

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.



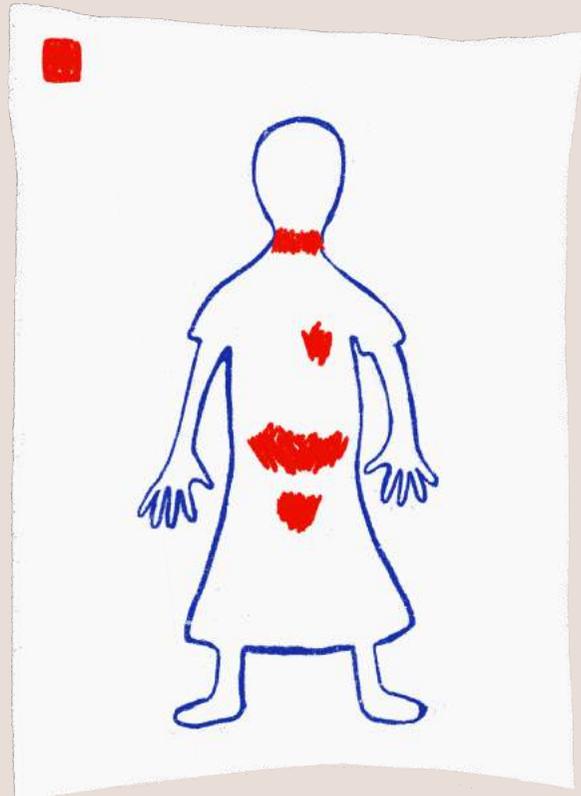
Step 3.

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



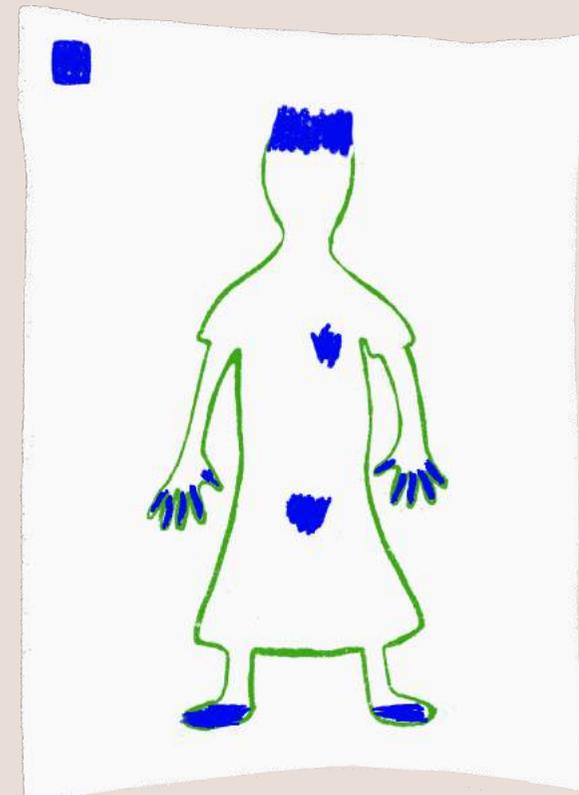
In my daily life and activism:

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?



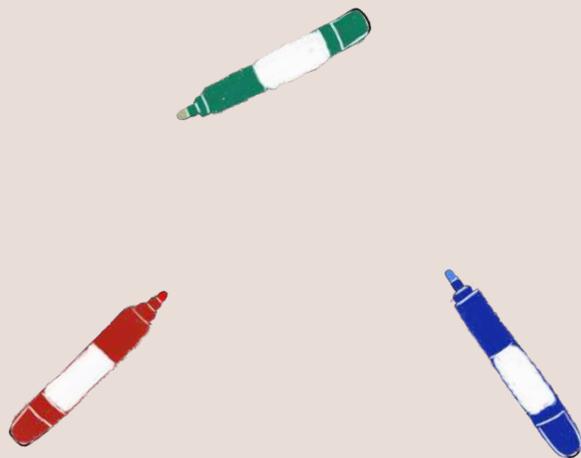
* Indicate 2 or 3 specific places

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>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 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>Fear: That the police arrest me in our protests against the company that wants to build a mine in our community.</p> <p>Types of violence: 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>Fear: That my husband will become violent because he does not like me participating in the organization.</p> <p>Types of violence: 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.

