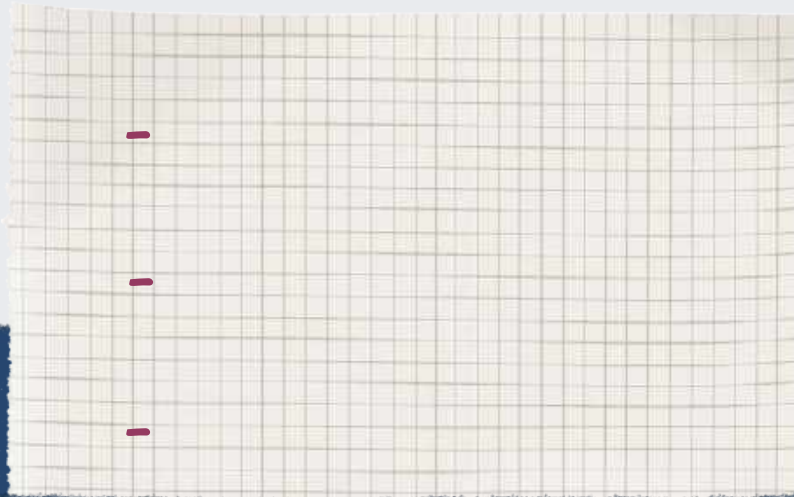
Do you remember how women struggled to get the vote here in this country? Do you remember the names of some of the women who participated in that struggle? If so, say them out loud so we can honor them.





In this country, women, their communities and organizations have pushed for the enactment of important laws for the full recognition of our human rights. Despite the resistance and obstacles that we face in their implementation, these are achievements that we must acknowledge and use in our strategies for change.

In addition to the laws that the group mentioned in the earlier exercise, other important laws are:



**HERE**



The facilitator adds additional information she has researched about country-specific laws to which women have contributed over the years. Write each of these laws on a card and add them to those that the group mentioned in the previous activity.

# Second part

Now let's learn about experiences from other places, where women's efforts made it possible to establish laws and policies supporting their rights. These experiences are inspiring!



- In **Colombia**, after the 2016 Peace Agreements between the guerillas and the government were signed, women were able to get the Gender Subcommittee established as a mechanism to incorporate women's rights, demands and needs.

status as recognized as heads of household. Obtaining this legal documentation is a prerequisite to accessing social services.<sup>1</sup>

- In **Indonesia**, a country where female heads of household are not allowed the same rights as males, the organization PEKKA succeeded in getting women granted legal



1 Zulminarni, Nani, Valerie Miller, Alexa Bradley, Angela Bailey, and Jonathan Fox. 2018. "Movement-building for Accountability: Learning from Indonesian Women's Organizing." Accountability Research Center, Accountability Working Paper 3 [https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WP3-Indonesia\\_Oct18\\_web-1.pdf](https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WP3-Indonesia_Oct18_web-1.pdf)



- In South Africa, because of the colonization and racist apartheid regime, women lost their right and access to land. When apartheid was eradicated, legal changes in land tenure did not guarantee that women would gain access to homes and land. Thanks to women's organizing, the law allowing this inequality was changed. Traditional authorities often refuse to recognize this legislation, however, so women continue to struggle.

- In Syrian Kurdistan, despite living in a context of war and violence, women were able to get child marriage and polygamy banned in their communities. In addition they established a system in which each leadership position must be jointly held by a man and a woman.



### QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:

What do you think of these examples? Do you know of any laws from other countries that women's struggles have made possible and that have advanced the rights of women and those of their people? What are some?

# Third part

Women's struggles for the recognition and expansion of their rights have also led to international achievements. One of the most important was the enactment of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**.

**QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:** Who is familiar with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women? Please raise your hand.

Perhaps you wonder why it is so important. Let's look at some of the reasons:

- Approved by the United Nations in 1979, CEDAW has been signed and ratified by 187 countries, which is 96% of those in existence! It is a binding instrument, which means that ratifying States have a legal obligation to comply with it.
- It establishes the obligation of the States to eliminate "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex ...in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field...", i.e., [and] to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.
- Its aim is to achieve equality, -- that men, women and all persons are born with equal dignity and

rights. Equality also means that the diversity of people's identities and needs cannot be grounds for discrimination.

- In each of the 187 countries, many women and feminist collectives and organizations have used CEDAW not only to advance laws supporting their rights but also to legitimize equal rights and conditions between men and women, and to demand effective governmental policies and actions.

**QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP:** Do you know if your country has ratified CEDAW?

Additional relevant aspects of CEDAW in Spanish can be found at: Alda Facio. CEDAW en 10 minutos. UNIFEM  
<http://americalatinagenera.org>



# SESSION 2. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

Exercising our right to defend our rights.

**Activity:** Reflection to explore our strategies.

## Introduction:

We know that defending, protecting and disseminating human rights and, in general, fighting for justice, equality and peace is a right that all people have and that it is expressed in rights related to freedom of expression, assembly, association, etc. We also know that the right to defend human rights is not respected by many of our governments or by those group and persons who oppose our participation. Given this reality, we have developed a variety of strategies to exercise our right to defend our rights.



# Step 1

In small groups answer these questions:

What obstacles have we encountered as women in exercising our right to defend human rights (in our families, our organizations, our communities and with the State)?

What strategies have we used personally and collectively to assert our right to defend human rights and to overcome any obstacles (to protest, to speak freely, to organize, to demonstrate in public, etc.)?

# Step 2

Identify the strategies that are common to the small group.

# Step 3

Think about what symbols or images can be used to represent these strategies. On sheets of colored paper, sketch drawings or symbols that represent these.



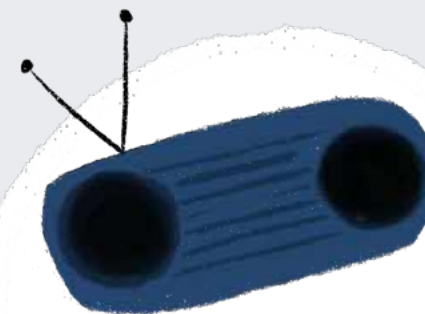
## IDEAS:



SPEAKER  
Protest



CAMP FIRE  
Shelter



RADIO  
Community watch



YARN  
Group of women

## Step 4

In plenary, share and explain the drawings and symbols. These images may be left in the meeting room or exhibited in the organizations' headquarters, as they represent the strength, the ideas and the ways in which we manage to participate and enforce our rights as human rights defenders.

# SESSION 3. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

Understanding the legal framework for the defense of human rights.

**Activity:** Reading and group reflection on the right to defend rights in the local context.

## Step 1

The facilitator provides each participant with a copy of the following text. Enough time is allotted to read it. If the group or a participant has reading difficulties, it is important that they receive support for this exercise, such as reading it aloud together.





## TEXT: Understanding the UN Declaration on human rights defenders and other instruments for defending our right to defend human rights.

In 1998, United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (abbreviated as the Declaration on human rights defenders). Thanks to the work of human rights organizations, this Declaration established that promoting, disseminating and defending human rights is a right in itself, as can be seen in the following table.<sup>1</sup>

**Art. 5.** For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels:

- a) To meet or assemble peacefully;
- b) To form, join and participate in non governmental organizations, associations or groups;
- c) To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations.

**Art.6.** Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others:

- a) To know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- b) To freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

<sup>1</sup> Resolution A/RES/53/144: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf>

While it is not a binding or mandatory instrument, [State compliance is not mandatory], it contains a series of principles and rights from other international instruments that are legally binding, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

To make this Declaration useful to women, feminist and human rights organizations succeeded in getting the United Nations General Assembly to approve a Resolution on Women Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 18, 2013. This Resolution recognizes the important participation of women in the defense of human rights. It also notes with concern the particular threats and harassment directed at women human rights defenders and establishes different measures that States must take to protect them.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the pressure of civil society organizations, some countries have established specific laws and mechanisms at the national level to protect human rights defenders. Here are two examples:

→ In Mexico, the Act for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists<sup>3</sup> was passed in 2012. This law requires authorities to implement measures to ensure the life, physical integrity and safety of persons at risk as a result of their work. Colombia, Brazil, Honduras and Guatemala also have official protection mechanisms.

→ In Mali, the National Act on Human Rights Defenders was enacted in 2017. This law contains provisions to foster an environment conducive to the work of defenders. The Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso also have legal systems to protect defenders.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the application and enforcement of these protection mechanisms has been very weak. Throughout the world, impunity in cases of violence against defenders is very high, and women activists, indigenous and environmental defenders, and LGBTI activists are among the most affected.

<sup>2</sup> This Resolution can be found at: [https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/roughguide\\_unresolutionwhrds\\_0.pdf](https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/roughguide_unresolutionwhrds_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For further information in Spanish: <https://www.gob.mx/segob/documentos/conoce-mas-sobre-el-mecanismo-de-proteccion-de-personas-defensoras-de-derechos-humanos-y-periodistas>

<sup>4</sup> For further information: <https://www.ishr.ch/news/mali-ground-breaking-new-law-strengthens-legal-protection-human-rights-defenders>

In some regions of the world, regional human rights organizations exist that help interpret and monitor the full implementation of international human rights standards in the regional context. These systems have been used by human rights organizations and activists when their rights have been violated and they have not found justice in their own country. In some cases, these systems can require States to implement urgent protective measures when a person, community or organization requires this action to safeguard their life and physical integrity.

→ In the Americas, there is the Inter-American System for the Protection of Human Rights.

→ In Europe, the European Council, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, each has its own regional human rights mechanisms and instruments.

→ In Africa, there is the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights.

For further information, consult: A Rough Guide to the Regional Human Rights Systems <https://www.universal-rights.org/nyc/human-rights-rough-guides/a-rough-guide-to-the-regional-human-rights-systems/>

# Step 2

In small groups, answer the following questions:

What laws can we identify at the national level that protect the right to defend human rights (e.g. those related to freedom of expression, assembly, association, etc.)?

Are these laws enforced?

Do we know if there is an official mechanism or specific policies to protect persons who defend human rights in our country?

What obstacles do we women face in gaining access to this mechanism?



## Step 3

In plenary, each group presents two or three of the reflections that arose from discussing the questions. The participants then reflect upon the question.

What can we do in our country to increase the respect for rights and the protection of human rights defenders?

## Step 4

The facilitator summarizes the most important reflections.

## Closing

**Synthesis of the session.** The facilitator briefly reviews the entire session, mentioning the main laws that were identified and the strategies and symbols that participants use to exercise their right to defend rights.



**RIGHTS AND  
LAWS**

**TO ASSEMBLE**

**TO COMMUNICATE  
WITH ORGANIZATIONS**

**TO SPREAD OPINIONS**

**TO RECEIVE PROTECTION  
AS A DEFENDER**

**TO SAFEGUARD INTEGRITY**

# WHY ARE WE AT RISK?

## OBJECTIVE

To develop an initial analysis of the violence that participants face as human rights defenders and activists to help them later create a basic plan for their protection. (Module 6).

**NOTE:** This module offers analytical tools and processes to understand and assess the risk faced by human rights activists/defenders. Please note, this is an introductory activity. If you believe you or your organization currently face a high risk situation, please use the appendix of module 6 to find organizations and tools for protection.



## ESTIMATED TIME

8 hrs

(In these long sessions, it is important to schedule breaks and some dynamic activities to energize the group.)

## MATERIALS

Newsprint, markers, colored cards, computer with Internet to project a video (optional).

### The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

*The experiences of women defenders are diverse. They promote and protect human rights in very different circumstances. In doing so, they generally face greater risks and challenges than men do.*

*Some of the risks and violations they experience have not been sufficiently understood, analyzed, documented and recognized; some have not been treated as legitimate human rights concerns.*

*The risks, threats and attacks faced by women defenders should be monitored and trends analyzed so that precautionary measures can be taken.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

# SESSION 1. 4hours.

What do we fear? What puts us at risk?



