
PAVING THE ROAD FOR FREEDOM & EQUALITY

MESOAMERICAN WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS INITIATIVE

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A call to
strengthen



MESOAMERICAN INITIATIVE
of women
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



PAVING THE ROAD FOR FREEDOM & EQUALITY

MESOAMERICAN WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS INITIATIVE

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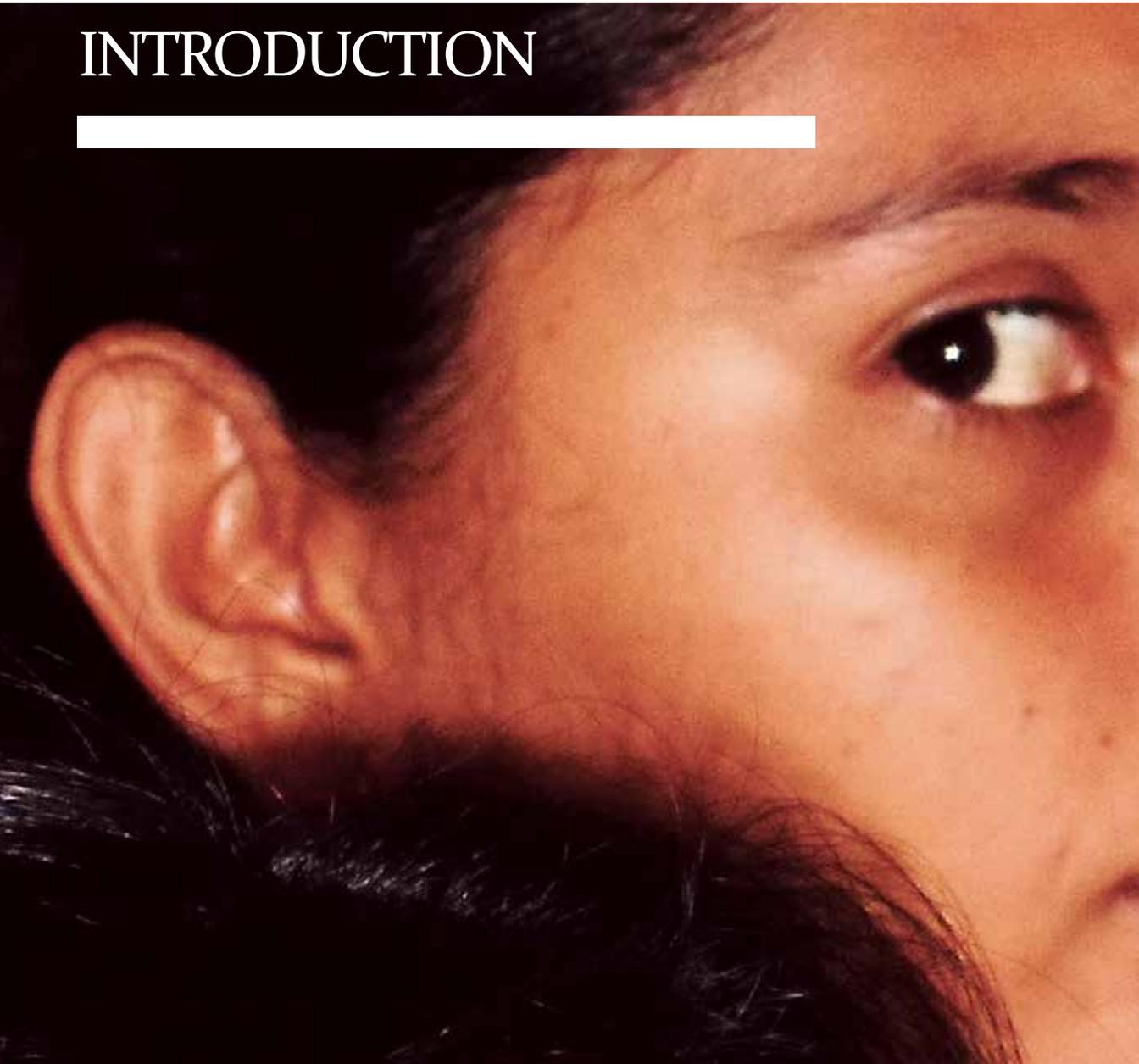
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INTRODUCTION

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Who is a woman human rights defender?

A mother seeking justice for her disappeared daughter. A teacher demanding decent quality public education. A maquila worker demanding livable wages. An activist fighting for LGBTI rights. An indigenous leader defending her community against illegal logging and mining. A young woman mobilizing others to decriminalize abortion. A journalist uncovering corruption involving the police and organized crime. Despite their contributions to freedom and justice, these activists and community leaders face discrimination and violence by both government and private actors.



“Paving the Road for Freedom and Equality” reflects the main achievements, lessons and experiences of the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IMD) and how it has contributed to the protection of women defenders in Mesoamerica—a region comprised of Mexico and Central America. These women human rights defenders carry out their justice work in a context of extreme violence, violence against those who dedicate their lives to justice and the defense of universal human rights.

The Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative was launched in 2009 when several organizations—JASS (Just



Associates), the Oaxacan Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEGUA), and Alianza Centroamericana para la Transformación de la Cultura Patriarcal—convened the first Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Gathering in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico in April 2010. With the participation of 55 women activists from local, regional and international social movements, their conclusions provided the basis for the creation of the Initiative.

The IMD is a partnership between 6 organizations (JASS, Oaxaca Consortium (Mexico), AWID, UDEFEGUA, the Feminist Collective for Local Development (El Salvador) and the Central American Women's Fund) and a representative from the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network of Honduras. The IMD also helped to create and continuously invests in the development of the national networks of women defenders in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Though the national networks are independent, the IMD and national networks are permanent allies.

As a part of the IMD, participants from across the region are committed to sustaining open dialogue to facilitate a shared analysis and vision, joint learning, information-exchange and collective action among women human rights defenders from different urban and





rural locations and from diverse local, national, and regional organizations and movements to strengthen the influence, public recognition and respect, and protection of women defenders in Mesoamerica.

The IMD is convinced that an accurate assessment and gendered analysis of violence against women defenders and that holistic protection measures are essential in order to guarantee the safety of activists; while in turn, contributing to the strength and sustainability of human rights movements in general. In addition, the IMD believes that both the Initiative itself and the national networks represent an extraordinary innovative example of cross-movement, local-to-global collaboration for much greater influence and impact, as well as for the safety of activists.





