

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MESOAMERICA



MESOAMERICAN INITIATIVE
of women
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

- Marisela Escobedo was murdered in December 2010 in Chihuahua, Mexico, in front of the local government's office building, while she was peacefully protesting to demand that the government take action and arrest the murderer of her daughter Rubí and stop the femicides.
- Two journalists working for the community radio station "La Voz de Zacate Grande" in Honduras were illegally arrested in December 2010. Judicial authorities prohibited them from leaving the country and from taking part in political protests. They currently face a death threat despite having been granted their release papers.
- A delegation of women human rights defenders was attacked by security forces in El Salvador in June 2011 while they protested against the criminalization of abortion in front of the building where the Organization of American States' General Assembly was being held.
- Margarita Chub—member of the Polochic Communities' Council and active participant in the quest for justice for crimes in the past—was a victim of femicide on June 4, 2011 in San José Panorama, Guatemala.

Mesoamerica is fast becoming one of the most violent, dangerous, conservative and unequal regions in the Americas. Human rights' violations and impunity are a daily phenomenon, and this particularly affects women, who have historically been excluded and discriminated against.

Women take part in social movements and community organizations across the region, defending fundamental rights, guarantees and freedoms. They also are the principal driving force behind combating impunity and seeking justice for victims of murders, kidnappings, sexual assaults and femicide—increasingly frequent crimes given the current situation.

And yet, alarmingly, across the region the number of attacks and threats against women human rights defenders are rising. These women, apart from suffering from the same attacks as their male counterparts, are also the targets of gender-based violence, especially when they question patriarchal norms and systems. Women human rights defenders in Mesoamerica:

- Do not always receive recognition as human rights defenders.
- Are particularly susceptible to being attacked by non-government forces and de facto powers.
- Are more vulnerable to discrimination and attacks within their own organizations and movements.
- Are victims of sexual violence, smear campaigns and threats to their families, due to social exclusion and the widespread culture of violence against women.
- Often face discrimination and isolation within their own families, and lack social networks to protect them, increasing the likelihood that they are forced to curtail or even stop their work.
- Often work in adverse condition, without dignified working conditions, under high levels of stress and pressure to respond to emergencies, thus exacerbating the negative consequences for their protection and self-protection.