## Introduction:

Before beginning, it is important to explain why we are doing this session, why it is important that we talk about the fears and violence that affect us as human rights defenders. We recommend some key ideas below to share with the participants:

- Defending human rights can challenge the actions, privileges and impunity of powerful individuals and groups. As we know, these groups use many different strategies, including violence, to keep us silent, fearful and at risk.
- In addition, just by being women, we face violence caused by the macho and sexist society in which we live. If we are also indigenous, black, lesbian, transgender, or poor, the risk of experiencing situations of violence increases due to other structures of oppression, such as racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and others.
- In this context, human rights defenders can experience different situations that instill fear in us and put our physical integrity and the work that we do for human rights at risk. Nevertheless, it is common for us to ignore these situations because we force ourselves to be

brave and/or because we do not have a safe and trustworthy space in which to talk about them.

- In this session, we will analyze the situations that make us afraid and the violence that they include, as this is the first step to improving and strengthening our safety and protection. It is important to recognize fear in our protection efforts as it can alert us to danger, especially if we have a safe and trustworthy space in which to identify and analyze it.
- We also know that we have the capacities and resources to face fear and protect ourselves. As we analyze together, we discover that often the fear and violence we experience is not accidental or by chance, but rather as the result of factors and power dynamics in the context in which we live.

## Activity: Body Mapping



### Introduction:

The facilitator explains that we will begin the analysis using our own bodies -- indicating how our fears affect us and how our experiences of resistance, capacity and strength help us face those fears. Then we will deepen the analysis and learn about what other human rights defenders have experienced.

### Step 1.

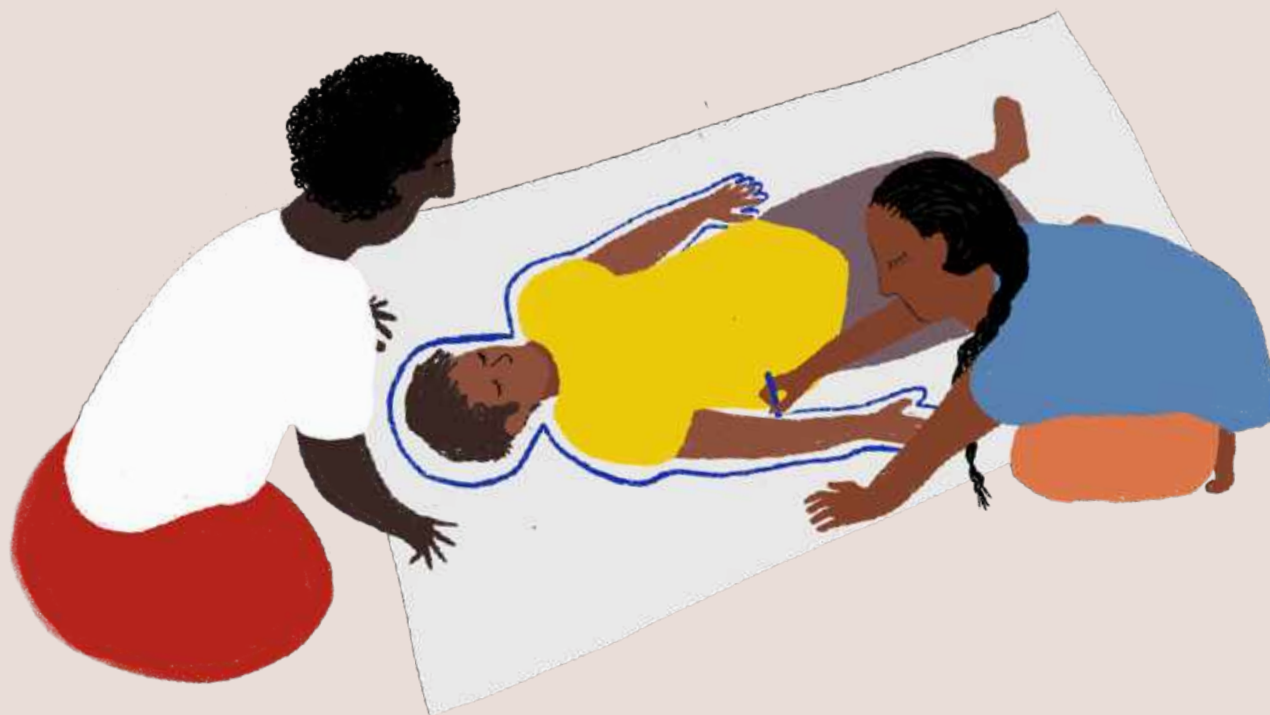
In plenary, brainstorm: **what makes us afraid** -- in our daily life and in our activism. Ask participants to share what first comes to mind. The facilitator takes notes and also talks about her own fears.





## Step 2.

In pairs. With the help of a colleague, each participant draws the silhouette of her own body on a large piece of paper.



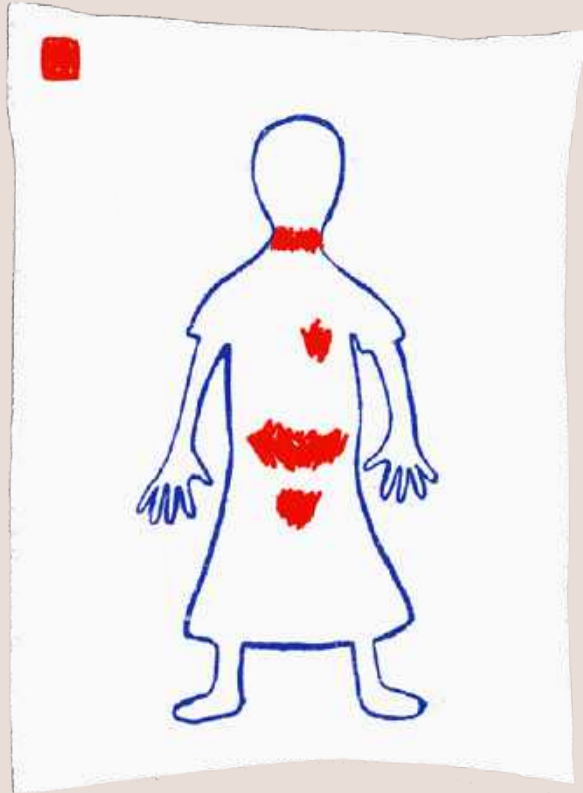
## Step 3.

The facilitator asks the participants to respond to two questions and indicate their answers on their silhouette.



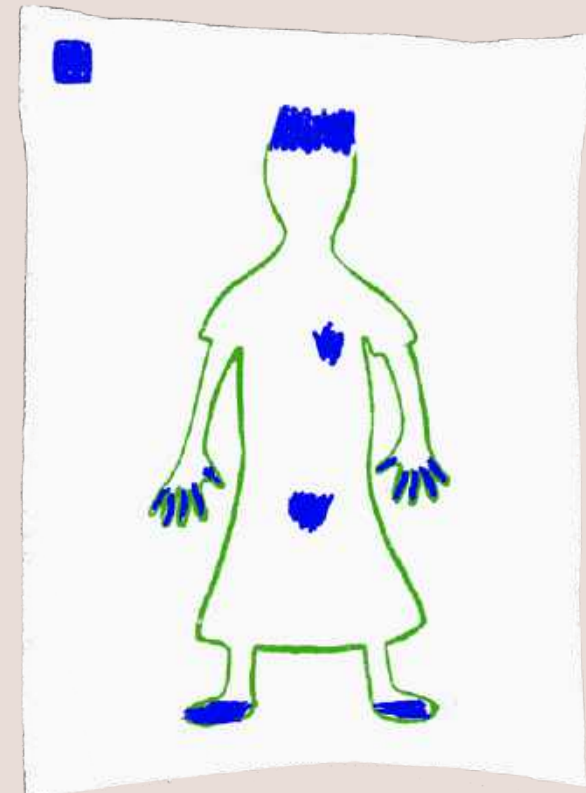
## In my daily life and activism:

Where on my body do I feel fear?



\* Indicate 2 or 3 specific places

Where on my body do I feel strength and the capacity to face the fear?



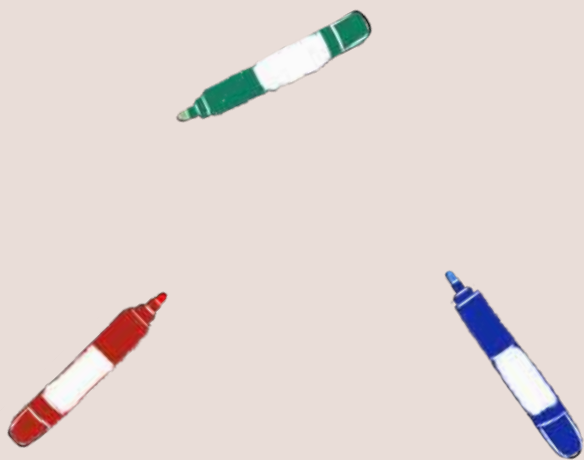
\* Indicate 2 or 3 specific places

## Step 4.

In pairs, the participants share and explain what they put on their silhouettes. Then, in plenary, they share common elements and insights that arise from the activity. The facilitator synthesizes the major reflections that emerge from the group.

## Step 5.

To close the activity, the facilitator tapes an empty silhouette to the wall that represents the collective body and asks everyone to indicate, with colored markers, the parts of the body where they feel strength and energy to face fear. That image remains there during the entire session to remind us that, although it may be difficult and painful to remember our fears, we always have the collective strength to support and accompany each other along the way.



**Activity:** Framework to analyze the violences that we experience as defenders and the capacities that we have to face these violences.

## **Introduction:**

We are going to analyze those situations that generate fear and the types of violence that they include, recognizing how these are affecting our lives and our political action. They may be situations that have occurred, that are currently happening, or that may occur in the future. Violence constitutes a risk to our physical integrity and to the work that we undertake as defenders.



# Step 1.

The facilitator explains the following format, using the example:

<p><b>1.</b> As a human rights defender, what situations generate fear in me and what kinds of violence can I recognize in them? – Identify the two or three most important ones for you at this time.</p>	<p><b>2.</b> How is this situation affecting my life and work for human rights? Indicate one or two effects.</p>	<p><b>3.</b> Is this situation affecting the organization or the community to which I belong? How? Identify one or two impacts.</p>	<p><b>4.</b> What capacities or resources do I have to face this situation -- What power do I have? Identify the most important of these. (for example: personal strengths, experiences, knowledge, friendships, strategies, solidarity, my organization, family, etc.)</p>
<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p><b>Fear:</b> That the police arrest me in our protests against the company that wants to build a mine in our community.</p> <p><b>Types of violence:</b> Arbitrary arrest in the protests against the mining company, physical or sexual abuse during detention.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>I am afraid when I go to protests, sometimes I have preferred to stay at home.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>They have already arrested one colleague; at some protests, the police have dragged us and touched our private parts.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>We have legal support to defend our arrested colleague. Now, we go to all the protests in groups so that no one is alone if they attack us.</p>

<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p><b>Fear:</b> That my husband will become violent because he does not like me participating in the organization.</p> <p><b>Types of violence:</b> Insults, pushing, threatening to take our children away from me.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>I don't feel safe in my home; I don't have the support of my husband to be a human rights defender and activist.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>Sometimes I don't go to my organization's activities to avoid having any more conflicts.</p>	<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>I have the power to stand my ground and defend myself when attacked. My daughters support me in continuing to participate in the organization.</p>
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## Step 2.

The facilitator asks each participant to individually complete the chart, exploring one or two situations that generate fear and the forms of violence that cause the fear:

<p>1. As a human rights defender, what situations generate fear in me and what kinds of violence can I recognize in them? – Identify the two or three most important ones for you at this time.</p>	<p>2. How is this situation affecting my life and work for human rights? Indicate one or two effects.</p>	<p>3. ¿Is this situation affecting the organization or the community to which I belong? How? Identify one or two impacts.</p>	<p>4. What capacities or resources do I have to face this situation? What power do I have? Identify several. (for example: personal strengths, experiences, knowledge, friendships, strategies, solidarity, my organization, family, etc.)</p>

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## Step 3.

