



*"I wouldn't be here, alive without the support from the national network and the Initiative...the collectivity that surrounds me, gives me security."*  
Berta Cáceres, COPINH, Honduras

The Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative was launched in 2010 to develop a comprehensive and regionally-relevant response to increased violence against women human rights defenders. The Initiative is dedicated to strengthening and mobilizing women defenders from distinct social movements and organizations for recognition, enhanced impact and protection in a volatile context.

#### **Who is a woman human rights defender?**

A mother seeking justice for her disappeared son. 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.

Founded and led by a political alliance between JASS Mesoamerica, Consorcio Oaxaca (Mexico), UDEFEGUA (Guatemala), La Colectiva Feminista (El Salvador), AWID, and the Central American Women's Fund, the Initiative benefits from an unusual blend of experience, expertise, geographic scope and relationships.

Through an innovative, movement-building approach to protection, the Initiative was built from the bottom up by convening and organizing a wide range of women defenders from across Mexico and Central America, including those most vulnerable to violence such as rural and indigenous women defending land rights and environmental justice, lesbian and transgender activists, and feminists advocating for an end to violence. Today the Initiative brings together more than 350 activists and 70 organizations from a dozen social movements through national and regional action and protection networks that help keep activists safe and advance a women-led, cross-movement human rights agenda.

The Initiative's programs are mainly carried out through National Networks in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Guatemala. They combine training, self-care, research, social media activism, urgent action and human rights advocacy to raise awareness about the important but often invisible leadership role played by women defenders in the advancement of human rights.

By building strategies and agile structures in direct response to women's experience of injustice and inequality in both the public and private sphere, the Initiative's cutting-edge model and gendered analysis of violence against human rights defenders is poised to influence the future of human rights policy and practice, and has already impacted the work of key international NGOs and human rights agencies.



## By the Numbers



In addition to convening the diverse actors, programs, and strategies represented above, in its short history, the Initiative has:

- Developed a holistic protection model that integrates processes for women's increased awareness of their role and risks, self-care, and other measures to sustain their activism and ensure that they are better equipped to deal with violence and gender discrimination.
- Managed an Urgent Action Fund and a Self-Care Fund created and administered by the Initiative by and for women defenders, their families and their organizations.
- Maintained an ongoing dialogue among key regional and national-level social movements and organizations—including trade unionists, indigenous peoples, LGBT, and others—resulting in the increased recognition of women's unique risks and roles in promoting human rights.
- 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.
- Published annual assessment reports on the nature of violence faced by women defenders in the region, making the Initiative a key go-to resource in the field. These analyses have been referenced by a range of key human rights actors including UN Special Rapporteurs and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
- Contributed to the development and passage of the first-ever UN Resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders in November 2013.

In 2014 and 2015, the Initiative will focus on consolidating regional and national infrastructure and ensuring the quality of its programs while expanding its communications, outreach and advocacy efforts.

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