JASS

Just Associates

Is an international women's rights organization dedicated to strengthening the voice, visibility, and collective power of women to create a just and sustainable world for all. Anchored and driven by our regional networks in Mesoamerica, Southern Africa and Southeast Asia, JASS trains and accompanies activists and their organizations in 27 countries who are building movements to address diverse justice issues—including LBG-TI rights, HIV and reproductive health, indigenous land rights, and violence against women human rights defenders. JASS Mesoamerica co-founded and currently coordinates the Mesoamerican WHRDs Initiative and the national networks in Mexico and Honduras. In 2014, JASS launched a cross-regional exchange program aimed at adapting networking and protection strategies for women defenders in all three regions, and also became a member of the Women Human Right Defenders International Coalition.

www.justassociates.org/es/jass-mesoamerica



FCAM

Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres

Was created in 2003 to contribute to guaranteeing the right of Central American women to physical and emotional integrity, economic justice and to promote their participation as leaders in making decisions that affect their lives and communities. FCAM supports grassroots organizations led by and comprised of women, with a special emphasis on young women that work to promote and defend their human rights through grant-making programs, capacity building, accompaniment, monitoring and evaluation. FCAM currently runs a rapid response program that supports, both financially and others, WHRD at risk, in addition to working with a number of international agencies to highlight the violence they are facing.

www.fcmujeres.org



COLECTIVA

Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local

In 2008, the Feminist Collective was founded with the philosophy of creating a relationship model for women organizers, which has led to a joining of diverse visions of women from the urban cities to the rural areas of El Salvador, with different ideologies and religions. This coming together has given way for women organizing on a national-level, promoting collective processes that seek to recognize and support women's rights. The Feminist Collective currently organizes and brings together women human rights defenders in El Salvador.

www.colectivafeminista.org.sv



AWID	CONSORCIO-OAXACA	UDEFEQUA
<p>Association for Women's Rights in Development</p>	<p>Oaxaca Consortium For Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity</p>	<p>Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala</p>
<p>Is an international, multi-generational, feminist, creative, future-orientated membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women. AWID's WHRD Strategic Initiative aims to raise awareness of violations of the rights of WHRD, strengthen mechanisms for their protection, and contribute to more gender-responsive and effective responses to WHRD at risk. AWID currently coordinates the Mesoamerica Registry of Attack against WHRD of the IM- Defensoras and is a member of the Women Human Right Defenders International Coalition.</p>	<p>Created in 2003, Consorcio Oaxaca monitors and denounces incidents and patterns of violence against women and women's human rights violations. In addition to trainings and radio programs at the community level, Consorcio engages with local and state authorities to advance effective changes and implementation of policies that affect women. Consorcio promotes linkages between women defenders networks at the national level as well as in the state of Oaxaca, and provides judicial accompaniment of women victims of violence and defenders at risk. In the IM-Defensoras, Consorcio coordinates the Self-care strategy.</p>	<p>Was founded in 2004 with the objective of promoting the security of human rights defenders in Guatemala and to contribute to the protection of the political space in which they work. UDEFEGUA's programs support threatened human rights defenders and their organizations, and advise them about prevention and response to threats and attacks, through the provision of information, training, monitoring and psychological support. In addition, UDEFEGUA promotes the protection of human rights defenders with local government institutions and the international community.</p>
<p>www.awid.org</p> 	<p>www.consorciioaxaca.org.mx</p> 	<p>www.udefegua.org</p> 



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Land art
Jorge Rodríguez-Gerada
for Vogelvrije Vrouwen
diciembre 2010



Since 2009, the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative, in collaboration with various organizations, has:

- Supported the creation of five national women human rights defenders networks in Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, which in turn have organized and supported more than 360 women defenders from diverse social movements to develop security and self-care strategies that strengthen their justice work.
- Generated data and statistics on attacks, threats and the needs of women defenders through the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks, the only system of its kind in the world.
- Produced cutting-edge annual assessment reports on the nature of violence faced by women defenders in the region, making the IMD a key go-to resource in the field.
- Developed a holistic protection model that links security with self-care to strengthen defenders' activism and ensure that they are better equipped to deal with violence and combat gender discrimination.
- Contributed to the security and well-being of more than 100 women defenders,

their families and their organizations through emergency resources, shelters, self-care centers, counseling and workshops in 2013.

- Trained 100 women defenders in both the content and practical application of human rights mechanisms for defenders, including utilizing the CEDAW to challenge violence against women defenders.
- Trained 200 defenders in self-care strategies and techniques, helping them deal with exhaustion and burnout, to make their human rights work more sustainable.
- Fostered a higher level of recognition and awareness about the important work of women human rights defenders by the media, civil society, companies and governments through multiple media strategies involving more than 2,000 people and organizations internationally.
- Contributed to the development and passage of the first-ever UN Resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders.
- Gained the support of more than six international donor agencies that invested in the development and recognition of the IMD.



Chapter I

BEING A WOMAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER IN MESOAMERICA



Testimony from Honduras

“ Human rights defense work is now done in a highly complex and increasingly dangerous context, faced with drug trafficking, organized crime, gangs, militarization... If you defend the intimate partner of a gang member or of a policeman, the risks are even greater than if you defend the partner of an ordinary man... all this in a post-coup context, of course”





Femicide in Mesoamerica



Activism in the current context

Mesoamerica is currently facing alarming levels of violence and systematic human rights violations fueled by the combination of corrupt and fragile State institutions, the erosion of social safety nets, and the growing influence of organized crime. While some states continue to tolerate, and at times protect, powerful private interests—transnational corporations, drug traffickers, organized crime networks, and local mafias and their armed groups—human rights are put at risk. Whole sections of particular countries are controlled by these private groups and lack presence and protection by state authorities which exacerbate a problems of continuous violence against the local population.

With an increasing focus on security across the region, states are being militarized and several governments are reintroducing authoritarian practices

and laws that, far from contributing to peace and security, criminalize social protest, restrict freedoms, and limit both individual and collective rights.

In this context, there is a disturbing rise and intensification of violence against women that is being used by both governments and non-state actors as an instrument of social control by instilling fear and breaking down family and community bonds. Women face increasingly cruel forms of violence—including dismemberment, stabbed in the womb while pregnant, kidnappings and sexual torture—and are confronted with a rise in femicide and a pervasive manipulation of media to justify gender-specific violence and a culture of discrimination. Such violence limits and reverses hard-fought rights gains won by feminist and women's movements, gains that improved development and democracy in the region.

