



OUR RIGHTS, OUR SAFETY:

RESOURCES FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



FIRST VERSION

OUR RIGHTS, OUR SAFETY: RESOURCES FOR PROTECTION

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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 Associates¹) 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 light gray background with several stylized illustrations of hands and protest signs. At the top, there are several brown hands, some raised in a fist, and two blue rectangular signs on black sticks. On the left side, a blue hand is raised, and a purple hand holds a white rectangular sign. On the right side, a brown hand is raised, and a brown hand holds a white rectangular sign. At the bottom, there are several brown hands, some raised in a fist, and two blue rectangular signs on black sticks.

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.
- 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.
- For each module and exercise, we have indicated an approximate time, which should also be adjusted to each group's needs and size.



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.