In plenary: The facilitator explains that, for this part, it is important for the participants to share only the information that they want to. Since the activity involves sensitive issues, people should only do so if they feel safe. The facilitator asks participants to share the types of violence that they are experiencing and the capacities, resources and power that they have to confront them. Later, we will use what is shared here as an input for creating the protection plan (Module 6).

## Step 4.

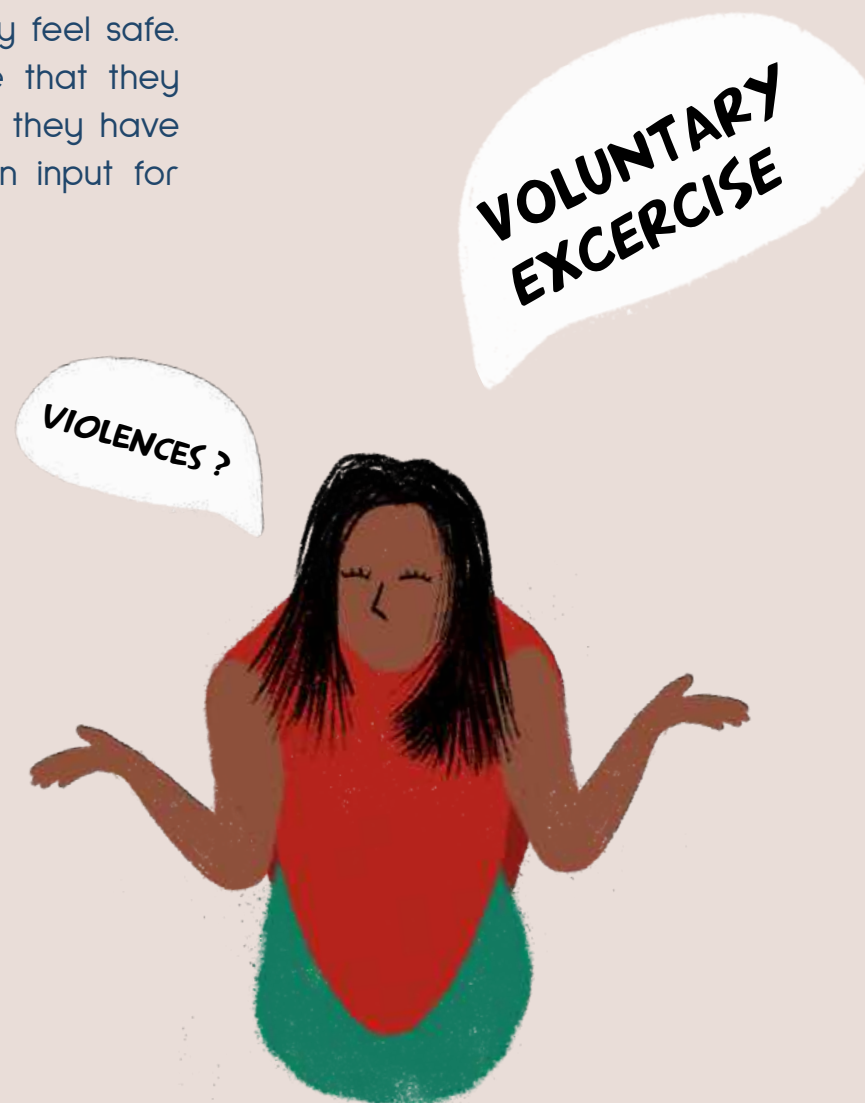
### GROUP REFLECTION.

The facilitator asks the participants:

What types of violence did we share?

What capacities and resources do we have to face these violences?

What power do I have?



The facilitator summarizes the types of violence that are common to the group as well as the capacities and resources that participants have to face them, and then records them on two pieces of newsprint in the format shown below. These sheets of paper should remain visible during the entire session.

### Shared forms of Violence

### Capacities and Resources: My Power

## Activity: Survey and text to explore common experiences among defenders and activists throughout the world.



### Step 1.

The facilitator explains: We will take a short survey to compare our experiences with those of other defenders that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on defenders highlighted in its report.

Raise your hand if you have experienced any of these types of violence (the facilitator gives everyone a copy of the following text and reads the list). Those that are common are added to the newsprint list of shared types of violence done in the previous activity.

#### Types of violence shared by defenders in different parts of the world:

- Non-recognition, marginalization and systematic exclusion. Women defenders, as well as their actions, are rendered invisible or their contributions and opinions are marginalized.
- Public shaming, stigmatization, attacks on honor and reputation. Efforts to shame women have led to their stigmatization and isolation.
- Risks, threats and attacks in the private sphere (within the family or among close relatives) and against relatives and loved ones.
- Physical attacks, sexual violence.
- Torture

- Killing of members of the organization or of activists in the community.
- Enforced disappearances.
- Online harassment, violence and attacks, including threats of sexual violence, verbal abuse, sexuality baiting, “doxing” (online sharing of private information about a person by others) and public shaming.
- Judicial harassment, criminalization and incarceration.
- Threats to legal status, especially if the person is an immigrant or seeking asylum..
- Aggression, harassment and lack of recognition within the organizations, communities and movements themselves.

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

## Step 2. The facilitator asks:

What types of violence on the list have we not yet experienced, but still may represent a threat to us in the future?

Which ones should be added to the newsprint sheet on shared violence?

(consider especially those that have a great likelihood of occurring)

What might we do to protect ourselves from them?



## Activity: Circle of Strength.

**Step 1.** Everyone gets in a circle and holds hands, closing their eyes if they want.

## Step 2.

The facilitator asks the participants to remain silent and think about the power that all women, personally and collectively, have created and activated to confront acts of violence and heal from their trauma, for example the power of recognizing our vulnerability and asking for support when we need it, the power of caring for each other and making our own decisions. These strengths are always with us and help us to find our way in difficult times. We tap into the strength of our women ancestors, the strength of our vital energy, the strength of our movements and our causes.



## Step 3.

To conclude, everyone takes a collective breath (inhaling deeply through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, at least three times).

## SESSION 2. 3 hours.

Contextual analysis to recognize the perpetrators of violence and understand the causes of violence that we experience.

### Introduction:

The facilitator may use the following ideas to explain the session:

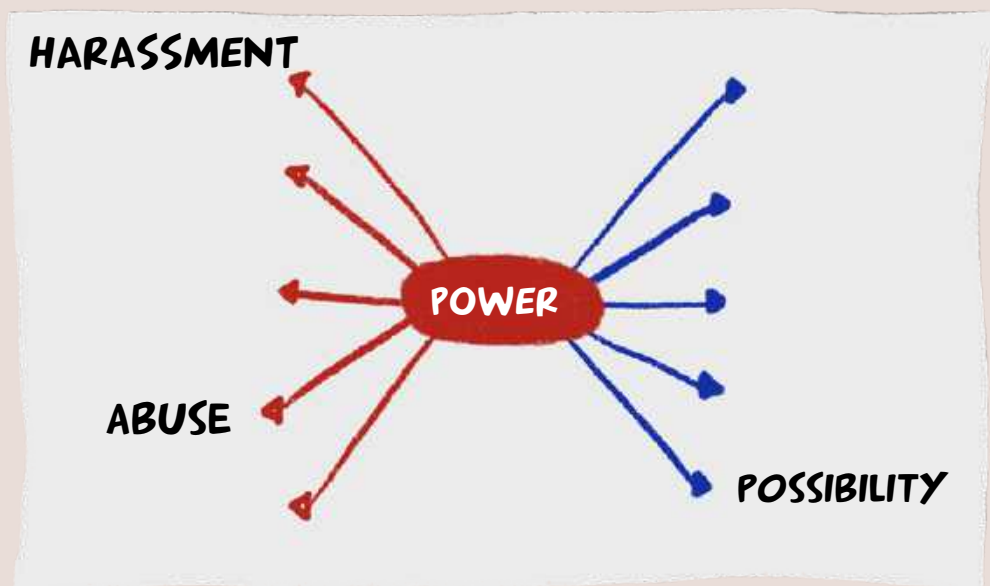
- The violence that is affecting our lives and our work for human rights does not usually occur by chance or without reason. There are powerful forces and actors behind this violence that see their interests being affected by our work as defenders. They are threatened because we are women who are breaking traditional stereotypes and daring to raise our voices against injustices.



- Analyzing the contextual forces that generate the fear and violence affecting us is fundamental to our protection so we can develop better strategies to counter them. In this session, we are going to analyze these forces of power and the actors responsible for the common types of violence that we identified in the previous session. Then we are going to look at transformative kinds of power that can help protect us and keep us safe – power, as we have seen, that is within each of us, in our communities and in our organizations, including the strength of solidarity that connects and inspires us.

# Activity: Brainstorming on nature of power – what is it?

**Introduction:** The facilitator explains that, to advance our rights and protect ourselves from the types of violence that we have identified, we need to analyze the forces and types of power that operate in our context.



## Step 1.

In plenary, the participants respond to the question:

**What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word “power”?**

The facilitator encourages the group to respond quickly as she records the words on a sheet of newsprint.

## Step 2.

The facilitator reflects on what emerged from the brainstorming – noting that the words that often emerge first are those that emphasize the negative, violent or oppressive aspects of power, but that words may also emerge that express the positive, creative and inspiring aspects of power. Power often can be seen as having two sides: on the one hand, the oppressive and violent power that seeks to dominate us and overturn our struggles, and, on the other hand, the transformative power that we tap into to free ourselves and create more just societies.

**Note:** If you want to more deeply understand the ways and dynamics in which power is manifested, see the Appendix at the end of this module.

## Activity: Analysis of the actors and the forces of power that put us at risk.



### Step 1.

The facilitator explains that we are going to identify the actors and forces of power that oppress us and that cause the violence that affects us. To begin, place the newsprint that the group created listing the types of shared violence on the wall. Read them out loud to ensure that everyone understands them and that the most important one are listed. Prioritize 3 or 4 and assign one to each small group.

### Step 2.

In small working groups, analyze one type of violence according to the following questions:

#### **FORMS OF VIOLENCE**

**RACISM**

**THREATS**

**RAPE**

**HARASSMENT**

**ATTACKS**

**SEXISM**

**HOMOPHOBIA**

**DEFAMATION**



## Who is mainly responsible for this type of violence?

Recognizing that there may be several principle sources of the violence, the following questions may be useful in starting this reflection:

Are there State authorities who use institutions, laws, policies, security forces or other public power to attack us? Which ones?

Are there private groups behind the violence? (a company, an organized crime group, communications or media outlet, a religious group, etc.)? Which groups?

Are there people who are close to us, in our family or intimate sphere, who are threatening or violent to us? Who are they?

Why do these different forces/actors attack us?

What power and what resources do they have to do this?

What cultural practices, stories, rumors or stereotypes do they use to defame us, to undermine public support and by so doing, to legitimize this type of violence?



## Step 3.

Each group presents their analysis. The rest of the participants ask questions and add any information that may be missing.

## Step 4.

In the plenary session, participants reflect on the question:

What have women and communities done to respond to these aggressions?  
What powers do we have?

**Activity:** Reading and reflection on the power dynamics that promote violence against women human rights defenders worldwide.

## Step 1.

### GROUP READING.

Divide into four groups and introduce the activity. We are going to imagine that it is early in the morning and that we are meeting with a group of relatives or friends to drink coffee, tea, etc. and to talk about the news in the community and in the world. If it is possible, put out something to eat and drink to share. Each group is given a copy of the following text to read collectively and reflect. It's presented as a newspaper article.