Testimony from Guatemala

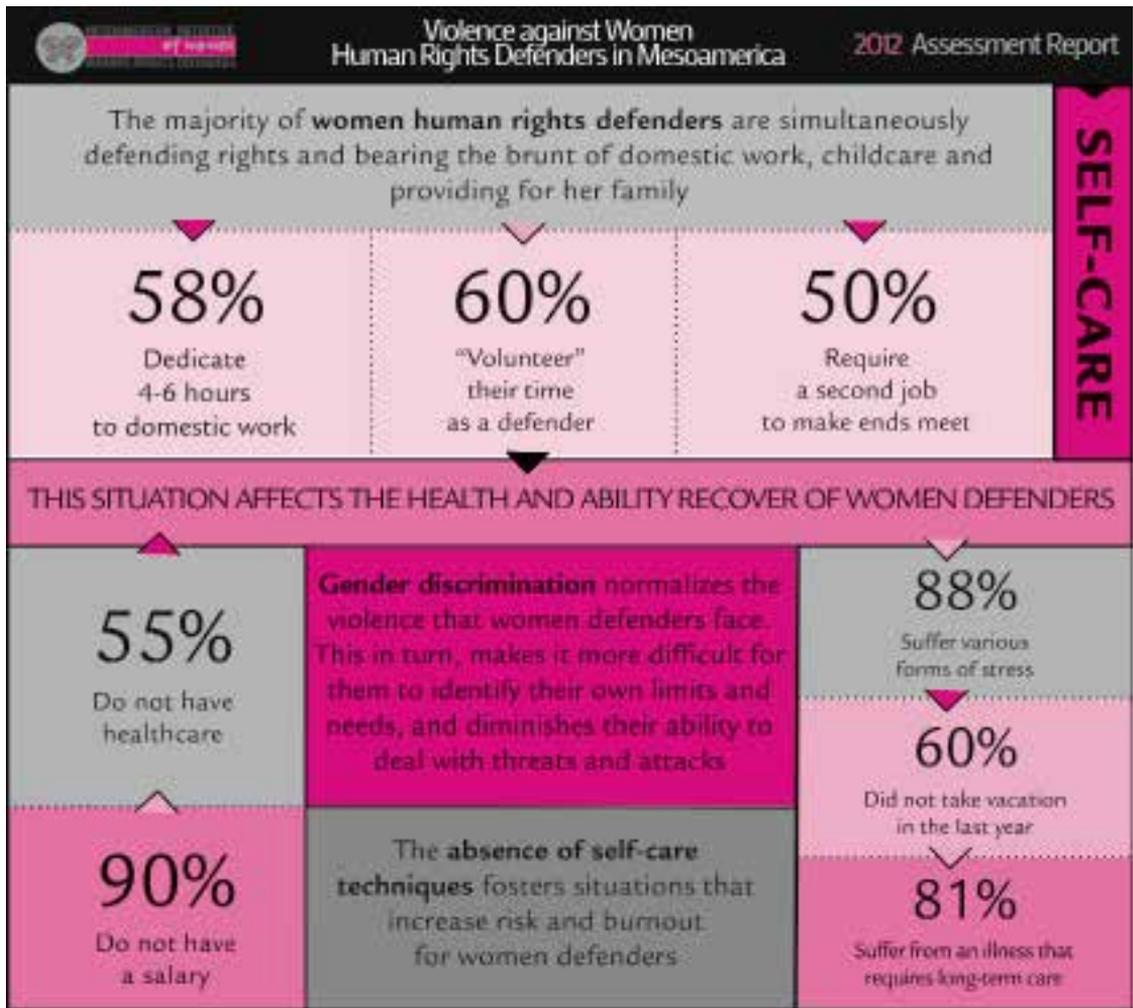
“ I’ve endured persecution, received threats, and been attacked. They’ve tried to kill me and have threatened me with different kinds of weapons. I’ve suffered stigmatization and defamation. There’s a lot of defamation, and it’s directed at women through sexual assault: ‘We’re going to kill you but before we kill you, we’re going to rape you, and this is the way we’re going to do it, and not only you, but your daughter, too...’ These kinds of threats stay deep inside us and fill us with terror, with extreme fear, when we think about what is coming”

Despite this dangerous context, across the region women human rights defenders are on the frontlines of diverse social movements and vital agendas.

Through non-violent actions, women defenders lead the search for the victims of forced disappearances; combat violence against women; mobilize in defense of land rights and natural resources; and stand up for women jailed for having an abortion, women workers struggling for better wages and conditions, and for people who face discrimination and hate for their sexual orientation. Likewise, women defenders are often those who work to recover the history and the experiences of marginalized sectors and fight for justice for crimes committed during past armed conflicts.

Women defenders in Mesoamerica are apart of organizations and networks consolidated during past decades as well as small new collectives. They often make up the majority of the organized base of most movements despite their limited representation and lack of recognized leadership roles, which signals that even within their own movements, organizations and networks, women human rights defenders face discrimination and must fight to be recognized.

The active, widespread presence of women defenders in society contributes to the development of participatory democracies and generates ways of living that are based on respect for rights, peace, and dignity of all people.



Violence against women human rights defenders in Mesoamerica

Being a women human rights defender in Mexico and Central America means challenging the discrimination and social exclusion that women experience because of their gender. While many fight against a wide range of injustices and inequality, their work in defense of human rights is also because they themselves have experienced gender-specific violence and discrimination in their lives and demand that their rights and freedom be respected.

Gender discrimination limits the work of women defenders, heightens risk, and diminishes resources for confronting violence. It also further encourages a social mindset that allows and even encourages negative attacks and critiques against women who decide to participate in the public arena, which isolates defenders from families and their communities of support. Given this lack of social recognition, many women often don't view themselves as human rights defenders even though they are speaking out and demanding respect for human rights. Indeed, an important contribution of the



IMD is the fact that a range of activists now see themselves as women human rights defenders, making the more aware of the risks they face.

Women human rights defenders face the same attacks as our male counterparts, while simultaneously defending themselves from specific forms of discrimination and violence because they are women. These gender-specific forms of violence include: intra-family, street, social

and work harassment, and even sexist attacks within our own organizations. Seldom, acknowledged, these attacks can have a strong impact on their self-esteem and limit the ongoing work of other women defenders. In extreme situations, this violence has cost women defenders their lives, as is the case with victims of femicide and of women who have died due to illnesses brought on by years of gender-specific violence.



Testimony from Mexico

“ I’ve been defending human rights for more than 50 years, and I’ve never found such a welcoming, accepting and supportive environment as I have in the Women Defenders Initiative. I think it’s an incredibly important tool: first of all, inside each country there is a network of women who are willing to take immediate action on a number of issues and problems. The quality of the members is also important. They’re not just playing around. They’re people with experience who are risking their lives, people who have struggled for a long time and have decided to come together to support other women...since we face multiple forms of discrimination, as activists and as women. Then too, we are connected to Mesoamerica as a whole and with migrant labor, for example. We’ve always thought regional movements were important. That’s why we organized with the Caravans of Mothers of Migrants. The fact that we can suddenly multiply impact and opportunities to the X degree because there is a network of committed women in each country, opens up important new horizons for short-term goals”

Chapter II

HOLISTIC PROTECTION STRATEGIES: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR SECURITY & SELF-CARE

In 2013 the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IMD) released the 2012 assessment report analyzing data and cases documented through the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks. This report, the only one of its kind in the region, is an important tool for spotlighting the specific forms of violence faced by women human rights defenders. As stated in this 2012 report, gender discrimination normalizes the violence that women defenders face, limits their ability to make decisions about their own security, makes it more difficult for them to identify their own limits and needs, and diminishes their ability to deal with threats and attacks.

Furthermore, violence that women defenders suffer in their homes, offices and other private spaces are often seen as outside of the State's purview and therefore, excluded from government protection strategies and plans. This

added form of discrimination leads to an increase in vicarious violence suffered by those who support victims of human rights violations, in particular women defenders whose work is not recognized as legitimate work or who defend victims marginalized by their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age.

The holistic protection model that the IMD is developing recognizes that the violence faced by women defenders as a result of their work is closely linked to and affected by gender discrimination. By recognizing the contributions and specific protection needs of women defenders, the IMD seeks to strengthen the capacity of women defenders and their organization, and by greater extent, the social fabric.

The fundamental aspect of the IMD's work is centered in the creation of protection networks among and for women defenders that enable them to overcome isolation



and a lack of support in moments of risk, and to mobilize greater influence on policy and public discourse. To this end, the IMD utilizing the following strategies:

● We **mobilize** collaboration and joint strategies with diverse women activists, organizations and networks across borders, movements and issues to influence political agendas, public debate and respond to urgencies.

● We **train** and **accompany** diverse women defenders to better understand the risks they face, gain awareness of their human rights as both defenders and women, and the practical mechanisms provided by the human rights system.

● We **support** for women defenders at-risk by developing protection strategies that address security concerns in emergency situations as well as self-care needs that help to prevent future violence.

● We **document** cases and gather data in order to generate systematic, gender-focused information and analysis on violence against women defenders in Mesoamerica, which is used by international human rights organizations and governments.

● We **develop** high-visibility communications campaigns and actions that not only spotlight the political profile of women defenders and their

organizations in situations of risk, but that also transform existing preconceptions of women activists and foster recognition of the importance of their work.

● We **promote** a new culture of activism that strikes a balance between the demands of defending human rights and demands of personal and collective spaces to ensure the well-being of women defenders and the sustainability of their movements.

