

PRESS RELEASE

160 Women Human Rights Defenders from Mexico and Central America Denounce Assassinations, Persecution of Members as Regional Violence Rises

More than 160 women human rights defenders from throughout Mesoamerica gathered in Suchitoto, El Salvador to analyze the crisis in violence against women human rights defenders in the region, threats to their communities and the lack of access to justice.

At the 2nd Meeting of the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders, women leaders of movements against the imposition of mega-projects in development, mining, militarization and government repression, and in defense of reproductive, sexual and labor rights shared accounts of the alarming increase in attacks on women defenders in the context of the "war on drugs" and local battles to protect lands and territories. In Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and other countries, women face discrimination, slander and physical attacks as they take on front-line roles in defense of human rights. "We have to recognize that we're targets," Morena Herrera told the gathering. "Too many of us have been murdered, simply for exercising the right to defend rights."

Organizers emphasize that the meeting offers a safe place for the women--many of whom work under constant threat--to share methods for increasing their own safety and physical and psychological well-being, and building advocacy strategies from a feminist human rights perspective. It also provides the occasion for the launch of a major report, to be released on Sept. 9, titled "Violence against WHRDs in Mesoamerica".

Among the principal findings of the report:

- 46 women human rights defenders have been assassinated in the region over the past three years
- Women prominent in defense of land and territories (many indigenous women), reproductive and sexual rights, journalists, women working against violence and femicide, and human rights leaders are among the most at-risk categories.
- Threats against women defenders and their families, and criminalization have become common tactics of intimidation by both governments and organized crime.

The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders, which organized the event, was formed in 2010 by the **Feminist Collective for Local Development (El Salvador); the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); JASS (Just Associates); the Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity Oaxaca A.C. (Mexico); Unity of Protection of Women and Men Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEQUA), the National Network of WHRDs of Honduras and the Central American Fund for Women (FCAM).**

This second meeting follows up on the first, held in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2010 where women organized in national networks and created the regional network to respond to the violence faced by women rights defenders.

For more information on the Mesoamerican Human Rights Defenders Network, the situation in the individual countries, and interviews, please contact: Cristina Hardaga Fernández: cristinahf.jass@gmail.com

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