## NEWSPAPER: JUSTICE AND FREEDOM

**The UN Special Rapporteur expresses concern about some major global trends regarding violence against women human rights defenders:**

March 8, 2019. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders presented its latest report in Geneva. It highlights some of the major global trends that are affecting the lives and activism of women defenders around the world. The editors of this newspaper have prepared a synthesis that we hope will be useful to our readers:

**1. Prevailing patriarchal<sup>2</sup> and heteronormative ideas<sup>3</sup>** that impose a rigid definition of gender identities. Those who do not conform are cast as “deviant”, “abnormal” or “perverted”. Human rights defenders may be stigmatized and marginalized by the authorities, community leaders, religious groups, family, neighbors and communities, who believe that their actions represent a threat to family, religion, honor, culture or traditional ways of life.

**2. Proliferation of misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech** by political leaders, which has normalized violence against women and gender non-conforming persons.

**3. Restriction of civil society space.** An increasing number of States in the global North and South have been restricting civil society space, imposing legal and administrative requirements that curtail the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, association and assembly.

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2 A form of social organization, conception and cultural practice that establishes that authority and power reside in men and masculinity. In a patriarchy, sexual difference is used as a mark of inequality; women and all people who do not conform to the idea of dominance of men and masculinity are targets of discrimination. This form of oppression is reinforced by and connected to other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism.

3 The beliefs, practices and social structures through which heterosexuality is imposed as the predetermined or “normal” state of human beings. Any other form of emotional and/or sexual relationship (lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, etc.) is condemned, rejected, and even prohibited.

## Step 2.

In the plenary session, reflect on the following question:

Do we also experience these global trends where we live?

How do they affect us?

Are there others that are not mentioned that we are facing?

4. **Militarization.** Militarization normalizes the use of force and violence; it often results in the idealization of violent masculinities. Actions taken to prevent and counter violent extremism have resulted in women defenders being labelled as potential terrorists, thus silencing legitimate, peaceful dissent. Women also often find themselves excluded from peace processes.

5. **Power of non-state actors.** Non-State actors such as businesses, organized crime figures, investors and financial institutions have been growing in power and influence over States and societies. Projects carried out in the name of economic development – for example, by extractive industries and agribusiness – have resulted in environmental destruction, displacement and high levels of human rights abuses and violence.

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders<sup>4</sup>.*

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4 For more information on the types of violence faced by women human rights defenders, see the following section of the report: VI. Gendered risks faced by women human rights defenders.

# SESSION 3. 1 hour.

In hostile times, let's use the strength of transformative power and solidarity!



## Introduction:

The landscape shown by the contextual analysis does not seem very hopeful. However, in addition to the groups of power that oppress us and the global trends against our struggles and our lives, there are many other signs of transformative power that are activated when a defender, an organization or community is threatened or attacked. It is the collective power of solidarity which in difficult moments gives us strength and determination to continue. But, above all, it reminds us that we, as individuals, communities and peoples can tap into different forms of transformative power capable of changing our reality!

**Activity: Images and solidarity strategies that inspire us.**

## Step 1.

The facilitator explains that, in contrast with other moments in history, nowadays when a defender is attacked, it is much easier to activate others worldwide to denounce the violence and express solidarity. New technologies and social media give us added capacity to mobilize. Solidarity is one of the expressions of collective and transformative power that we can all create. To demonstrate this, show the following photographs to the group:





Protest in New York, United States, for the murder of the Honduran indigenous leader, environmentalist and feminist, Berta Cáceres. Berta Cáceres became millions!



Demonstration in support of activists from Palestine in London, United Kingdom.



Demonstration in Pretoria, South Africa, in solidarity with the social protests in Zimbabwe and repudiating the violence.





Global demonstration: One Billion Rising, activists dancing and singing to end violence and celebrate women and girls that strive to defend their rights.

## Step 2.

After looking at the photographs, the facilitator first asks:

What strikes you about these examples?  
What do they say to you?

Then asks the group:

What other expressions of solidarity are you aware of that were organized to defend rights and denounce violence? They can be personal experiences, those of your organizations or from other places. The more experiences shared, the better!



## Step 3.

Closing. To conclude, watch the following video, created by One Billion Rising:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL5N8rSy4CU>.

It is an inspiring example of music and movement that also inspires all of us to dance!



# Appendix:

## DYNAMICS AND TYPES OF POWER<sup>1</sup>

### OPPRESSIVE AND VIOLENT TYPES OF POWER

Power can be used to dominate and maintain the sexist, racist and classist system in which we currently live. It uses violence, manipulation and deception to prevent women and other groups from participating politically and challenging this system of violence and domination. This type of oppressive power is manifested in three main ways which interact with each other and affect us in our work, our activism, our family and intimate lives.

- **Visible power or official power:** mainly reflected in the exclusionary power of governments – their decisions and actions in the form of biased laws, policies, institutions, etc. – which are used to benefit elites and to marginalize and silence groups such as women, indigenous peoples, the poor, older adults, transgender people, lesbians, and others.

- **Hidden power or shadow power:** involves powerful groups (corporations, certain religious forces, drug cartels, organized crime, communications/media outlets and others) that seek to control society's important institutions and governments for their own benefit. They do this often with violence and slander, trying to silence

and subjugate certain populations and communities who threaten their interests, such as women and indigenous peoples, and by so doing they maximize and maintain their privileges.

- **Invisible power:** maybe the most difficult to identify because it often operates on our consciousness without our awareness. It is manifest in traditional beliefs, norms, ideas and prejudices about gender, race, class, ethnicity among others. It affects our ways of thinking, acting and feeling. Visible and hidden power actors manipulate invisible power, including through public narratives, to reinforce their domination and control.

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<sup>1</sup> Text adapted from JASS' Power Framework. For more information, consult: Power Framework [https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/mch3\\_2011\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/mch3_2011_final_0.pdf)

## TRANSFORMATIVE AND LIBERATING TYPES OF POWER

We develop and tap into transformative and liberating types of power to counter the forms of oppressive and violent power that work to subjugate us. These are forms of power that seek to end inequality and injustices and that are born of empathy, solidarity, awareness and mutual care. Such types of personal and collective power are expressed in the capacities, values, dreams, knowledge and striving for justice seen in the lives and work of women defenders, their organizations and communities. These give rise to an infinite number of strategies that work to counteract and transform violent forms of power.

By activating our hearts, minds and bodies, these strategies support the struggle for justice, collaboration, collective power, mutual care, and the strengthening of our communities, organizations and movements. These powers are contributing to new kinds of economies, political organization, and family and emotional relationships that can enable us to attain fuller and more meaningful lives and overturn the inequalities that threaten these possibilities. They awaken joy, hope and creative capacities.

It is this type of power that inspires us and encourages us to raise our voices, organize and move forward in our struggles. It seeks to eliminate domination of certain people over others and to build respectful relationships within the larger web of life that brings together and connects all of nature in an interdependent weave of strong multi-colored threads.



# POWER AND PROTECTION TO CONTINUE IN THE STRUGGLE

## OBJECTIVE:

Provide participants with an introduction on collective feminist protection through basic tools and analysis that can enhance their safety and the conditions in which they defend human rights.

ESTIMATED  
TIME

7 - 8 hrs

## MATERIALS

Newsprint, markers, copies of forms and readings, skein of yarn and materials for the "Backpack of Confidence" (see below)

**NOTE:** This module provides analysis and tools for collective feminist protection. However, it is only an introduction to the topic. If you believe that you or your organization face a high-risk situation and you urgently need protective measures, or if you want to learn more about the issue, please first review the Appendix on organizations and tools for protection that is found at the end of this module.



### The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

*Women defenders must define their own protection strategies in safe spaces. [These] women-only spaces should cut across cultures, age groups and the rural-urban divide, enabling women to raise common concerns, define collective action and, over time, develop strong networks for greater influence and self-protection.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

# 7 PRINCIPLES TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

THE RAPPORTEUR EMPHASIZES SEVEN PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN PROTECTION PRACTICES.

1 DEVELOP A RIGHTS- BASED APPROACH, EMPOWER DEFENDERS AND INCREASE THE ABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PROTECTION



2 RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSITY OF DEFENDERS; THEY COME FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, CULTURES AND BELIEF SYSTEMS



3 INTEGRATE A GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND ADOPT AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH



4 FOCUS ON THE "HOLISTIC SECURITY" OF DEFENDERS, IN PARTICULAR THEIR PHYSICAL SAFETY, DIGITAL SECURITY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING



5 RECOGNIZE THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN DEFENDERS, GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND FAMILY MEMBERS SHARE THEIR RISKS



6 ENSURE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF DEFENDERS IN ALL STAGES OF PROTECTION STRATEGIES



7 ENSURE THAT PROTECTION MEASURES ARE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE



MORE INFORMATION:  
[WWW.PROTECTING-DEFENDERS.ORG](http://WWW.PROTECTING-DEFENDERS.ORG)

# SESSION 1. 1 hour / 30 minutes

Recognizing what we know about facing violence.

**Activity:** The backpack of confidence. Recovering our knowledge and resources for protection<sup>1</sup>.

## Step 1.

The facilitator provides materials to the participants to make their backpacks (colored paper, cloth, colored markers, glue, scissors, yarn, needles and thread or any other material that can be easily obtained).



## Step 2.

Based on their own experience, participants will identify some important elements that give them confidence and contribute to their protection. Using the materials provided, each participant constructs a “backpack of confidence.”

### THE BACKPACK SHOULD CONTAIN 3 TO 4 ELEMENTS THAT SYMBOLIZE:

- What makes them **feel protected** at times of risk.
- What **calms** them at times of anguish.
- What helps them to **rest** and deal with burnout.
- What helps them to **face fear**.
- The people and groups that **take care** of them.
- The **protection strategies** of their organizations or communities that have been useful to them.





## Step 3.

Participants share in small groups, writing the elements of confidence and protection that each person chose on a sheet of newsprint, identifying common elements. The lists are put on the wall so that everyone can look at them, together with the images of the backpacks.



## Step 4.

Reflection in the plenary session. The facilitator asks:

What do you think of these elements?

Were we aware of all the resources, support, and ways that we have to protect ourselves?

What new ideas have been generated?

# SESSION 2. 1 hour / 30 minutes

The Protection Tree<sup>2</sup>. Deepening our understanding of protection.

**Activity:** Brainstorming on our vision of protection.

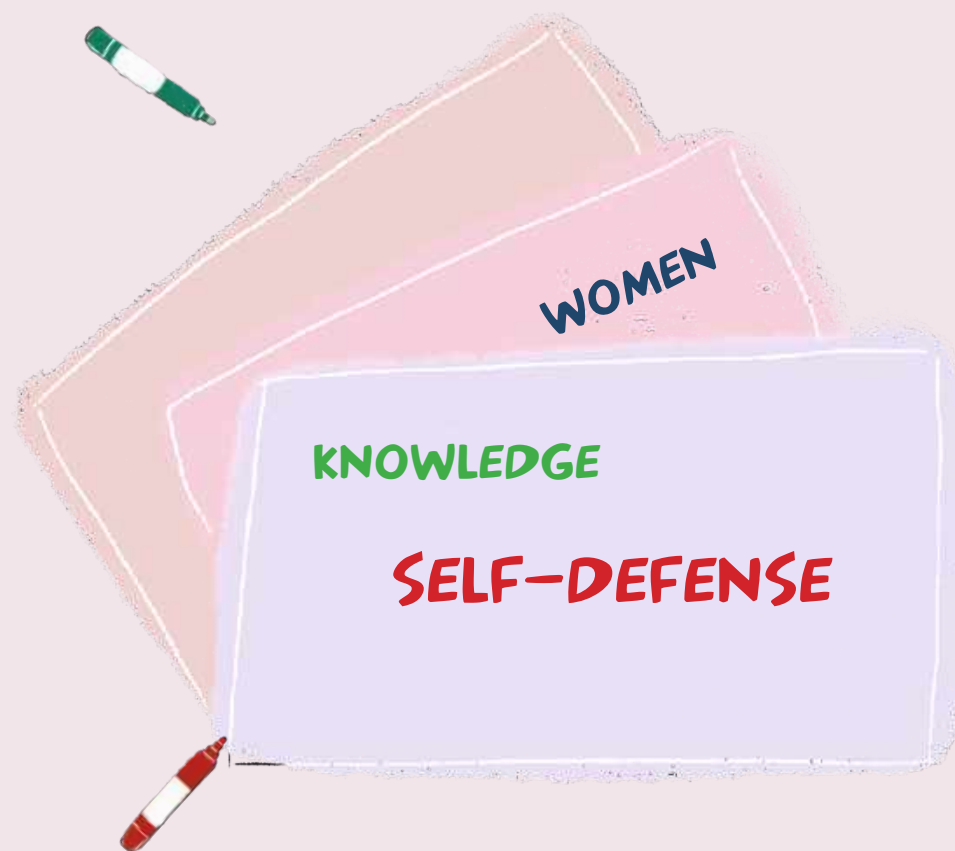
## Step 1.