Testimony from Honduras

“ (In) the Mesoamerican Defenders Initiative, there are all kinds of organizations, including those defending the environment, land, and more... So this exchange of experience deepens what each of us already know... It strengthens our alliances and our defense strategies. The IMD has made us much stronger, at least that's true of the organizations that are part of the National Network in Honduras... We feel that this is a space for getting to know other cases and be aware of possible dangers. Sometimes we don't look at threats as being so serious, but then we see that other women have also been threatened and then experienced attempts on their lives or were killed... and we realize that we've been downplaying the risk”



The organizations that participate in the IMD and in the women defenders national networks are producing cutting-edge information to impact public policy and contribute to improvements in government protection mechanisms, so that they guarantee:

- Access to justice for women defenders through research that is effective and in accordance with existing women's rights protection models that holds perpetrators accountable and avoids revictimizing the victim.
- Risk analysis and security measures that address discrimination against women defenders, deal with violence brought on by such discrimination, and contribute to the strengthening of the women defenders themselves.
- Inclusion of gender indicators in data collection systems and monitoring and compliance mechanisms.

The IMD acknowledges and is learning from the experiences, strategies, knowledge and expertise of numerous organizations across the region and around the world that have developed their own innovative protection mechanisms, including Protection International, Urgent Action Fund, FrontLine Defenders, Peace Brigades International, Center for Justice and International Law, Amnesty International and the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, as well as various important national organizations.

Caring for ourselves and among ourselves enables us to confront sexist violence and to deconstruct gender norms, build stronger more inclusive social justice movements, move towards sustainable equality within our families and organizations, improve governments' commitment and capacity to guarantee rights, and contribute to the creation of a new social fabric.



Chapter III

NETWORKS OF WOMEN DEFENDERS AMPLIFY VOICES & SAVE LIVES

Testimony from México

“The Women Defenders Network in Mexico has been really important in my life. It’s been my right arm...I’m not alone. Somebody else is with me. So many women, 60 women, 80 women, many women that now back me up. The longer this network and the Mesoamerican Network keep going, the more we’re going to be able to move ahead and gain rights for others”

National Networks: a critical Mesoamerica WHRD Initiative strategy

Based on the principle that collective power is louder and that “networks can save”, a key strategy of the IMD is the creation and continuous support of national women human rights defender networks and the coordination of joint actions. These networks are specifically formed for the security and self-care of women leaders and activists from diverse social movements in each country of Mesoamerica and also provide a powerful joint platform for confronting and overcoming violence. With IMD support, national networks in Mexico, Guatemala

and Honduras have been fully functional since the end of 2010 and in El Salvador as of December 2012. Although a network has yet to be established in Nicaragua, in 2013 the IMD agreed to support processes of coordination among activists and various women’s organizations.

Number of Women Human Rights Defenders participating in the National Networks:

In Mexico: 112 defenders
In Guatemala: 82 defenders
In Honduras: 65 defenders
In El Salvador: 80 defenders
Support in Nicaragua: 25 defenders



In all, the national women defenders networks include approximately 360 women human rights defenders who participate in more than 70 organizations and networks across the majority of provinces in each country of the region.

One of the most important characteristics of these networks is the diversity of the organizations, identities, and movements that actively participate: trade unionists and groups defending worker's rights; indigenous and rural people defending land rights and natural resources; organizations fighting against femicide and feminicide, defenders of sexual and reproductive rights; and organizations that defend sexual diversity.

The networks are facilitated by a number of different organizations

In Mexico: Red Mesa de Ciudad Juarez, Consorcio Oaxaca, and JASS Mesoamerica
In El Salvador: La Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local

In Guatemala: Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEUGA)

In Honduras, a facilitation group is comprised of: Center for Women's Studies in Honduras, the National Ojojona Women against Violence Network, JASS Mesoamerica, and the Association for the Development of the Zacate Peninsula (ADEPZA) as well as a few individual women defenders.



The national networks are organized into different types of committees that operate in accordance with the priorities outlined by their coordinating teams, such as communications, security, urgent action, self-care and solidarity.

All operate through virtual networks both for maintaining relationships and disseminating information. A number of the networks have also made significant progress in developing protocols to respond to urgent situations and for the holistic protection measures of women defenders in their countries, including existing protection models for activists and for attending to victims of sexist violence.

Testimony from El Salvador

“The Network is key because it enables us to be together. Now we know what works for us. International pressure may no longer have the same impact it once had in our countries, so there’s nothing left to do but consolidate our efforts and support each other to be able to move everything we can together... In this sense, the Initiative has helped us make concrete and systematize our mutual support”

The IMD has helped create and expand these networks by providing access to resources for organizational development, strategizing and agenda-setting, design of protocols and women defender



protection capacity, rapid response funds for emergencies and self-care, solidarity campaigns, and international actions. Likewise, the IMD has a regional virtual communications network that serves as a liaison for women human rights defenders in 15 countries.

These networks make it possible for women defenders to counteract the isolation and lack of support that they may experience in high-risk situations, and to develop protective measures from a gender perspective. Some national networks have even begun to encourage the creation of



local, area-specific networks in different provinces as a strategy for acquainting members with their holistic protection strategies.

● In Mexico: The Oaxaca Women Defender and Activist Network and the Women Defenders Network in Guerrero.

● In El Salvador: The Northern San Salvador Women Defenders Network, the Metropolitan Women Defenders Network, the “Los Nonualcos” Women Defenders Network, and the Western Women Defenders Network.

Within a short time, the national networks have been able to:

- Develop their own protocols and protection mechanisms with contributions from members
- Lend support to activists at risk or who have suffered violence, as well as to their families by providing temporary shelters, spaces for rest and healing, risk analysis with gender indicators, and emergency resources. They also make connections and direct high-risk defenders to other organizations for their protection. The networks have helped 124 women human rights defenders at risk.
- Denounce cases and situations of violence against women defenders to the general public and national authorities. The networks have been formed within a previously accepted framework of documentation of attacks and threats faced by women human rights defenders.
- Strengthen protection capacities, self-care and coordination through workshops and area-specific meetings.



Key network activities & actions

● The National Network in El Salvador, in collaboration with 15 women human rights defenders from the Cuscatlán area, is conducting a pilot version of a secure, low-cost, effective, alternative communications tool for the use of MATILTI FEMINISTA, so that defenders can communicate with each other, denounce violations, issue calls to action, and send telephone messages, which upon being received by a server, can sound an “alert” to the Network or designated public entity. Furthermore, the El Salvador Network is building a physical protection space for high-risk defenders and their families from within the country and from the entire region.

● The Women Defenders Network in Guatemala, has prepared three guides on “What to Do in Case of Sexual Violence,” “What to Do in Case of Searches of Defender Homes and Offices,” and “What to Do in Case of Evictions,” which will be published in their 2014 Annual Planning Report. The Network is also launching a campaign entitled “Silence is History. Now I Write History. I’m a Defender,” aimed to strengthen women’s identity as human rights defenders. The Network has a physical protection space supported by IMD resources, where women defenders from Guatemala and Honduras have found shelter.

● The National Women Defenders Network in Mexico has developed a protocol to attend to cases of women defenders in high risk situations that incorporates gender indicators. A Network committee made up of women defenders who are experts in psycho-social attention

Testimony from Honduras

“ The Network has been successful in united diverse women. When one of us is hurt, all of us are hurt. Knowing we are united by strong ties, though they may be invisible... even though we’ve never met each other... we can now make noise for everyone”

and risk analysis implements the protocol. The Network has a self-care committee that promotes the concept of security and self-care as two inseparable elements through workshops, training sessions and individual accompaniment. The Network has used IMD resources to establish a physical self-care protection space that has been used by women defenders from Mexico and Guatemala.