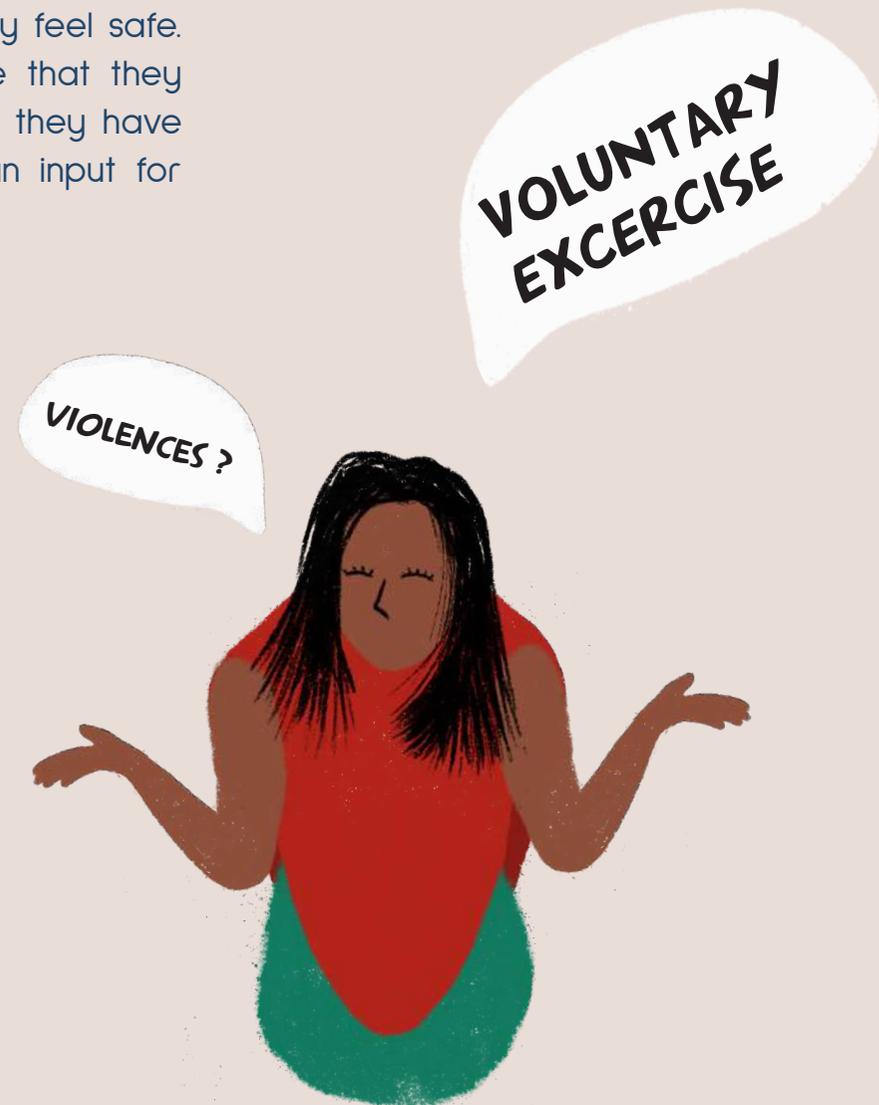
GROUP REFLECTION.

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:

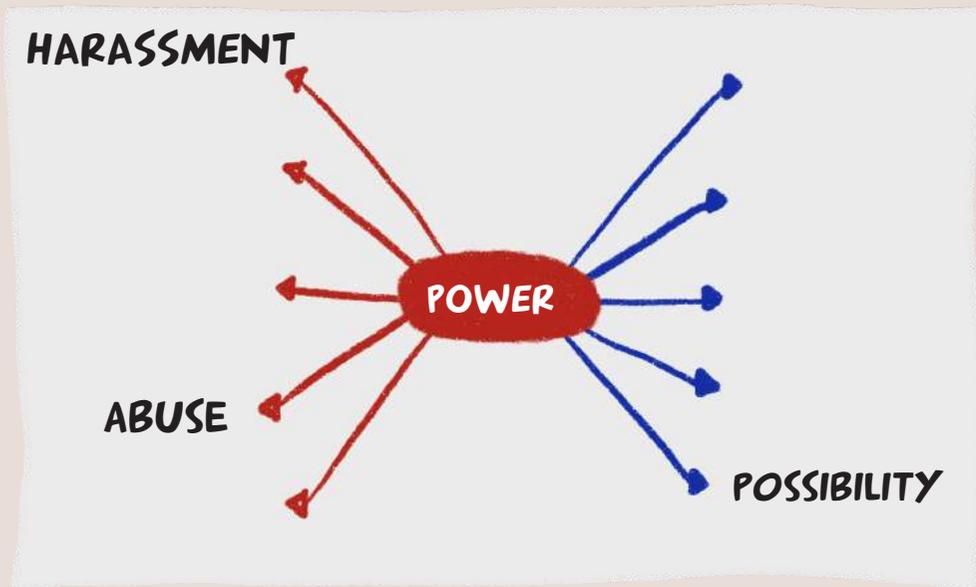
- The violence that is affecting our lives and our work for human rights does not usually occur by chance or without reason. There are powerful forces and actors behind this violence that see their interests being affected by our work as defenders. They are threatened because we are women who are breaking 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 **patriarchal² and heteronormative ideas³** 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.

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 Defenders⁴.

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 POWER¹ 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.

¹ 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

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.