The facilitator asks the group:

**What does protection mean to us?**

(remember what you put in the backpack of confidence)

The facilitator writes the main ideas on a sheet of newsprint that remains on the wall during the entire session, as a first step in building a group definition. The following activity will help participants more deeply explore the ideas and experiences that have been shared so far.



# Activity: The protection tree.

## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Step 1.

The facilitator puts the figure of a tree in the middle of the room and introduces the exercise with the following explanation:

- There are several ways to envision and define protection that can deepen and complement our own ideas. We can think about protection as a tree: A tree that gives us shade and protects us from the sun's damaging rays. A tree that gives us air to breathe and fruit to nourish us, enabling us to continue to be strong and to prevent and face aggression. A tree that keeps us connected to the earth, to our roots, to our causes.
- A tree is as essential for the planet as protection is for our struggles. Therefore, protection should be part of our strategies, of our political action, of our organizational strengths and also part of our daily lives and of the lives of those closest to us – such as family and other close relationships.
- The information that we have included in the Protection Tree is the result of reflections by many people, communities and organizations working on this issue.



# PART TWO: EXPLORATION OF THE ROOTS AND TRUNK OF THE PROTECTION TREE

## Step 1.

The facilitator divides the group in half. One half will work on the explanation of the roots and the other half on the trunk. Each team should read the explanation and respond to the questions:

What can we derive from this definition?

What would we change or add?

### THE ROOTS OF PROTECTION ARE:

1. **Awareness of the context in which we live and its power dynamics.** Protection is an increasingly urgent necessity in the context of political crisis and authoritarianism experienced by many in our territories. States are increasingly repressive and operating with impunity, using violence and hate speech to protect the economic interests of the elites and corporations. Some States have mechanisms for protection of defenders, but being an activist continues to be risky work.

2. **The personal and collective knowledge and strategies that we already have to prevent, face and/or heal from violence** against us and the commitment to continue building a more just world. Although we make demands and exhort authorities to fulfill their obligation to protect us, ultimately developing our own protection strategies which draw on our knowledge and resources is vital for individual and collective protection.

3. **Feminist vision and intersectionality.** A feminist perspective recognizes not only the intersecting historical structures of oppression (patriarchy, racism, capitalism, etc.) that increase vulnerability and are the basis for attacks on activists and social movements, but also those commonly ignored forms of violence against women such as: sexual violence, family-based violence, the full burden of household work and caregiving, and economic inequality, as well as harassment and discrimination within their own organizations. For women human rights defenders, protection is based on the recognition that women must have our own voice and power to define our full safety and protection.

## THE TRUNK IS:

1. **The collective protection that we activate in our communities, neighborhoods and territories.** When we are at risk, we activate the strategies and relationships in our immediate environment to protect us. This takes many forms. Urban neighborhoods and rural communities have organized self-defense groups, community radio stations and shelters for protection against violence. Indigenous territories proactively use open assemblies to declare their municipality or community free of mining or other extractive industries in order to activate unity and deter the violence of imposed projects.

2. **The strength of our organizations and communities.** Building strong organizations and cohesive communities enables us to more successfully face risk. We can transform our organizations and communities so that they become spaces for collective care and protection: combating the culture of individual sacrifice, fostering solidarity and mutual support, rejecting macho, racist or discriminatory practices that undermine unity, and fostering collective leadership so that more people have power and decision-making capacity and to thwart the individualization of attacks on perceived leaders.

3. **Protection in networks:** Networks of protection enable organizations, individuals and communities to benefit from shared resources and knowledge, breaking through isolation and fostering more effective strategies against the powerful groups behind the aggression. **Networks among women defenders** (whether from the same community or from different communities and organizations) constitute safe and trustworthy spaces to talk about our concerns and to create our own strategies.

# Step 2.

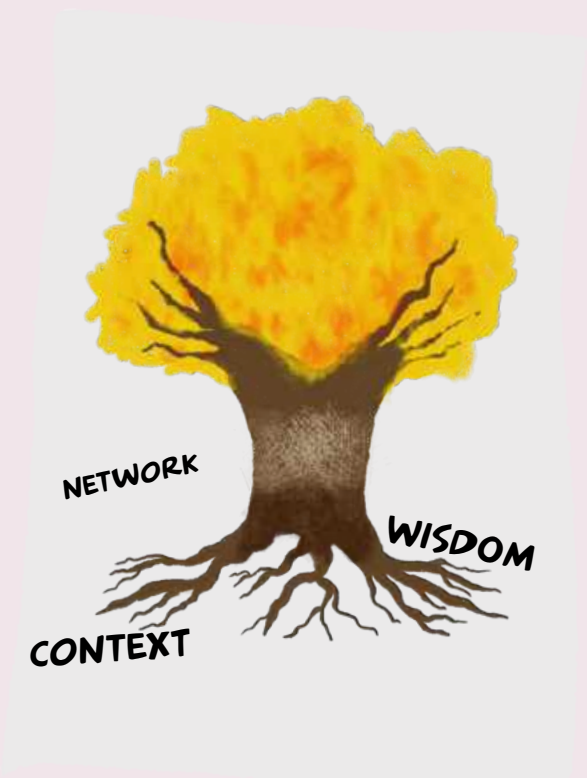
## PRESENTATION

Each group presents their part and the facilitator places the central elements from the groups on the tree (key words or phrases).

## PART THREE: EXPLORATION OF THE BRANCHES AND FRUITS OF PROTECTION.

# Step 1.

The facilitator provides a general introduction to this section, using the following explanation:



## THE BRANCHES AND FRUITS

The branches are the types of protection strategies that we choose as we need them. Protection strategies may be:

- **Preventive**, Those that we define and implement to prevent aggression or to diminish a threat.
- **Reactive**, Those that we define and implement once attacks have occurred in order to stop them and to mitigate negative impacts.

The fruits are the protective measures that we choose based on the risk analysis that we have done, and on the capacities and resources that we have. There is not one single recipe or list of measures and strategies.

The measures are joined together in a **protection plan**. A protection plan is a set of concrete and realistic measures that are agreed upon by the group to address the violence that affects us. These are measures that help us to use and strengthen the capacities and resources that we already have and to reduce vulnerabilities (limitations and weaknesses that hinder us in overcoming the threat). There are as many measures as we have needs for protection.

## Step 2.

The facilitator gives each person three paper figures in the shape of local fruit along with the following text that explains some examples of existing protection measures. Each person can read the complete text (you will want to read it aloud in groups with limited literacy) or choose one or two protection measures. Participants consider which measures are most useful in their context and write those measures on their paper fruits.



## Some examples of existing protection measures:

**Physical safety:** Safe homes, work and meeting spaces: know who comes in and goes out, have escape routes, control the doors, windows and other access areas. Homes and special places for refuge in case of emergency. Personal defense strategies, understanding of our bodies, knowing how to face sexual aggression. Knowing risky areas in our environment (including places for possible sexual aggression), use safe routes and transportation or define protection measures on public transportation (advise someone when departing and arriving at destination, alert in case of risk, etc.). Strategies to face repressive acts (e.g. at demonstrations or any activity in which security forces may intervene).

**Legal protection:** Connections to lawyers or trustworthy legal organizations that can provide support in the case of arbitrary arrest or any kind of criminalization. Understanding of the existing legal mechanisms for protection at the national and international levels (in the face of a violation of human rights, repressive acts, family-based violence and gender-based violence, etc.), understanding of the protection mechanisms for defenders, including their limitations and

possibilities. Understanding the possible legal consequences of our strategies, especially in the case of protests and resistance actions.

**Secure communications and digital security:** Defining which information can be public and which cannot, protecting privacy and personal information (particularly on social media), having safe space to store sensitive and important information (such as personal documents, legal documents, etc.). Remembering which information to give and to whom in case of emergency. Identifying safe channels of communication. Obtaining training on digital security. Installing radios and other forms of communication and community alerts. Campaigns to counteract false or defamatory information.

**Organizational strengthening:** Regular and participatory power and risk analysis. Collective development of protection plans and protocols. Enhancement of the capacities and knowledge of women and their leadership. Regular analysis of the context, power dynamics and the stakeholders whose interests are affected. Mechanisms to address internal conflicts. Definition of measures



to prevent any type of discrimination, harassment or violence within the organization. Definition of measures to reconcile personal/family life with the work of the organization, ensuring spaces for childcare during activities, equitable distribution of housekeeping tasks.

**Self-care and collective care of health, physical and spiritual well-being:** Implementation of methods of personal and collective care to prevent burnout, illness or stress (in accordance with existing needs and resources). Strengthening our connection with the web of life - nature, female ancestors and cultural roots. Transforming political practices and ways of doing activism that put us at risk (the culture of sacrifice/martyrdom, individualistic leadership, etc.). Agreements and policies within the organizations to respect workdays and schedules, prevent burnout and provide periods of rest, ensure basic labor rights, organize recreational spaces, etc. Facilitation of safe and trustworthy spaces for women.

**Strengthening of the social fabric:** Working for greater support and unity within the community with which we work. Organizing community activities that strengthen solidarity and social cohesion. Use of art, spaces for gathering and recreational

activities that inspire hope that justice and change are possible. Actively involving the community in our activities. Fostering popular education processes and strengthening the capacities of facilitators to inspire, sustain and expand public support and that of allied organizations, networks and movements. Establishing dialogue with local authorities, when possible.