● The Women Defenders Network of Honduras has acquired important experience in addressing situations of violence against women defenders inside their own organizations and movements, where violence is commonly rendered invisible due to the lack of necessary tools to provide effective attention. The Network will also soon introduce a community radio program to promote the work of women defenders, their identities, and the agendas of their movements. It will be the first of its kind in the region.

Testimony from Mexico

“The Initiative is very important to us because since we’ve joined in its activities, we’ve initiated a process of making our work as women human rights defenders more visible and have encouraged the rest of the women in Nicaragua working for the human rights of women to see themselves as women human rights defenders. The IMD is an important avenue for making an impact, coordinating our efforts, helping ourselves, and forming alliances. We are women from many countries of Mesoamerica, and I think it’s important to have a network of support, coordination, and sisterhood... to know we can count on women in Mexico, and really, I think in all of Latin America. This sisterhood is really important for us in Nicaragua”

Strengthening alliances between Mesoamerican women defenders

As of now, the IMD has organized two regional women defenders’ meetings, one in 2010 and the second in 2013. In September 2013, 187 women defenders came together from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama and Colombia for the 2nd Gathering of Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica.

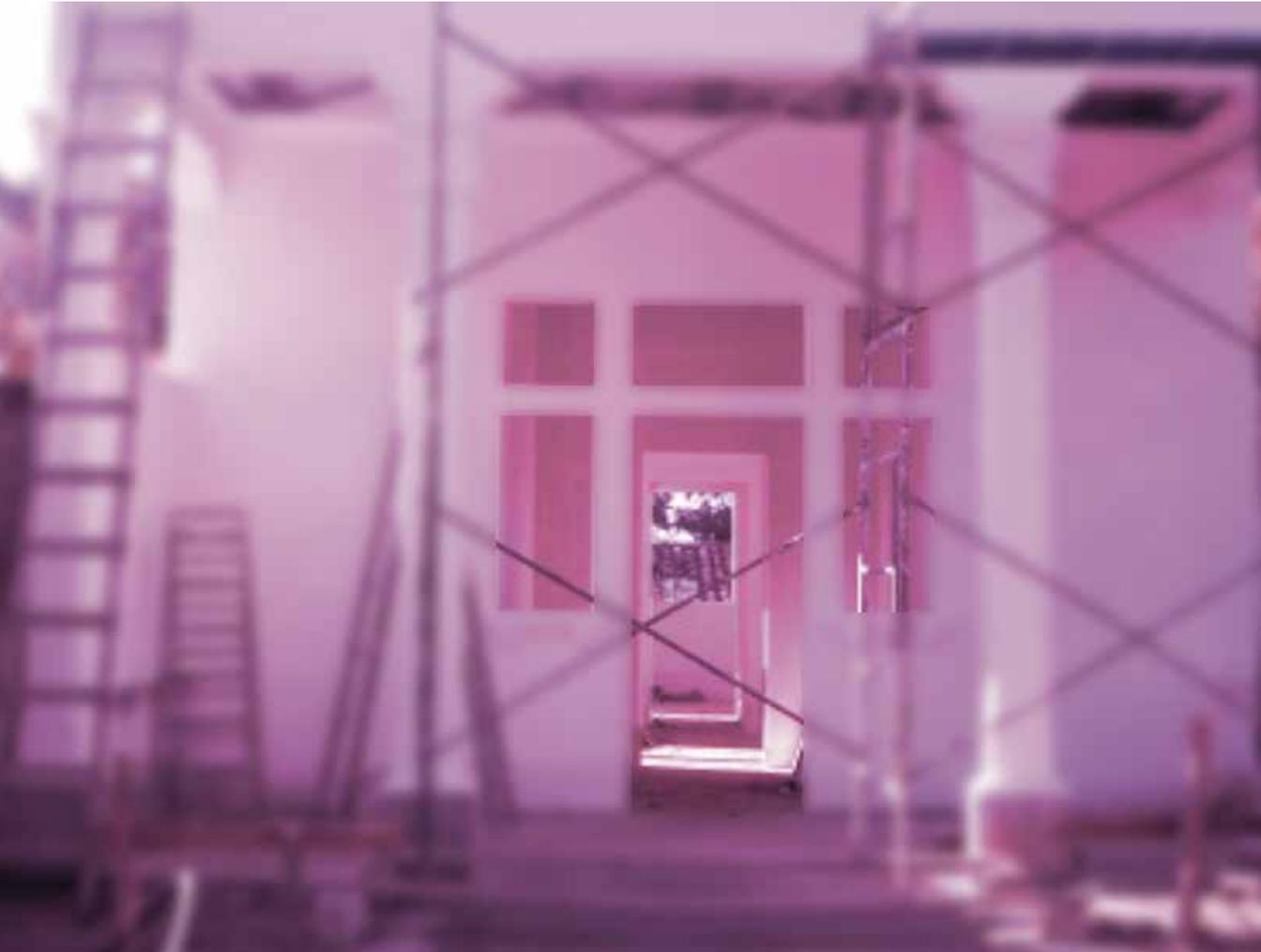
For 3 days, women defenders from cities and rural areas across the region came together: indigenous women, professionals, teachers, healers, journalists, singers and creative artists, community organizers, vendors, trade unionists, sex workers, migrants, agricultural workers, domestic workers, lawyers, therapists, lesbians, and transsexuals, all grouped together within national defenders networks and coordinating groups in Mesoamerica.

Held in Suchitoto, El Salvador, participants discussed how a feminist perspective could strengthen the alliances, liaisons, and strategies of the national networks, and how to foster local, national, regional and international linkages to ensure the holistic protection of women human rights defenders. Participants also shared personal and collective testimonies about how they are preventing and confronting such violence and made advances in placing self-care as a central strategy both for the defense of human rights and for movement sustainability, and also as the right of women defenders to well-being and security —a right that should be respected by society as a whole.



Testimony from Guatemala

“I suffered an attempt on my life on January 9th, and that’s when I got to know the IMD, which at a certain point helped me move away from the area where I’d been attacked and stay away for two months so I could explore the best place to relocate to, yet continue my work. For me, it’s one more instrument that we now have, especially us women, for considering the issue of self-care, growing stronger, and in so doing, bettering our human rights work”



Chapter IV

RESOURCES FOR THE HOLISTIC PROTECTION OF WOMEN DEFENDERS

The IMD has gradually built its own capacity to provide the following kinds of support that help to guarantee the protection of Mesoamerican women human rights defenders:

1. Rapid response funds for emergency situations and self-care

The IMD has developed a regional protocol for the timely mobilization of resources that address the urgent needs of women defenders at risk and also support the incorporation of self-care measures into the lives of the women defenders. This is made possible by a system of sending out calls to national networks to mobilize rapid response funds for security and self-care.

The majority of the cases dealt with are those of women defenders who are supported by national networks; this means that the funds granted are part of a broad protection strategy that stems from a professional risk analysis conducted by high-risk defenders themselves along with expert network members.

A unique strength of this funding is that it supports all women defenders regardless of the kind of violence they are subjected to, no matter whether it is political or criminal in nature, or whether it occurs within their family, organizations, or movements.

Individual support has been granted to 31 women defenders and their families in the last two years. This support has been mainly focused on assuring a safe living space, which may mean improving security at home or in temporary shelters or contributing to healing processes, therapeutic attention, self-care and legal advice.

According to the accounts of women defenders themselves, this support has enabled them to return to their communities and residential areas in conditions of better security, substantially improve their emotional health, ensure economic stability in situations of high vulnerability and risk, assure their own physical integrity and that of their families, and attend to their personal



and family needs. In most cases, those with support from the IMD and national networks have continued their work for human rights and, despite adversity, continue to feel empowered throughout the process.

Through this funding, the IMD has also given resources to organizations for the development of joint programs and initiatives. In the last two years, 13 organizations have received support, which has mainly been designated for the development of proposals and institutional plans for self-care, strategies for dealing with stress and fear, attention to burnout syndrome and other health needs, and support in maintaining emotional restraint in the face of attacks.

The IMD acknowledges that lack of self-care is one of the most common vulnerabilities among women human rights defenders and their organizations in the region; it endangers their physical and emotional health and possibly increasing the risks they face or heightens insecurity.

In addition to helping to address the immediate needs of high-risk women defenders and their families, the IMD has used IMD funds to promote a number of skill-building processes that contribute to building a culture of security and self-care among women human rights defenders and their organizations.

Through regional and national workshops, 108 women defenders from more than 70 organizations have learned to conduct a risk analysis from a gender perspective, developed their own security plan, identified their needs and resources

related to self-care, and received tools for dealing with different forms of violence, including stronger digital security.

For the development of this important strategy, the IMD coordinated with the Urgent Action Fund to share skills and knowledge to support women human rights defenders based on their accumulated experience in this field.

Testimony from El Salvador

“Moving ahead in fear of threats In December of 2012 my family and I were threatened with rape and murder due to the work we were doing in defense of women’s rights. We lived in an area where the Maras had a strong presence. Our friends in the El Salvador Network lent us support, providing temporary shelter during the risk situation and putting us in touch with a psychologist who helped us. My family and I are now trying to get on with our lives, and even though we haven’t been able to return home for fear of threats, we are developing new ways to sustain ourselves so as not to stop our struggle on behalf of women”

taken from the
Mama Cash annual
report

2. Spaces for recovery and protection

Thanks to its innovative work, the IMD is now better equipped to provide physical protection spaces for women defenders who face threats and to generate emergency plans that addresses their security concerns.

The IMD and national networks depend on national-level assessments of available spaces and locations for the protection of women defenders, including shelters, hostels, and halfway houses in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, that can be used at a moments notice in urgent situations. In addition, funds from the IMD have helped build three shelters/self-care centers: in Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. These shelters do not only provide a safe space for women defenders and their families from that particular country, but are also open to women defenders in need from across the region. The majority of women who have used these spaces also participate in a national women human rights defenders network.

- In Mexico, the shelter was built outside the country's capital city, thereby responding to the difficulties faced by women defenders in rural/indigenous surroundings, for whom urban centers are foreign to their everyday lives and customs. This space are meant to adapt, as much as possible, to the personal and family requirements of these women defenders, including the availability of cultural, alternative healing methods.

- In Guatemala, where numerous women defenders face constant attacks in relation

to the Rios Montt genocide trial, a safe house was established in May 2013 and since then, has responded to 12 urgent cases of violence against women defenders. Despite the security measures in place during a person's stay at the house, the space has been under constant surveillance.



The IMD seeks to ensure that all safe spaces meet basic conditions that attend to the well-being of a women defender at-risk. In addition, during the time that she and her family are staying at the house, the IMD and networks offer a variety of activities based on their self-care needs (healing, therapeutic attention, recreational activities, etc.),



as well as opportunities for conducting a risk analysis and defining security plans that enable them to return to their homes –should they decide to do so– with safer conditions.

The IMD will soon release a new report that presents recommendations for improving the services provided by the shelters in Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala and that includes an analysis of good practices and lessons learned. The aim is to use the study as a basis for generating a system of IMD shelters that will be launched in mid-2014. For

this purpose and to strengthen the development of more informed strategies, the IMD will explicitly connect their analysis on shelters/safe spaces with their regional and national assessment of registered attacks.

Based on the experiences of the last year, the IMD can conclude that these shelters and temporary safe spaces have provided women defenders and their families with a calm place and time to recuperate, evaluate their situation and develop strategies to move forward and continue their work defending human rights.



3. Regional self-care program

In the IMD, we understand self-care as the right of women human rights defenders to fully and satisfactorily experience their activism and their daily lives. We also see self-care as a political tool for preventing violence and fostering the sustainability of our movements, thereby enhancing the well-being of all within those movements. As noted in the 2012 Regional Assessment Report, lack of self-care creates risky situations or wears down defenders as they do their work. The IMD has made a significant contribution towards

Testimony from Honduras

“One of the great contributions is self-care, which means putting your body as a woman defender at the center of the debate. Your body is political territory. It’s one of the first spaces for constructing freedom... for defining how to exist as a woman, a human being, a citizen in this struggle”

recognizing the need to deal with the lack of self-care as part of the process for strengthening, sustaining and protecting women defenders.

The IMD has been able to generate an understanding of self-care as both a principle and a tool for holistic protection based on the experiences and knowledge of women defenders in the region. We have published results from a virtual dialogue on this issue among diverse women with extensive experience in the feminist movement.

In addition, the IMD has provided capacity-building through self-care workshops in five countries of the region, attended by more than 250 women human rights defenders. Together they have begun to address the conditions in which defenders engage in their activism and self-care. In these workshops, women defenders and their organizations have:

- Used collective processes to promote substantive changes in personal and organizational work dynamics, transforming the practices that put us





at risk and deny the needs and rights of defenders.

- Identified dimensions of well-being that have not been addressed; opening spaces of trust and empathy to share feelings seldom addressed or recognized, such as fear, anxiety, and pain; and developing an ability to better handle these feelings.
- Developed individual and collective strategies for attending to physical, psychological and emotional well-being, while also generating proposals for healthy, stronger activism that fosters new principles for co-existing and working together.

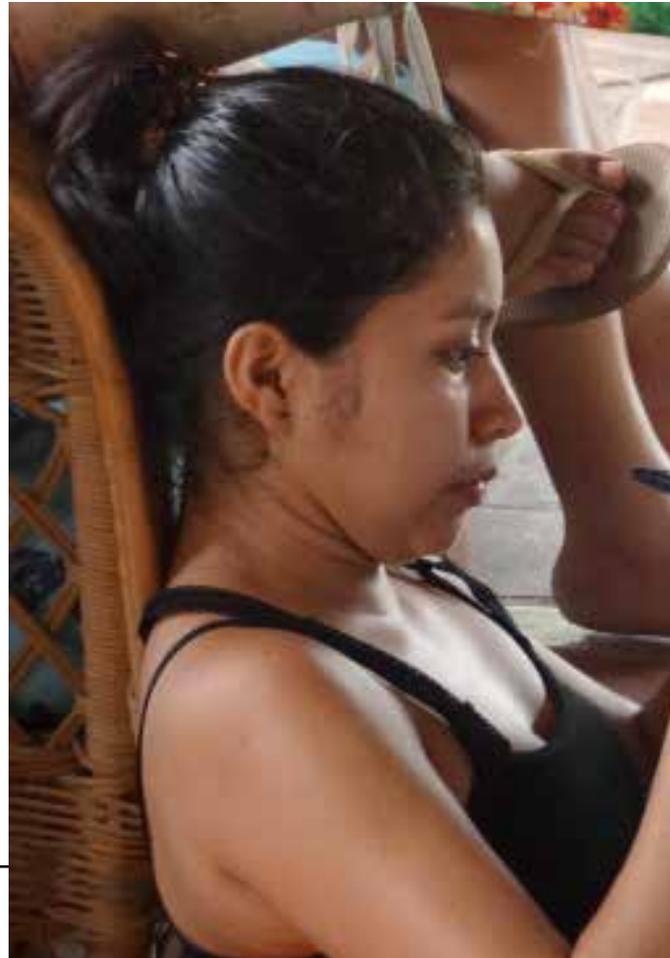
Three experiences during 2013 reflect the importance of this strategy:

● Through a training process, we accompanied defenders who are fighting for the right to choose in El Salvador. They are experiencing severe strain and exhaustion from their engagement with cases of women jailed for ending a pregnancy in this country imposes criminal penalties on individuals involved in abortions to save the life of the mother. With the IMD, these women and their organizations found a space for healing and for developing tools to confront social stigma and campaigns to discredit them, and mapped out strategies for continuing the difficult work of supporting unjustly imprisoned women and their families.

● With IMD funding and thanks to the Self-Care Committee of the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Mexico, a self-care space was

organized for members of the Emeteria Martínez Caravan of Central American Mothers. As a result, many women were able to rest and alleviate the stress and pain they experience in their unflagging search for their children in a country where there are major violations of the human rights of migrants.

● Through professional support and with IMD funding, we have provided healing alternatives to women defenders and their organizations in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico to help deal with mourning processes whether related to losing family members during armed conflict, suicides of colleagues in their own organizations, or finding the bodies of their slain daughters, victims of femicide.



In 2014 the IMD will publish a regional self-care assessment based on a survey of a sample of women defenders in the national networks, and are now mapping the resources available by country in order to identify with who and where defenders can receive physical and emotional attention.

Today, the IMD and national networks are building a culture to prevent injury and affirm the right to care for themselves, and in this way are also strengthening movements. They have a shared understanding that investing in this dimension is just as important as their other strategic areas of work.



Testimony from Guatemala

“It’s really important because we’ve been able to raise our voices, be the bearers of news of what’s happening with us, and tell others about it. When our story is heard nationally and internationally, this helps humanity to form a critical opinion about what’s happening, and we become a reference point for indigenous women in other countries”

4. International Advocacy

The IMD understands international advocacy as a tool for advancing the justice agenda of women defenders and for consolidating their protection capacity as well as that of their networks.

In order to put attacks and discrimination against women defenders in the region on international agendas, expand our networks for international solidarity, and demand that states fulfill their protection obligations, the IMD has developed an advocacy and alliance-building strategy, including developing a map of human rights organizations and mechanisms that can support this area of work. A key part of this strategy is encouraging ties between defenders at risk, their organizations and protection-oriented bodies of the United Nations and the Inter-American Human Rights System, thereby ensuring that their testimonies and demands are directly heard by the entities that can make recommendations to States on protection issues.



Some of the activities and results achieved through this strategy include:

● Communication and engagement with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders. In 2011, linked to the Rapporteur's special report on the situation of women defenders, we held a forum at the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the state of violence against women defenders in Mesoamerica, including participation of women from Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala. We have consistently shared up-to-date information with the Rapporteur on cases of women defenders at risk in the region who has, on occasion, included it in her reports.

● Communication and engagement with the CEDAW Committee. In November 2013, we organized a meeting with two experts from the Committee, women defenders at risk and representatives of national defender networks. We identified opportunities to protect and promote the rights of women defenders through CEDAW and its Optional Protocol.

● Preparation of alternative reports on the situation of women defenders for different United Nations bodies. In the past two years, we have supported women defenders from Mexico to prepare and present their reports and engage with international human rights mechanisms linked to the 52nd Session of CEDAW in July 2012 and the Universal Periodic Review presented by Mexico before the United Nations Human Rights Council in October 2013.

● Information and proposals sent to United Nations bodies that make recommendations to States on the protection of women defenders. This work has led to important recommendations, such as those made by the CEDAW Committee to Mexico, which were the first specifically for the protection of women defenders, or those developed on protection by various countries for the presentation of Mexico's Periodic Universal Report to the Human Rights Council. The IMD also participated in the 57th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, held in March 2013. The final document recognized the need to eradicate violence against women, and the IMD pressured governments in the region and beyond to support the approval of the first resolution on women human rights defenders, which was adopted on November 27, 2013, by the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

● Dissemination of information on the situation of violence against women human rights defenders in the Inter-American Human Rights System, and recommendations to incorporate a gender perspective. In 2010 during the 140th Period of Regular Sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), we had a hearing on the situation of violence against women defenders in El Salvador, Mexico and Honduras, and in January 2012, we made a presentation to the IACHR Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders on the gender dimension of the Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in the Americas.

Chapter V

DENOUNCING VIOLENCE & BUILDING SOLIDARITY: DOCUMENTING ATTACKS

1. Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks

Invisibility is a risk factor: specific protection measures are neither analyzed nor generated, which reflects the discrimination faced by women defenders and a low level of social recognition.

The IMD has a system for registering attacks against women human rights defenders, which gathers information from the responsible organizations in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. With it, we have been able to confirm the type of attacks perpetrated against defenders during 2012 and 2013. This is the first registry of its kind in the region. In the first year using the database, we compiled information on 414 attacks, of which 40% were identified as having gender dimensions.

Using the new strategy of registering attacks, we have been able to publish and disseminate two regional assessments

(2010-2011 and 2012) of the situation of violence against women defenders at a regional level and in three countries.

The establishment of the Registry has become a tool for denouncing attacks and recognizing women defenders. Through training processes and technical assistance, the national networks are better equipped for the registry, analysis and dissemination of information on attacks in their countries, which, in turn, allows for greater access to this information by civil society, news media, government institutions and international bodies.

2. Analysis and publication of regional assessment reports

The first publication containing data on attacks against women defenders, entitled “Violence against Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica, an Assessment in Progress, 2010-2011,” systemizes reflections by participants in the 1st



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MESOAMERICA

SUMMARY FINDINGS



MESOAMERICAN INITIATIVE
of women
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Regional Meeting held in Mexico and makes a series of preliminary assessments in four countries (Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala) based on this input. These assessments represent one of the first efforts in the region to document violence faced by women defenders based on their own experiences and cases that have come to light in recent years.

Through the development and regular operation of the Registry, we have been able to publish the “2012 Assessment. Violence against Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica,” which was presented at a press conference at the 2nd General Meeting of Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders in El Salvador. It received widespread media coverage in both national media and social networks.



The report is a one-of-a-kind tool for denouncing violence and defending Mesoamerican activists. It is divided into five sections:

- The first describes and analyzes the regional context.
- The second goes more deeply into the situation of human rights defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.
- The third includes a series of articles on some of the defender groups that are under the heaviest attack, written by experts involved in the activities of these groups.
- The fourth section is dedicated to the issue of self-care, its importance, and its current status among Mesoamerican defenders.
- The fifth part contains a set of conclusions, observations, and recommendations directed at government officials, international actors, and non governmental organizations.

3. Dissemination, communication and solidarity actions

Through denunciations, calls to solidarity, awareness-raising campaigns, and the dissemination of information about specific situations and cases, we have been able to position the IMD as a key regional and international voice on the situation of women defenders and to receive rapid responses of support, primarily through social networks.