## Step 3.

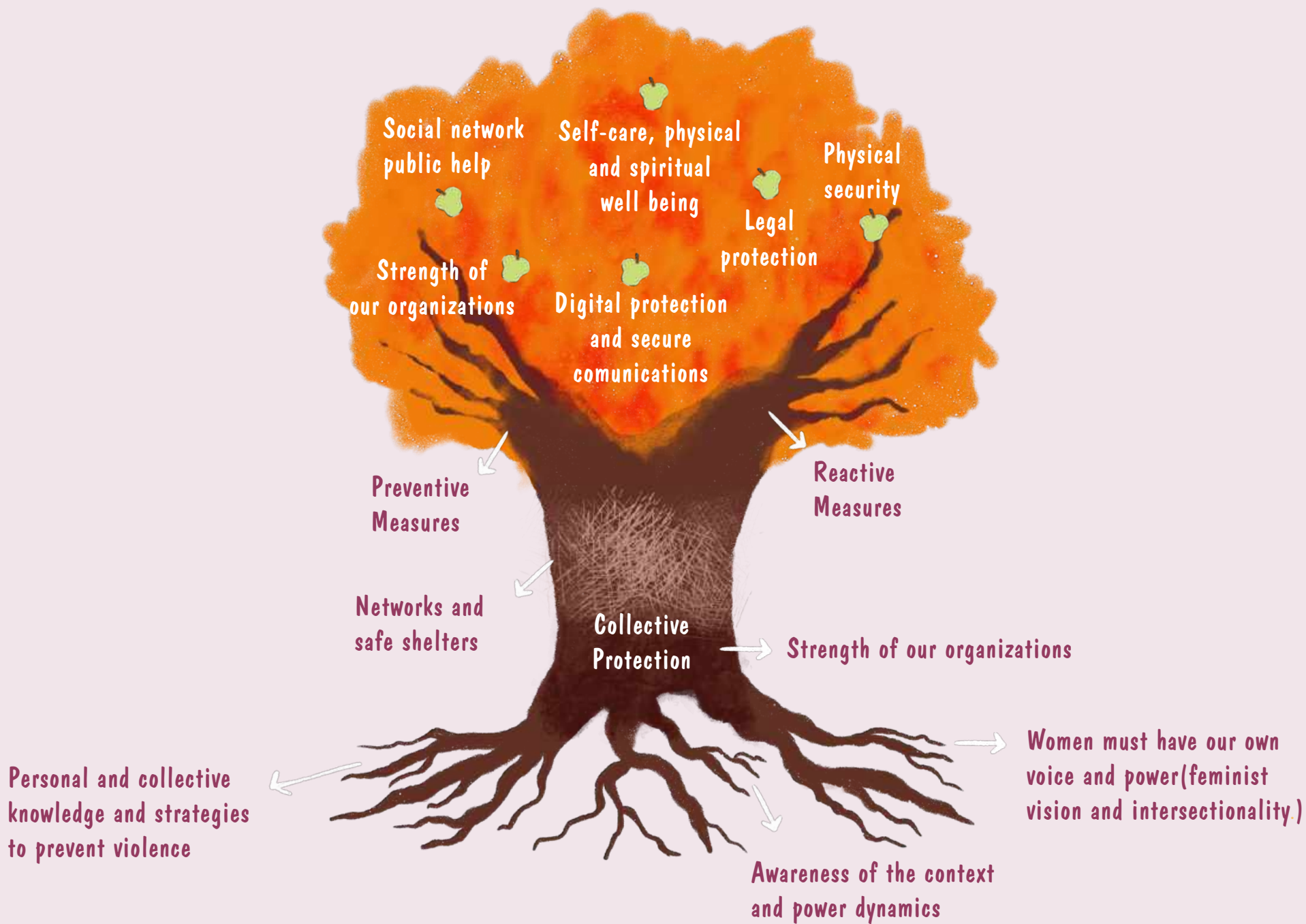
Each person explains the fruits that they made and places them on the tree. At the end, the facilitator asks:

What do we think when we see all these fruits?

Which ones do we need the most in our context?

What other protection measures could we add?





# SESSION 3. 2 hours

Constructing a basic plan to strengthen our protection.

## Introduction:

The facilitator reminds the group of what a protection plan is, recalling the definitions from the group and complementing them with the following definition:



A protection plan is a set of concrete and realistic measures that are agreed upon by the group to address the violence and risks that affect us. These are measures that help us use and strengthen the capacities and resources that we already have and to reduce our vulnerabilities (limitations and weaknesses that undermine our safety).

## Activity: Prioritizing risks.

### Step 1.

In Module 5, the group identified the types of violence that put at risk the physical integrity and work of women human rights defenders and activists. In this session, the facilitator recalls this analysis and puts up a sheet of newsprint with the common risks that were previously identified..

## Step 2.

The group prioritizes the three most urgent risks on which the group wishes to work.

### Activity: Developing a protection plan.

## Step 1.

The facilitator presents the following form, which will be used to develop the protection plan. It should include an example to help the participants to use the form.



**RISK:** (EXAMPLE) Workers and people related to the mining company are sexually harassing our daughters when they pass the mine construction site.

<p><b>Capacities and resources</b> (personal/family, organizational, community)</p>	<p>(EXAMPLE)</p> <p><b><u>Personal/family</u></b> Understand the problem and its impact.</p> <p><b><u>Organizational:</u></b> The women’s group in the community held a workshop on sexual harassment, so we know how to identify it.</p> <p><b><u>Community:</u></b> We have a community security watch.</p>
<p><b>Vulnerabilities</b> (personal/family, organizational, community)</p>	<p>(EXAMPLE)</p> <p><b><u>Personal/family:</u></b> Our daughters are embarrassed to talk about this issue.</p> <p><b><u>Organizational:</u></b> When the violence of the mining company is reported, the sexual harassment that the girls are experiencing is not mentioned.</p> <p><b><u>Community:</u></b> There are men who blame the women for provoking it.</p>

Protection measures/actions	(EXAMPLE)
	<p data-bbox="1115 352 1413 392"><u>Personal/family:</u></p> <p data-bbox="1115 403 2089 536">We are going to talk about the issue in our families so that our daughters feel safe talking about this with us and we can guide them.</p> <p data-bbox="1115 580 1397 620"><u>Organizational:</u></p> <p data-bbox="1115 632 2089 764">We are going to hold a workshop on harassment for all the young women in the community, with an emphasis on how to combat it.</p> <p data-bbox="1115 775 2089 863">With the support of allied organizations, a public legal complaint will be presented regarding these incidents.</p> <p data-bbox="1115 916 1330 956"><u>Community:</u></p> <p data-bbox="1115 967 2089 1150">The people in charge of the community watch will be trained on sexual harassment so that they know how to identify it and issue warnings about any situations that arise.</p> <p data-bbox="1115 1161 2089 1249">It is recommended that young women walk together so that they can protect each other.</p> <p data-bbox="1115 1260 2089 1393">We are organizing an assembly to declare our community free of mining in order to stop these and other aggressions that we are suffering as a result of it.</p>

# Step 2.

Three groups are formed to complete the form with each of the prioritized risks. Each group will work on a different risk.

**RISK:**

**Capacities and resources**

(personal/family, organizational, community)



## Vulnerabilities

(personal/family, organizational, community)

Protection measures/actions

# Step 5.

## PRESENT AND ANALYZE THE PLANS.

In the plenary session, each group presents its plan, which is further developed with support and feedback from the other groups – clarifying doubts and questions, making agreements, offering suggestions, etc.



**NOTE FOR THE FACILITATOR:** Depending on the possibilities and connections of the group, you might invite people or organizations that have experience on protection issues who could provide feedback on the protection plans developed by participants.

# SESSION 4. 1 hour / 30 minutes

Alliances, communities and networks for our protection.



## Introduction

The most effective protection is collective and networked, a protective fabric of people, organizations and knowledge that provides on-going support and responds in a timely fashion when a person, organization or community faces a situation of risk.

### The Report on the situation of Human Rights Defenders tell us:

*Safety networks diminish the isolation of women defenders and provide a sense of belonging and support. They enable women defenders to better understand and confront sexism and violence by fostering a shared understanding of the impact of these dynamics and encouraging collective approaches to safety, well-being and survival.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*



# Activity: The circles of alliances for protection

## Step 1.

The facilitator draws a target-shape of concentric circles on a sheet of newsprint. She writes the name of the organization, group or community in the center circle. In the second circle, she writes the names of the closest and most accessible allied organizations, individuals and communities. In the third circle, she writes the names of organizations and alliances that are not as close but that can be relied upon. And in the fourth circle, she writes the organizations and alliances that are not very close but with whom ties could be strengthened.



## Step 2.

The facilitator invites reflection on:

- How can these alliances contribute to the protection plan that we have designed?
- Which ones are our priorities?
- What can we do to strengthen their support and solidarity?

**NOTE:** If the participants are from different organizations, the exercise should be done for each organization.

# Activity: Reflection to understand community-based protection experiences.



**Introduction** The facilitator emphasizes the importance of community efforts to develop their own protection strategies, not only to stay safe and face aggression with greater strength, but also to fortify their social fabric.

**Step 1.** Small groups will review two community-based protection experiences (one experience per group). We suggest two examples, but if the facilitator or the group knows of others, they can be substituted.

**Autonomous types of community-based security:** The Cherán indigenous community in Mexico was threatened by criminal groups and corrupt authorities that did not protect them. Tired of the violence, the people in the community began to set bonfires in different neighborhoods of the town. People came together at each bonfire to protect and take care of the community, women, men and people of all ages. The meetings around the bonfires were also used for talking about problems and events in the town and for exchanging ideas about how to solve them. Each bonfire group elects its representatives.

The representatives meet in a community assembly called the Council of Elders. This is the body that makes decisions about the different issues in the town, including its security. Women have earned a place in these community-based security structures, which has enabled them to take other problems to the assembly, such as family-based violence or macho prejudices.

**Safe Spaces.** In Colombia, rural communities have created what they call “Humanitarian Zones”, used to define and temporarily cordon off an area in which the community lives. These zones have signs that indicate that the area is only for the civilian population, preventing the entrance of armed actors.

Other spaces for refuge are temporary and are activated only when necessary. These are called Humanitarian Shelters. The shelters are spaces into which the communities move when they have an urgent need to protect their lives in the face of a critical situation of human rights violations. These spaces remain in place until the violence has decreased; they help prevent displacement and are essential for the communities to maintain control over their territories.

## Step 2.

Each group reflects on the following questions:

Could this experience be useful in our context?

What other community-based protection experiences do we know?

Which of these could be useful in our protection plan?

## Step 3.

The groups present in the plenary session. If there are new ideas for the protection plan, the group will decide which to add.

# Activity: Mural newspaper of the defender protection networks.

## Introduction

The facilitator tells the group that, in different parts of the world, women defenders have organized, not only in the community, but in networks and collectives to protect themselves from violence, mutually support each other and collectively care for one another, creating their own ways of responding to violence. Understanding those experiences may be useful in strengthening the protection plan that the group has developed.



## Step 1.

Small groups are formed and each group reviews one of the three experiences of defender networks that are presented below and exchange opinions about this experience.

What is most important about this experience?



## THE MESOAMERICAN INITIATIVE OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (IM-DEFENSORAS)

This initiative began its work in 2010 in order to provide a comprehensive and regional response to increased violence against women human rights defenders in Mesoamerica. This network is comprised of more than two thousand women defenders and their organizations:

- It brings together five national networks of women human rights defenders in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Each network has urgent response resources and closely accompanies defenders in situations of risk. They also open spaces for meeting and the strengthening of holistic feminist protection capacities with a feminist approach to socio-political violence (based on risk analysis and safety and self-care strategies, including specific digital security tools for defenders).
- It has two special shelter houses for women human rights defenders at-risk and their families, and one house for respite, self-care and healing.
- It has developed its own risk analysis methodologies to develop protection plans that cover the different protection needs of women defenders. In addition, it has developed a strategy for self-care,

collective care and healing that involves training processes and resources to build more sustainable activism with improved well-being for the activists.

- It has a system for documenting attacks and the violence experienced by women defenders as a result of their work as well as gender-based discrimination they face. It also has a public alert system to activate national and international allies to denounce any attacks or threats against activists.

For more information on IM-Defensoras:  
<http://im-defensoras.org/trayectoria/#>



## Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum (FAMM)

This is a network of more than 350 young women from 30 provinces across Indonesia. It unites rural, urban, indigenous, Muslim, Christian and LGBTI activists. Through on-going training and accompaniment by movement support organizations, JASS and PEKKA, the members of FAMM meet to develop the following capacities:

- Analysis of the context and risk in their country and communities. They develop a critical consciousness about the dynamics in their context and learn to do analysis of gender, power and the actors driving violence and restrictions against women and LGBTI activists.
- Confidence and leadership. FAMM offers a safe space to strengthen the leadership of young women by recognizing and valuing their voice and contributions, and to develop strategic and collective leadership capacities in their communities. The network is a space for mutual support and solidarity.
- Safety. The network has an emergency response mechanism that activates a network of people and organizations in solidarity any time that a member of the network is at risk. This mechanism mobilizes different

kinds of support, such as emergency funds, protection groups, legal and psychological support.

After each training event, the members of FAMM return to their own organizations, communities and movements to share and put into practice what they have learned.

For more information on FAMM:

<https://www.justassociates.org/en/>



## THE COALITION OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

This network is comprised of defenders and organizations working in the region and of local networks in Iraq, Palestine and Jordan. Its work involves:

- Documenting human rights violations against defenders.
- Fostering solidarity campaigns for activists that have been threatened, incarcerated or attacked in some way.
- Strengthening public recognition in the region of women who defend human rights, combating stereotypes and the stigmatization that many women face for raising their voices.