Within the IMD we understand dissemination and communication as an important strategy for advocacy, dialogue and solidarity actions in the face of aggressions against Mesoamerican women defenders, contributing to their protection and that of their movements. In the years to come, the IMD is eager to build their alliances and capacity in this area.

Calls to urgent action, as well as regional and international IMD denunciations, are always done with the prior agreement of women defenders and their national networks, building mechanisms for quick consultation and joint action while expanding their opportunities for visibility and influence.

Impact social networks in operation since April 2013



590 followers

7000 people see any of our publications

50 new followers monthly

IM_Defensoras



550 followers

3800 tweets

Regional and international impact

@IM_Defensoras



51 papers published

16132 people have accessed any of our documents



11 Videos

7 own productions

1295 views



#VOGELVRIJE VROUWEN

jouw tweet geeft haar vlucht

Over the past year, IM Defensoras and Mama Cash raised awareness in the Netherlands about the life-threatening situation for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Central America and Mexico, with financial support from the Dutch Postcode Lottery.



On November 29 2013 – International Women Human Rights Defenders Day – Mama Cash organised a twitter explosion to support these women activists: #vogelvrijevrouwen – your tweet gives her wings! The audience showed their solidarity with thousands of messages, making a clear statement: People care about human rights and their defenders. We do NOT accept the gender-based violence the WHRDs in Central America and Mexico face.



776 CONTRIBUTORS
2,383 TWEETS
4,1 MILLION TWITTER REACH



#VOGELVRIJEVROUWEN WAS NO. 1 TRENDING TOPIC FOR +2 HOURS IN NL! (and top 10 all day)

FEMINIST ACTIVISM IS DIVERSE

5 out of our 10 most influential tweeters were men



TOP 5 RELATED HASHTAGS:

1. #DEFENSORAS
2. #WHRD
3. #LANDRIGHTS
4. #HUMANRIGHTS
5. #LGBTI

PEAK MOMENT: 5:30 PM / 1097 TWEETS

3 LANGUAGES
ENGLISH
SPANISH
DUTCH

+167 NEW FOLLOWERS
GAINED

IN THE FINAL #VOGELVRIJEVROUWEN WEEK

HONDURAS

Berta Cárdena Flores: land rights
Fátima Sandoval Mejía: journalist
Karla Lara Pineda: women's rights
Deyu Flores Hernández: eco-feminist

MEXICO

Ara Karen López Quintana: sexual diversity
Alicia Pérez Escobar: indigenous women's rights
Inésida Mamfo Nava: toxicologic
Tania Ramírez Hernández: forced disappearances

GUATEMALA

Lolita Chávez Icaque: nature & environment
Ara Elena Farfán: genocide & historical memory
Irma Velásquez Nimatuj: journalist

EL SALVADOR

Mariana Moisés: sexual & reproductive rights

NICARAGUA

Carla López: safety of activists

HEART OF THE TWITTER EXPLOSION: AMSTERDAM, NL



WOMAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN CENTRAL AMERICA + MEXICO



FACEBOOK

9 POSTS (ON NOVEMBER 29)

4912 VIEWS / 229 'LIKE' HITS



THANK YOU FOR ALL THE #VOGELVRIJEVROUWEN SOLIDARITY TWEETS!



+ YOU!



Mama Cash is the oldest international women's fund. We support women's, girls' and trans movements around the world.

www.mamacash.org



mamacashfund



mamacash

defend our defenders

Delmy has participated in many struggles in defense of land and territory, against mining and against the privatization of natural resources since 2006. She has been involved with the Women's Rights Center (CDM) and since 2009 has been actively engaged in the resistance to the coup d'état. In February 2012, Delmy's activities to accompany a young woman who was victim of sexual violence perpetrated by a leader of one of the most relevant peasant movements in the Atlantic region - which to this day remains in impunity due to the traffic of influence and silence by some organizations - has resulted in reprisals against Delmy and her family, such as losing her job and death threats.



Name: Delmy Martínez Zavala
Organization: National Front for Popular Resistance, National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders.
Place: Honduras
Activity: Defense of human rights, defense of land and territory.
Aggressions faced:

HARASSMENT

DEATH THREATS

Our activism in social networks: Using Facebook, Twitter and SCRIBD, where the IMD has published 51 documents in the last eight months and established the IMD as a source of information and a promoter of urgent action in the face of attacks against women human rights defenders, directly reaching and involving more than 2000 people and hundreds of organizations.

This important Initiative has also carried out campaigns on specific commemorative days, particularly within the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign; in support of Mexican schoolteachers protesting privatization and other measures, caravans of mothers of disappeared migrants, and against

the murders of women human rights defenders. Through these campaigns, we are intensifying communications in support of the lives and work of women defenders.

One regional action with particularly high resonance was a video in which different defenders in the Mesoamerican region expressed their solidarity with the Ixil women who participated in the trial of former dictator Ríos Montt, charged with genocide.

We are increasingly able to maintain a constant flow of information through our e-mail list, communiqués, and emergency action notifications in social networks, as well as through regular work in print media.



INVESTING IN DIGNITY, FREEDOM & EQUALITY

A call to strengthen the IMD

Supporting the IMD helps make it possible for hundreds of Mesoamerican women from a variety of social movements to come together in an unusual and innovative network that aims to strengthen the human rights and justice defense work of women by ensuring their security, sustainability and self-care. Expressions of solidarity, dissemination of information about the situations they are dealing with and financial supports have all had a direct impact on the quality of life of women defenders, bolstering their personal and collective empowerment and leading to a greater recognition of their rights and their contribution to a more just society among the general human rights community.

With the research and strategic experience and knowledge accumulated by the IMD and national defender networks in the last three years, the Initiative is in an ideal position to explore new paths going forward, enriching and expanding our mission and facing the challenges that we have outlined.

Our commitments for the next three years include:

- Increasing the participation of women human rights defenders in national networks, prioritizing those that are still isolated with no coordinated protection mechanisms, and consequently are at greater risk. We will place more emphasis on the mothers of victims of violence and forced disappearances, on LGBT defenders, migrants, worker rights advocates, defenders of territories, and defenders of a woman's right to choose.
- Strengthening the capacities of the national women defenders networks in the areas of human rights and gender-specific protection, digital security and new technologies, development of risk analyses, use of official protection mechanisms, and construction of personal and collective security and self-care plans, among others.
- Supporting the System of Shelters for defenders at risk and the Protection Houses for healing and self-care, exploring alternatives for their sustainability.



- Strengthening our regional self-care program with the objective of building interest in national networks for the definition of plans that favor sustainable activism.
- Building greater public awareness of the importance of protecting women human rights defenders through better-resourced media strategies, high-impact communications actions and campaigns.

- Increasing the IMD's advocacy influence on related policies and specifically on recommendations regarding international protection mechanisms and national institutions charged with protecting and ensuring justice for defenders.
- Forming more strategic ties with a range of national and international organizations in order to implement coordinated measures for increased media and advocacy, to ultimately curb attacks and improve official protection mechanisms.
- Strengthening human rights education and training programs to provide ongoing information and strategic advice to the national networks, women defenders and their organizations.
- Documenting the experience of building and sustaining the networks to contribute to ongoing discussions shaping women's rights and security policy and practice.



With your support, the
**Mesoamerican Women
Human Rights Defenders
Initiative** can continue
contributing to build a region
that guarantees justice, equality
and participatory democracy,
and respects women's lives and
rights