For more information:

<https://whrdmena.org/2019/04/30/a-year-of-solidarity-and-defending-human-rights-a-visual-summary/?lang=en>



## Step 2.

Each group makes a mural newspaper (a sheet of newsprint that contains some headlines and images that illustrate the information that the group wants to share) to present the experience of the network that it studied. The group can look on the Internet for additional information on the network and can use different materials: drawings, symbols, and pictures from magazines, newspapers or the Internet, etc.



## Step 3.

The groups put their newspapers on the wall. Beginning with the first mural newspaper, the facilitator asks those that did not work on it:

What do you see?

What does this tell us?

Then the facilitator asks the group that worked on it to explain. The same is done with the other two mural newspapers.

## Step 4.

In the plenary session, the group reflects on the following question:

What do these experiences tell us about our contexts?

Then the analysis is deepened with these questions:

Do we know of other protection networks for defenders?

Would it be useful to have a network of defenders?

If there is a positive response, what steps should we take to form one?



# CLOSING: 30 minutes

**Activity:** Creating our protective fabric.

## Step 1.

The group forms a circle.



## Step 2.

The facilitator holds a ball of brightly-colored yarn and begins the activity by saying, "I want to honor \_\_\_\_\_" (saying the name of a woman who was important in her life, who helped her and supported her at a time of risk, helping her feel more protected).

## Step 3.

Then she throws the skein of yarn to another member of the group, holding the end of the yarn in her fingers. The next member of the group does the same, "I want to honor \_\_\_\_\_" and throws the skein to another. The idea is to form a web.

## Step 4.

At the end, the facilitator asks everyone to look at the web that they formed. The facilitator summarizes, emphasizing that it is really the web of life, a network of mutual protection and care, a network that saves and protects us. This network accompanies us and gives us strength.



# ANNEX:

## Additional resources to deepen risk analysis and protection:

Protection International. New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders. Guide for Facilitators

<https://www.protectioninternational.org/en/protection-manuals/guide-facilitators>

Front Line Defenders. Workbook on Security Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/workbook-security-practical-steps-human-rights-defenders-risk>

## Support and resources in emergency situations:

Protect Defenders. Delivers a fast and specific EU response to support Human Rights Defenders at risk. The emergency grants program ensures that Human Rights Defenders can access and implement urgent security measures to protect themselves, their family and their work.

<https://www.protectdefenders.eu/en/supporting-defenders.html#emergency-support>

Front Line Protection Grant Program:

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/protection-grants>



## Support and resources in emergency situations:

[Urgent Action Fund](https://urgentactionfund.org/what-we-do/rapid-response-grantmaking/). Urgent Action Fund's Rapid Response Grants support the resilience of women's and trans movements by providing flexible and responsive funds to women's and trans human rights defenders who face immediate threats and by supporting advocacy when unanticipated opportunities emerge to set new legal or policy precedents. UAF has regional sister funds. <https://urgentactionfund.org/what-we-do/rapid-response-grantmaking/>

[East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project](https://defenddefenders.org/get-help/). Seek to protect and strengthen human rights defenders (HRDs) in the East and Horn of Africa sub-region, and raise awareness about their work at national, regional, and international level. Emergency Assistance for Human Rights Defenders.

Tel: tel +256-783-02761256-3932 65820/1/2

<https://defenddefenders.org/get-help/>



# WE DEMAND GREATER SAFETY FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS!

## OBJECTIVE:

Participants will identify different ways in which the Special Rapporteur's Report on women human rights defenders can be used as an advocacy tool with governments and local communities and help strengthen protection and support struggles.

ESTIMATED  
TIME

4 hrs

MATERIALS

Newsprint, markers,  
colored cards.



## The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

*The Special Rapporteur recognizes and celebrates the significance of women defenders in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Women are, and have been, critical to the furtherance of human rights worldwide, but, because of their identities and their activism they continue to face systematic discrimination, marginalization and repression.*

*The Special Rapporteur calls on all stakeholders to work together to ensure that women defenders are supported and strengthened to promote and protect human rights.*

*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.*

# SESSION 1.

Taking the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on defenders to our communities, organizations, governments and other actors critical to our protection.

## Introduction:

The Report on women human rights defenders presented by UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst in 2019 contains specific recommendations for States and other actors to assume their obligation to ensure an enabling environment for the defense and promotion of human rights, which can be useful in strengthening our protection. It can also be a useful tool for helping our communities to support and value our work, participation and contributions.

Through this exercise, we will explore together how to contribute to our protection plan by taking this report to additional spaces and actors. In the Annex we have included an interesting article by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) that will help us better understand

the different features of this report and how the United Nations is promoting the protection of human rights defenders, as well as the advances made, the ongoing challenges and the strategies that we defenders can promote to strengthen our voices in these international arenas.



**Activity:** Getting to know the Rapporteur's report recommendations and prioritizing them within our particular context:

## Step 1.

Three groups are formed. Each group reviews the recommendations from the Rapporteur's report (see texts below) and responds to the following questions:

What do we think about these recommendations?

Which of these recommendations are of highest priority to strengthen our security in our particular context?

What additional recommendations would we add to further develop our protection plan?



- Group 1

Will review the recommendations to the Member States (governments and other State institutions and branches);

- Group 2

Will review the recommendations to multilateral institutions, intergovernmental organizations and regional bodies (mechanisms of the UN and/or regional human rights system, multilateral bodies with in-country representation, embassies, etc.)

- Group 3

Will review the recommendations to national human rights institutions, civil society, human rights defenders of all genders, donors and other stakeholders (including our own communities and organizations).

## The Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:

- Protect the rights of women defenders, including by taking a public stand against all State and non-State actors who violate these rights, ceasing all attacks and threats against women defenders and investigating all that occur, ensuring that impunity does not prevail;
- Ensure that women defenders enjoy a safe and enabling environment to exercise their rights, considering their specific and diverse needs. This includes addressing systemic and structural discrimination and violence that women defenders experience and enacting laws that recognize and protect the rights of all human rights defenders, with a specific focus on the needs of women defenders;
- Ensure that non-State actors – including businesses, faith-based groups, the media and communities – meet their legal obligations to respect human rights. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are key for business enterprises;
- Prioritize the protection of women defenders in online spaces and adopt laws, policies and practices that protect their right to privacy and protect them from libel and hate speech;
- Dedicate part of their budget to strengthening the participation of women in human rights activities, ensuring that they are supported to respond meaningfully to issues in a sustainable manner;
- Refrain from interfering with funding provided to women for human rights work and ensure that legal and administrative frameworks do not restrict access to funding for human rights activism;
- Address barriers to the participation of women defenders in public life, including in regional and international human rights forums, such as travel bans, visa restrictions and their lack of identity or travel documents and resources;
- Assess protection practices for women defenders against the seven principles underpinning good protection practices and examine ways of strengthening those practices.

## The Special Rapporteur recommends that multilateral institutions, intergovernmental organizations and regional bodies:

- Identify ways in which the right to promote and protect human rights and women's rights are being opposed and take measures to counter regression;
- Ensure that women defenders who engage with multilateral institutions and international and regional human rights bodies can do so without fear of persecution or violence and that any allegations or instances of reprisals are promptly investigated;
- Recognize the initiatives, strategies and networks created by women defenders themselves and ensure that they are adequately resourced;
- Strengthen and support women's leadership and feminist, community-centered approaches to protection;
- Renew efforts to ensure the security, protection and well-being of women human rights defenders, while respecting confidentiality, the need for informed consent and the principle "do no harm";
- Ensure that there is effective follow-up, implementation and accountability for recommendations to Member States concerning the security and protection of women defenders.



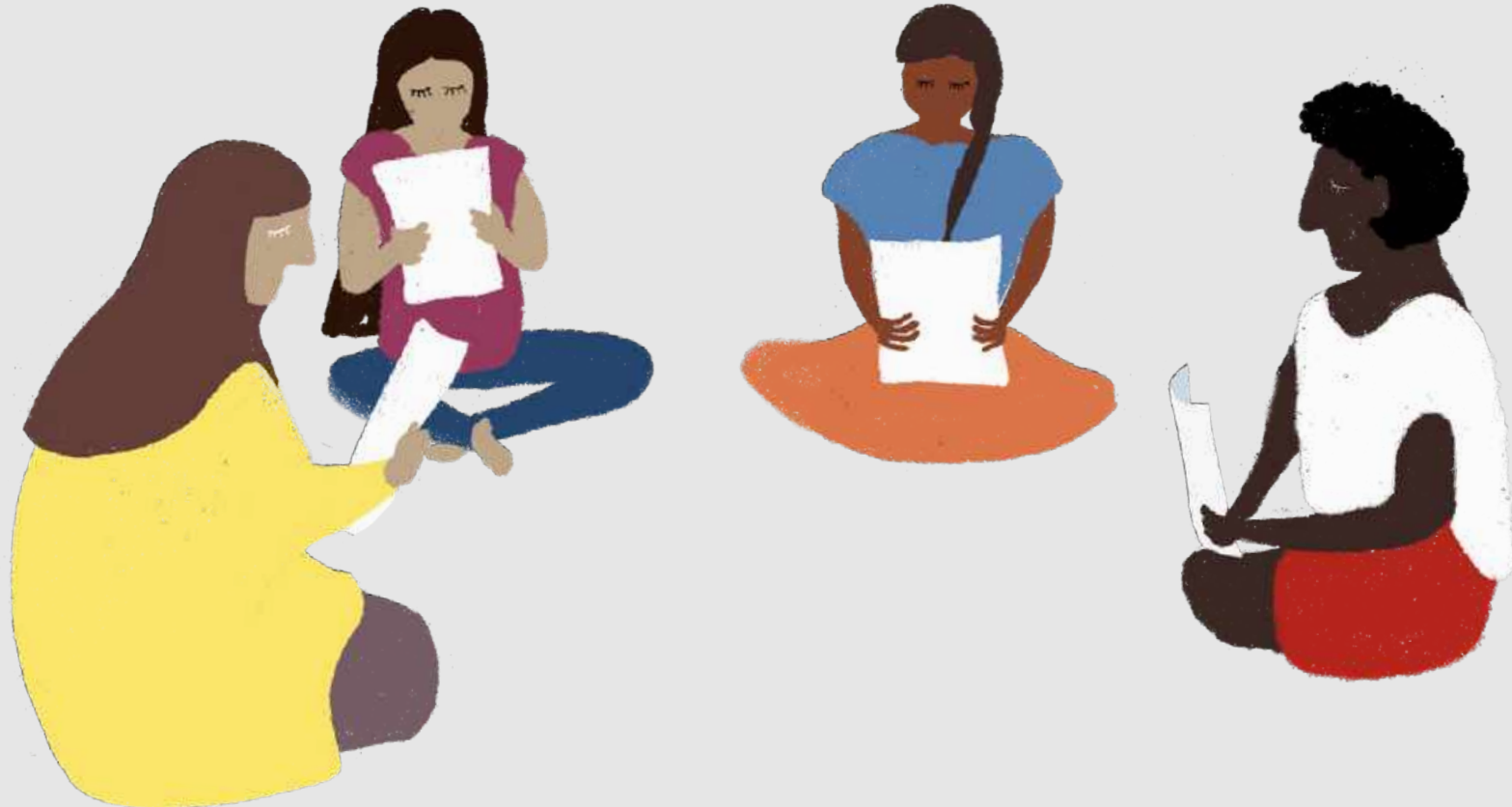
**The Special Rapporteur recommends that national human rights institutions, civil society, human rights defenders of all genders, donors and other stakeholders:**

- Document, monitor and denounce the threats and attacks faced by women defenders, highlighting whether perpetrators were brought to justice;
- Respond to women defenders' concerns about sexism, discrimination and marginalization within communities and human rights movements, including by taking measures to prevent those phenomena;
- Develop and support specific programmes of work on the security and protection of women defenders, recognizing their diversity;
- Develop a deeper understanding of how protection practices can be gender-sensitive, by viewing them through the lens of intersectionality;
- Assess protection practices led by multiple stakeholders for women defenders against the seven principles underpinning good protection practices and examine ways of strengthening these practices.



## Step 2.

Idea sharing: Each group presents the recommendations it prioritized and those it added. Participants give their opinions and complement what is presented by each group.



## Activity: Developing an advocacy plan to strengthen our protection:

**Step 1.** Using the same working groups that were formed for the previous technique, participants prepare a proposal on how to transmit the prioritized recommendations to the different actors and how to ensure they will be listened to and considered. To do this, they can use the following format:

<p>Who specifically do we want to know about these recommendations?</p> <p>(Write the name of each person, institution, organization and/or community.)</p>	<p>How can we get them to listen to us and commit themselves to comply with these recommendations (actions, strategies)?</p>	<p>What do we need to accomplish this (resources, partnerships, training, etc.)?</p>
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**Step 2.** Idea sharing: The plans are shared. The participants ask questions, complete information and jointly agree on the next steps for carrying out these plans.

# SESSION 2.

Achieving a deeper commitment from our communities and organizations to the protection of defenders.

## Introduction:

We know that better support from our communities and organizations translates into greater protection. Therefore, in addition to introducing and trying to get compliance with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur and others that are important for our protection plan, it might be helpful to develop a specific strategy to raise awareness in our communities and organizations, i.e., a plan that will help us get greater commitment and support from them. We're going to use all our creativity for this!



## Step 1.

The facilitator gives two cards, each of a different color, to each participant. On one, they will write an obstacle or resistance to the recognition and support of their work as defenders within their communities or organizations. On the other card, they will write an idea of how to overcome this obstacle or resistance.

## Step 2.

All the participants present their cards and place them in two columns - one with the obstacles and the other with the ideas.

## Step 3.

In groups, they select one or two ideas that they would like to promote and then propose how they would do so. It is very important to free our imaginations and use all our creativity. We should think of initiatives that use art, community culture, laughter, care, resistance, rebellion, etc.

## Step 4.

The ideas and implementation proposals are presented in plenary, and the entire group chooses those they consider most viable for realizing in the short term.

**OBSTACLE**

**IDEAS**

**DISUNITY**

**COLLECTIVE  
MURAL**

**FEAR**

**COLLECTIVE  
ALTAR**

**INDIFFERENCE**

**THEATER  
PLAY**

## Activity: The Light of Life.

20 minutes

Depending on the type of group and its needs, the facilitator can choose to close the module in one of the following ways:

### MATERIALS

Matches or lighter  
and a large candle

## Option 1.

- The facilitator asks participants to make a circle, and asks the person at her right to light the candle and share one of her most significant learning around collective power and protection, and one thing she will draw on for hope and strength. When she finishes, she hands the candle over to the participant next to her. Each participant shares her learning and source of hope and strength, and passes the candle to the person next to her.
- The facilitator closes the circle thanking everyone for their contributions to the process, and invokes the groups' collective light and wisdom, as well the commitment to take care of ourselves and each other in our struggles.



## Option 2.

- The facilitator asks participants to make a circle, and asks the person at her right to light the candle and share something she needs from the group to strengthen her collective protection and power, and something she can offer to the group to strengthen the collective protection and power of others. When she finishes, she hands the candle over to the participant next to her. Each participant shares her need and her offering, and passes the candle to the person next to her.

- The facilitator closes the circle thanking everyone for their contributions to the process, and invokes the groups' collective light and wisdom, as well the commitment to take care of ourselves and each other in our struggles.



# ANNEX:

## “Colossal force of action”: WHRDs organize within UN human rights spaces

By Pooja Patel, Programme Director, International Service for Human Rights

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs), including their networks, coalitions and solidarity movements, have strategically and diligently engaged with the United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms to build an important body of norms related to their experiences and protection needs.

And yet, WHRDs working in contexts of increased authoritarianism, extremism and fundamentalism are at the front lines of struggles to reclaim civic space even

as they face a history of discrimination cemented in patriarchal structures, institutions and practices. The resulting backlash is often experienced first by women and gender diverse people themselves, as their rights become deeply politicised and come under attack.

The UN intergovernmental spaces are mirrors of such dynamics unfolding in all regions. As WHRDs hold their ground and assert their place in the corridors and meeting rooms, their rights are contested, traded-off and undermined in State-led negotiations.

## The work of the Special Representative to the Secretary General and the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of Human Rights Defenders

The 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) presented an important landmark moment where the right to defend human rights and be protected while engaging in human rights work was squarely provided for in international human rights law. Since its adoption, women’s rights advocates and activists mobilised to ground an understanding of the fact that women, trans and gender non-binary activists experience a degree of discrimination and face barriers that their cis male colleagues do not.

In her first report to the UN General Assembly (2002), Hina Jilani, the former Special Representative to the Secretary-General on the situation of HRDs, pointed to the particular risks facing WHRDs. Through consultations, as part of her mandate, narratives on the specificities of the WHRD experiences were given a focus. Her successor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs, Margaret Sekaggya, focused her 2010 annual report on WHRDs by drawing analysis from specific cases of violations that her mandate had received concerning the situation of WHRDS. This has contributed further to some important developments at the international level, including:

1. Bringing greater recognition to WHRDs and their work;
2. Strengthening the legitimacy and credibility of WHRDs;
3. Monitoring systematically threats, challenges and violations experienced by WHRDs;
4. Developing or strengthening various mechanisms and policies protecting the rights of WHRDs at the national, regional and international levels;

5. Strengthening networks of solidarity and support that have been built by WHRDs and their supporters.

The current mandate holder, Michel Forst, revisited the situation of WHRDs nearly a decade later. His assessment goes beyond analysis on the basis of communications of individual cases, as he undertook a number of regional consultations to gain deeper insights into the current experiences and needs of WHRDs. Among the important contributions that his report to the HRC in March 2019 made, the following in particular expanded the framework for WHRD protection:

1. The specific experiences of trans and gender non-binary defenders, and the added challenges they face based on discrimination on grounds of gender identity;
2. The specific challenges of WHRDs working on the rights of sex workers;
3. Marginalisation, discrimination and violence that WHRDs may face from within human rights organisations and movements;



#### 4. The needs of sustaining feminist movements through collective care and holistic security.

Forst outlined key priorities for supporting WHRD movements, shifting the narrative away from one based on vulnerability and closer to one that supports WHRDs as agents of change. His report also shifted the narratives of a more paternalistic view of protection towards one that seeks solutions in the collective self-defined strategies of the movements themselves.

### Framework for WHRD protection at the UN

While this paper does not set out to capture in detail the full picture, some notable advances have been made at the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Of course, each has come with its own risks and challenges, and these are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Since the creation of the HRC in 2006, WHRDs have been mentioned in resolutions. Each reference to WHRDs incrementally created a framework from which WHRD protection could be more deeply interrogated.

The General Assembly resolution 64/163 expressed concern over the serious nature of risks indicated in communications submitted by the Special Rapporteur in particular as faced by WHRDs. It urged States to “to take appropriate measures to address the question of impunity for attacks, threats and acts of intimidation, including cases of gender-based violence, against WHRDs and their relatives”. In 2011, the General Assembly built on this to include the question of impunity of non-State actors and their role in gender-based violence and violence against WHRDs.

Meanwhile, at the HRC in March 2010, States adopted a consensus resolution encouraging them to “create and strengthen mechanisms for consultation and dialogue with human rights defenders, including through establishing a focal point for human rights defenders within the public administration where it does not exist, with the aim of, inter alia, identifying specific needs for protection, including those of women human rights defenders”. The following year, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was asked to “integrate a gender perspective throughout the work of his/her mandate, paying particular attention to the situation of women human rights defenders”. In March 2013, the HRC once

again passed a consensus resolution that expressed “particular concern about systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders, and calls upon States to integrate a gender perspective in their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights”. Thereafter, the adoption (by consensus) of the first-ever resolution specifically on WHRDs by the UN General Assembly in 2013 presented a significant step forward in recognising the important work of WHRDs.

However, it was regrettable that this consensus came at the expense of crucial paragraphs containing language calling on States to condemn all forms of violence against women and WHRDs, and to refrain from invoking any customs, tradition or religious consideration to avoid obligations related to the elimination of violence against women. Also removed were important references from the initial draft acknowledging the risks faced by those working on issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Several aspects of the resolution were fiercely debated during negotiations, with African and several Asian States arguing that the text should focus more on the duties and responsibilities of those who

defend rights and should not create special rights or privileges for certain groups of defenders.

While the resolution as adopted does not comprehensively address all risks and protection needs of WHRDs, it remains an important resolution that provides a useful tool for activists because 1) States from all regions have committed themselves to take concrete steps to protect WHRDs; 2) The resolution presents a detailed roadmap for implementation, and provides concrete recommendations to States, NHRIs and multilateral institutions for follow-up; and 3) It also presents ‘agreed language’, or text from a UN outcome that enjoys consensus by all UN member States and enables the possibility of building and strengthening norms on this basis.

## Challenges we face

Recent years have shown that world over there is a trend towards democratic societies giving way to increased populist and extremist leadership, while authoritarian institutions and systems consolidate themselves. There has been a shift in foreign policies and in geopolitics resulting in:

1. A well-coordinated anti-rights mobilisation by conservative civil society actors seeking to drive traditional values and cultural relativist discourse through human rights frameworks;
2. A denial of recognition and backlash against rights for HRDs, civil society and social movements, by States;
3. An attack on the human rights institutions themselves, by both State and non-State actors.

We have witnessed the watering down of existing agreements and commitments; deadlock in negotiations; sustained undermining of UN agencies, treaty bodies and Special Procedures; and success in pushing through regressive language in international human rights documents.

Conservative States and blocs of States aggressively negotiate out positive language and introduce hostile amendments to resolutions, most often focusing on rights related to gender and sexuality, as well as on the rights of WHRDs. For example, during the June 2016 session of the HRC, opposition was mounted towards a resolution on discrimination against women by the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and allies. During contentious negotiations, multiple provisions were removed, including women's and girls' right to have control over their sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights; and the need to repeal laws that perpetuate the patriarchal oppression of women and girls in families, and those criminalising adultery or pardoning marital rape. Hostile amendments were also introduced to remove references to WHRDs, but these were voted down.

The HRC has also been the site of unhelpful initiatives to co-opt human rights norms and enact cultural relativist language, such as that of the Russia-led "traditional values" resolutions, and the "Protection of the Family" agenda.

The issue of reprisals faced by WHRDs engaging, or seeking to engage, with the UN system, experts and offices remains of increasing concern. Instances of threats, harassment and violence against any individual engaging with the UN is increasingly expected, rather than being exceptional. Threats and intimidation have also been extended to Special Procedures mandate holders, particularly those who are women.

## Strategies to counter challenges

Working in coalitions and networks, civil society engaging with the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms have identified three key strategies to mitigate the backlash faced by WHRDs engaging in these spaces:

1. Strengthening access and participation of WHRDs by addressing the multiple barriers that cause impediments, including NGO accreditation, resources, discrimination from within movements, among others;

2. Strengthening coalitions for broad-based campaigns and strategic tactics to hold ground on the

standards already gained, while advancing rights from feminist perspectives to confront power, privilege and patriarchy;

3. Strengthening the capacity of WHRDs and expanding the pool of expertise in strategic engagement with the UN human rights system.

In conclusion, WHRDs are at the forefronts of struggles against populism, extremism and fundamentalism in all regions of the world. These struggles are mirrored at the UN. Global backlash against gender equality, particularly rights related to bodily autonomy, present additional challenges to WHRDs who are already working in contexts of shrinking civic space.

A coordinated, well-resourced feminist movement that puts well-being and collective care at the centre of its practices is important to not only prevent regress on advances made at the UN level, but also to strategically reclaim UN agenda and spaces from a feminist perspective.



# FIRST VERSION 2020



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR  
ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



INTERNATIONAL SERVICE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS