



URGENT ACTION FUND
FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

FUNDING COURAGE

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF INNOVATION,
SOLIDARITY, AND ACTIVISM

ABOUT URGENT ACTION FUND:

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (Urgent Action Fund) supports women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and transgender human rights defenders (THRDs), such as those included in this report, who are striving to create cultures of justice, equality and peace. In partnership with its sister funds Urgent Action Fund-Africa and Urgent Action Fund-Latin America, Urgent Action Fund provides rapid response grants to WHRDs and THRDs around the world. Urgent Action Fund responds to all requests within 72 hours. Its rapid response grants improve security when defenders face threats and enable strategic action during windows of opportunity to change laws, policies and public opinion. Since its founding in 1997, Urgent Action Fund has awarded more than 1,680 rapid response grants to support defenders in 110 countries worldwide.

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WHERE WE CAME FROM, WHERE WE'RE GOING

In 1997, Urgent Action Fund pioneered a new philanthropic model. We started with a simple but audacious idea: rapid, flexible grants that respond to the urgent and tactical needs of women human rights defenders. Why? Because that is what activists said they needed.

Urgent Action Fund provides immediate, real time support to thousands of women and transgender activists around the world. We have listened and learned from these human rights defenders how to protect and build resilient feminist movements that strive for social, economic, racial, environmental, and equitable justice in a peaceful world.

For over 20 years, Urgent Action Fund has supported defenders in unforeseen crisis and in unexpected moments of opportunity. We have sought out innovative means to fortify the engagement of activists in increasingly intersectional movements. We have adapted to geographically diverse and politically divergent landscapes. We have devised strategies to enhance the security and preserve the wellbeing of defenders.

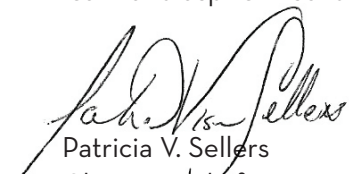
Urgent Action Fund is a vital resource for these movements – a place of hope in the face of backlash. As we learn from our past in order to shape our future, Urgent Action Fund firmly grasps the hands of our Sister Funds - Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean (UAF-LA), Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-A) and, soon to be launched, Urgent Action Fund- Asia Pacific. Together we work unflinchingly and unapologetically toward a more feminist, just, peaceful, and equitable world.

Who are the defenders that Urgent Action Fund supports? They are women and transgender individuals who take a stand to protect the human rights of others. They are activists key to movements that protect land and natural resources and tackle climate change. They are advocates responding to attacks on sexual rights, reproductive freedom, and women's political participation. They are organizers committed to racial justice, immigrant and indigenous peoples' rights. They are campaigners challenging corruption and militarism.

Urgent Action Fund recognizes that these defenders are also at risk – because of the work they do, and because they work in societies, including our own, that too often suppress the voices and power of people based on their gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Margaret Sekaggya, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, wrote: "Women defenders are more at risk of suffering certain forms of violence and other violations, prejudice, exclusion, and repudiation than their male counterparts. This is often due to the fact that women defenders are perceived as challenging accepted socio-cultural norms, traditions, perceptions and stereotypes about femininity, sexual orientation, and the role and status of women in society."¹ Transgender human rights defenders likewise face stigma, discrimination, and violence because they disrupt deep-rooted assumptions about gender.

Today, Urgent Action Fund celebrates 20 years of solidarity with those activists and movements. Twenty years of supporting their fortitude. Twenty years of building resilient feminist movements for a just, equitable, and peaceful world. Twenty years of rich history by which we still stand, listen, learn and aspire in solidarity with you.


Patricia V. Sellers
Chair, Board of Directors



¹ United Nations, Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, A/HRC/16/44 (20 December 2010), available from undocs.org/A/HRC/16/44.

FOREWORD

In 1995, more than 17,000 delegates to the World Conference on Women converged in Beijing in an incredible demonstration of strength, determination and diversity. They were there to ensure the recognition of women's rights as human rights and to lobby governments to adopt a groundbreaking and progressive plan to realize those rights: the Beijing Platform for Action. Just three years later, a Human Rights Defenders Summit (chaired by Indai Lourdes Sajor, one of Urgent Action Fund's first board members) called attention to the serious threats that human rights defenders around the globe were facing. The emerging Paris Declaration called for their protection and for mechanisms that would guarantee their security and ability to act.

These two moments highlighted the growth and vitality of movements to advance human rights around the world. They also underlined the enormous challenges facing activists, especially women human rights defenders, in promoting change. This is the intersection at which Urgent Action Fund was born.



A PIONEER OF RAPID RESPONSE GRANTMAKING

“Emergencies are real emergencies, no? I mean by the time you go through a normal grant application process, you’ll be dead...or the opportunity passes by...so there is something about a rapid response fund that is very important. It is very special to have that kind of fund.”

– Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, commenting on Urgent Action Fund

“Urgent Action Fund is known among activists for its actions, not its words.”

– a UAF Grantee

20 YEARS OF RAPID RESPONSE GRANTMAKING

- **1997 NOVEMBER**
UAF’s first grant goes to a crisis intervention team working with Thai and Malaysian women recently identified in Canada during a police raid on a sex trafficking ring.
- **2001 SEPTEMBER**
In the wake of the September 11th attacks, one of UAF’s first grants to activists in the United States funds a women-led coalition from South Asian, Arab American, and Muslim communities in the New York City area as they support community members and rally to prevent hate crimes.
- **2003 SEPTEMBER**
The first grant to a transgender human rights defender evacuates an activist from Honduras after she receives death threats and witnesses the murder of another transgender activist by police.
- **2007 AUGUST**
UAF awards its 500th grant in support of precedent-setting litigation after a young woman is raped in Colombia by a government official.

In 1996, Julie Shaw, then Senior Program Manager at the Global Fund for Women, and Ariane Brunet, who had recently launched the Coalition for Women's Rights in Conflict Situations, saw the need for a new way of working.

*"The impetus for UAF came first from requests that Ariane and I had received while working as grant makers in the U.S. and Canada. Generally, we reached out to individual donors to try to respond to urgent situations but our success was limited. More important, it became clear during the preparatory conferences and aftermath of the 1995 U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that **an unprecedented movement was building to assert women's human rights on every continent.** The Beijing Platform for Action provided a framework upon which to build local strategies and action plans to make change happen. In order to translate those plans into reality activists needed financial support to be able to respond quickly when strategic opportunities arose."*

– Julie Shaw

Women activists were operating in unpredictable, high-risk environments; they needed the ability to respond swiftly to new opportunities to advance human rights. No one was providing this kind of support. As Ariane remembers, "There was a terrible void between the spur of the moment situation for activists in conflict situations and the capacity of donors to respond." What did women activists think about this gap? They wanted to find out.

With a grant from a group of anonymous women donors and support from members of the Women Donors Network, Julie conducted a feasibility study for a new funding model, interviewing 80 activists and donors globally. The demand was clear: fast, flexible funding, with a minimum of bureaucracy, to respond to urgent needs. As Julie recalls, "That financial support was either tough to access or not available at all. In fact, it became apparent during our assessment that most groups didn't even consider approaching the philanthropic community with urgent requests. The establishment of a global rapid response fund was needed to fill that gap."

Urgent Action Fund was launched in October of 1997 with Julie at the helm. It was fueled by contributions from 12 founding mother donors, including founding board member Margaret (Mudge) Schink. Within a week, Urgent Action Fund made its first rapid response grant. In doing so, Julie, Ariane, and Mudge had launched one of the world's first-ever rapid response funds.

Urgent Action Fund also began with an unusual organizational set-up, with a governing board made up of women activists from a wide range of countries, cultures, and backgrounds. As Julie reflects,

"Most of the organizations we knew and worked with had boards made up predominantly of wealthy Americans and Europeans and had advisory boards of activists. We flipped this paradigm." In this way, Urgent Action Fund has always been rooted in movements and drawing upon the wisdom, resilience, and creativity of activists.

The Ford Foundation was the first institutional investor in this new model. Former Ford Foundation Deputy Director for Human Rights and International Cooperation Mahnaz Ispahani recalls, "What was so powerful about what Julie and Ariane were saying then, in the 1990s, was they wanted to get resources to women activists quickly. Women doing the work on the ground had so many urgent needs. As a foundation officer, I knew how slowly institutions can move and also the difficult situations women activists were in. This kind of help is vital, but it's not so easy to convince institutions when you say, 'We need the money now.' Julie and Ariane gave me examples: a woman activist in Afghanistan needed a cell phone now for urgent reasons. UAF could get it to her fast." She recommended that the Ford Foundation award Urgent Action Fund its first institutional grant in 1998.



Urgent Action Fund awarded its first grant to the **Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women—Canada**, responding to police raids attempting to break up an international sex trafficking ring. The funds enabled the organization to provide legal aid to 35 Thai and Malaysian survivors of trafficking who were facing criminal charges and deportation.

Other grants made that first year included support to **Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe** for the first-ever legal defense of a lesbian mother's child custody rights and to the **Sisterhood is Global Institute** to conduct research on the lives of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Today, the basic principles of the rapid response model remain unchanged. The grants continue to enable women and transgender human rights defenders to act quickly—to take advantage of unexpected opportunities, mitigate threats, or to prevent backsliding in their ongoing work to advance the human rights of all people. Individuals and organizations can apply 365 days a year, in any language. Urgent Action Fund will relay a response within 72 hours and send up to \$5,000 within a matter of days.

A VITAL LINK IN TRYING TIMES

From the beginning, Urgent Action Fund centered a commitment to activists working in countries and regions wracked by armed conflict, situations where more traditional forms of philanthropy struggled to find a foothold. Starting in its earliest years, Urgent Action Fund reached women responding to the needs of conflict-affected communities and leading efforts for reconciliation, reconstruction, and justice in disparate parts of the world: Afghanistan, Colombia, Sudan, Kosovo and

20 YEARS OF RAPID RESPONSE GRANTMAKING CONT...


- **2010 DECEMBER**
UAF awards its first grant to women working on climate change and funds a safe house for an environmental group in the Philippines after its leader is forcibly detained upon her return from a Greenpeace conference.
- **2011 DECEMBER**
UAF awards its 1000th grant to activists in Pakistan for legislative advocacy after an epidemic of sexual violence against low-caste Hindu minority girls and women.
- **2016 JUNE**
UAF awards its 1500th grant to support a major public protest in Zagreb, Croatia to defend reproductive rights.
- **2016 JULY**
UAF provides key funding for a delegation of Black transgender activists to participate in the historic national gathering of the Movement for Black Lives in Cleveland, Ohio.
- **2016 NOVEMBER 9TH**
The Resist and Reclaim Fund is launched by UAF to increase support to women and transgender human rights defenders in the United States.



the Balkans. Urgent Action Fund saw that, in addition to providing essential relief services, women were leading anti-war protests, reporting on human rights violations, supporting survivors of violence, and claiming a seat at the negotiating table. When the fighting stopped, women were at the forefront, demanding accountability for crimes and pushing for women's participation in legal and political reforms.

One of Urgent Action Fund's earliest projects was the **Balkan Gender Initiative**, an effort developed in consultation with women's organizations in Kosovo and supported by the Ford Foundation. Launched to support women's leadership and the creation of gender-sensitive policies throughout the Balkans, it combined rapid response grants for women-led peacebuilding efforts with support to build collaboration among NGOs and develop a regional network of WHRDs. This included connecting Kosovar women's organizations to those in other parts of the world that had also experienced conflict.

The "Budapest Base" was one of the significant developments to come out of the initiative. It was a rented office in Budapest, funded for its first six months by a rapid response grant from Urgent Action Fund, after which longer-term support was identified. In the instability and chaos of those years, the office served as an organizing base and safe space for activists from throughout the former Yugoslavia. It provided an essential link across borders, a safe space for activists to rest, and a place for exchange and organizing. For two years, it offered practical and emotional support to women, even serving as a shelter during the NATO bombing campaign. As Lepa Mladjenovic, a leading activist for LGBTI equality and peace in the region, wrote: "It was such a safe haven... It would have been totally different if we didn't have that place."



In 2000, Urgent Action Fund awarded a rapid opportunity grant to the **Rape/Genocide Law Project**. This grant enabled twelve women to travel to New York and testify in a civil suit brought against indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic by Bosnian survivors of rape and torture. It was the first time that survivors had the chance to testify before a jury about the human rights violations perpetrated against women during the conflict. And, it was the first recognition of rape as an act of genocide in a US court of law. After hearing their stories, the jury demanded that Karadzic pay \$745 million in damages. As a member of the Rape/Genocide Law Project wrote to Urgent Action Fund, “However much money is ultimately obtained from Karadzic, the women who came here felt vindicated by the process and the outcome of the trial itself. During the trial, many said that their purpose in this lawsuit was to bring what happened to them to the attention of the world so that it might never happen again. Many expressed their belief that they had achieved a victory.” Though he was living in hiding at the time and did not pay the damages, Karadzic was ultimately sentenced to prison in a criminal trial in 2016. Evidence gathered for the civil trial was used against him.

Similarly, Urgent Action Fund supported nearly three dozen grassroots women’s human rights and peace-building organizations during the years of armed conflict in Colombia. In 1999, the **Women and Armed Conflict Working Group** in Colombia used a grant from Urgent Action Fund to help peasant, indigenous, Afro-Colombian and displaced women testify to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Because of this intervention, the Special Rapporteur reported to the UN: “the use of violence against women in the midst of the conflict in Colombia as an arm of war is generalized and systematic.” Ultimately, this concentration of work in Colombia led to the launch of Urgent Action Fund – Latin America in Bogotá, Colombia in 2009.

Over the years, Urgent Action Fund expanded its work, continuing to reach conflict areas and increasingly supporting activists in a wider range of crises situations. Just as rapid response grants offer a lifeline to WHRDs and THRDs working in areas of conflict, they enable Urgent Action Fund to respond to the needs of activists working in an array of challenging contexts. This century has seen a groundswell of popular movements demanding racial justice, democratic governance, and corporate accountability. Meanwhile, growing authoritarianism, militarization, religious fundamentalism, and shrinking civic space have thrown activists up barriers to human rights organizing and multiplied the risks to activists.

Under the guise of counterterrorism efforts or in response to popular protest, governments are enacting policies or pursuing tactics to constrict freedom of association, assembly, and expression. Many of the activists seeking grants from Urgent Action Fund already struggle to overcome gender norms that deter women’s political participation and leadership; these new restrictions threaten the already limited space in which they operate.

In the Mindanao region of the Philippines, criminalization of environmental and indigenous human rights defenders has reached unprecedented levels. Tactics such as false charges and imprisonment, harassment, and violence are used to deter their work. Such threats occur in the context of an ongoing conflict and are sometimes carried out under the pretext of the government's campaign against local insurgent groups. Human rights defenders, their families, and their communities face displacement by the conflict and are targets of "fake encounters" (extrajudicial killings staged to appear as though they took place because of the military conflict). Women human rights defenders are at particular risk of sexual violence; rape is used to attempt to shame them and to discourage their activism.

— From In Our Bones: Stories from Women Defending Land, Community, Human Rights & the Environment in Indonesia and the Philippines

Activists already marginalized within organized civil society spaces—like those defending the human rights of sex workers or LGBTI people—are often targeted in these circumstances. In many countries, LGBTI defenders find themselves scapegoated in waves of nationalist backlash.

Last year in Indonesia, a backlash against LGBTI rights promulgated by public figures and vigilante groups intensified security threats for activists. An Urgent Action Fund advisor documented the trend in hate speech and its impacts and advised on grants made to relocate an activist and support in-place security measures for others. Since the backlash occurred as grantees were developing a safety and security training module, they invited activists from Myanmar, and the Philippines, who have dealt with similar hate speech and threats, to give input and advice, which they reported was helpful for developing localized responses.

For some activists, these situations are untenable. The only option is to escape with the hope of continuing to work from a safer harbor. For others, the risks they face can be mitigated by access to equipment (a cell phone, an alarm system), security training to assess threats and identify protection strategies, or legal aid to combat persecution. Sometimes what's needed is respite and care. Rapid response grants provide the means for all of these things, enabling individuals and organizations to be safer and more secure, and to attend to their wellbeing. In this way, and in this challenging global context, Urgent Action Fund is well positioned to sustain activism under threat.

In Armenia, the government has targeted activists to stifle dissent and quash protests. Due to her work fighting corruption and organized crime in Armenia, Marina Poghosyan, director of the civil society organization **Veles**, faced threats, harassment, and a baseless criminal lawsuit. A grant from Urgent Action Fund in 2016 provided her with legal assistance, safe transportation, and equipment to improve the physical security of Veles' office. With the aid of two lawyers, the fabricated charges against Ms. Poghosyan were rejected, and a report on the illegal actions of the investigator who brought the charges was filed.

At the same time, Urgent Action Fund uses rapid response grants to act quickly when unexpected openings to advance human rights appear. Through community organizing, street actions, strategic litigation, and lobbying, grantees call attention to critical social justice issues, push for progressive policies and pursue precedent-setting judgments. Sometimes the work is simply to hold the line and preserve

important gains; other times, it's to prevent the passage of bad laws or challenge unfair judgments. Often, it's to build capacity for further mobilization: training new leaders, bringing groups together to forge alliances and strategize, or collecting evidence for better arguments.

In 2015, Jessie Hernandez, a 17-year-old Latina, was killed by police in Denver. With a grant from Urgent Action Fund, Buried Seedz of Resistance (previously the Colorado Anti-Violence Project) mobilized to bring attention to issues of police violence in Colorado. Within a couple of weeks, they organized a vigil, collected more than 20,000 signatures demanding the U.S. Department of Justice investigate the practices of the Denver Police Department and facilitated community-wide meetings to organize around Jessie's case and, more broadly, local efforts for racial justice and police accountability. With training in media and film production, youth members of the group started to create a documentary to commemorate Jessie's life and contribute to organizing efforts.



While Urgent Action Fund always gave a small percentage of its rapid response grants within the United States, we increased this funding significantly to respond to the recent surge in hateful rhetoric and violence. The Resist and Reclaim Fund, launched on November 9th, 2016, is helping activists, especially activists of color, to resist discriminatory policies, access security training, and take steps to protect themselves and their communities when under threat.

SECURITY & OPPORTUNITY GRANTS DISBURSED
OVER 20 YEARS





LISTENING, LEARNING, SUSTAINING

INVESTING IN THE RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING OF ACTIVISTS AND THEIR MOVEMENTS

20 YEARS OF EVOLVING THINKING AND PRACTICE ON SECURITY AND SELF- CARE FOR ACTIVISTS

- **2005**
Rising Up in Response is published based on interviews with 82 women human rights defenders working in conflict zones. The book documents the threats to safety and health they encounter in their work.
- **2007**
What's the Point of the Revolution if We Can't Dance? is published. Through the voices of over 100 women human rights defenders the book explores issues of harassment, burnout, secondary trauma, depression, and exhaustion, and the strategies defenders use to sustain their work despite these challenges.
- **2011**
UAF supports the development of the *Integrated Security Manual* - a practical and holistic guide to risk assessment and security for activists since used in over 30 countries.

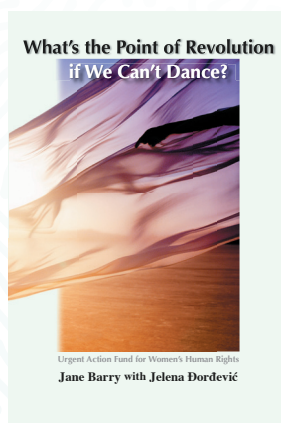
"During a group interview in Sri Lanka, one of the activists stopped in mid-conversation and said: 'Look, I don't get it. What's your point? What does security have to do with this? Why are you asking about when we take holidays or rest? What does this have to do with our work?'" and that was the point, it turned out. Or, one of them. That women human rights defenders did not see that how they felt within themselves—how exhaustion, or sadness, or worry about making ends meet—how they keep themselves safe—had anything to do with their 'real' work. For them, it was completely separate. Most activists had never considered these issues as relevant to their work—they were private. You just don't talk about them."

– Jane Barry, Integrated Security: The Manual

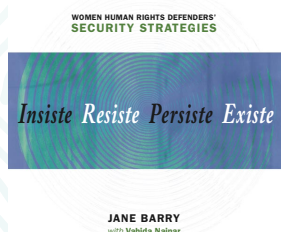
In 2004, Urgent Action Fund staff responded to what they considered an unusual request from a coalition of 15 Roma women working in camps for displaced persons in Serbia. A decade of war, compounded by the ongoing marginalization of the Roma community, had taken its toll: the women were exhausted. They needed a respite from the physical and emotional toll of their work. A grant from Urgent Action Fund funded a retreat for the activists and enabled them to get medical check-ups and to receive psychological counseling for the trauma they had witnessed.

As other requests to support activists' health and wellbeing came in, Urgent Action Fund began to explore the issue of physical and emotional burnout and to learn—from activists themselves—about the deeply personal cost of their efforts. This conversation led to the publication of Rising Up in Response, which looked at concrete ways to support women's rights activists working in conflict settings and revealed the varied impacts such work had on their physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. As the publication's author, Jane Barry, writes, "We began to uncover patterns in women activists' lives, which were both disturbing and surprising. It was disturbing to see what activists managed on a daily basis: high levels of chronic stress, exposure to trauma, and enormous workloads. What was surprising was that it seemed that despite it all, activists just kept going."

The research also underscored that individual and collective burnout impacted the ability of women's movements to work together, persevere, and plan for the future. These realizations sparked a desire to understand more deeply how activists sustained themselves and their work—and fostered Urgent Action Fund's commitment to the long-term resilience of movements.



What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance? was part of our first foray into these questions. It drew on interviews with more than 100 women activists from 45 countries and over 2,000 grant requests received by Urgent Action Fund over nine years. The conversations delved into the many dimensions that affect WHRDs' and THRDs' health and wellbeing, revealing their hopes, fears, and ways of coping with stress and exhaustion. The book challenged funders and activists alike to re-define "sustainability" and to support self-care, whether through conversation, celebration, opportunities for rest and reflection, access to health care or creating spaces for networking, solidarity, and support.



While awareness of the threats facing human rights defenders was growing, a significant gap remained when it came to the security risks, vulnerabilities, and strategies of women human rights defenders. Looking again to the experiences and knowledge of activists, Urgent Action Fund teamed up with Front Line Defenders (Ireland) and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Sweden) to document and share the protection and security strategies that activists around the world were using to keep themselves safe and well. This partnership resulted in Insiste, Persiste, Resiste, Existe: Women Human Rights Defenders Security Strategies and led to the critical next step: bringing together concepts of wellness and sustainability with practical security tools.

Through a series of workshops with hundreds of WHRDs and THRDs from 50 countries, Urgent Action Fund and Kvinna till Kvinna designed and tested *Integrated Security: The Manual*, a resource to equip frontline activists with awareness of potential threats and with practical, immediate response techniques that had been successfully used by other women. In the process, a new framework on security was developed, one that recognized the shared dangers that women, men, and transgender defenders confront, but also the barriers and response strategies that are specific to gender identity. This work laid the foundation for Urgent Action Fund's integrated security approach: a strengths-based and holistic pedagogy that includes physical, psychosocial, and digital security, and reinforces defenders' capacities to assess and respond to the security challenges they face.



We continue to learn. After several years of developing resources and supporting activities to promote safety and wellbeing, a critique began to emerge. While important, a focus on individual self-care just wasn't enough. Few activists had access to the resources and opportunities they needed to care for themselves; Urgent Action Fund observed how well-intentioned programs, like retreat centers, ended up privileging organizational leaders or those with more time and resources—denying access to, or overlooking, younger leaders and those working outside the formal NGO sector. As it stood, the discourse on self-care didn't acknowledge the systemic lack of care (sick leave, access to health care, access to training on trauma and vicarious trauma) that made it difficult for activists to sustain their work. It positioned activism and movement work as draining instead of sources of strength and resilience.

20 YEARS OF EVOLVING THINKING AND PRACTICE ON SECURITY AND SELF-CARE FOR ACTIVISTS CONT...

- **2014**
UAF pilots its first Collective Integrated Security grants in Turkey and Indonesia to support long-term innovations at the network or movement level in holistic security for defenders.
- **2015**
UAF becomes part of ProtectDefenders.EU — a global platform of support to human rights defenders co-implemented by 12 organizations worldwide.
- **2016**
UAF pioneers a year-long model of security support and leadership development for a cohort of young women leaders in a context hostile to human rights. It provides access to resource people, text support from a mentor, and trainings.



The conversation on self-care needed to expand. As Urgent Action Fund's former Director of Programs Keely Tongate put it, "We need strategies for collective sustainability that make sense for activists and their communities. That doesn't mean abandoning self-care, but it does mean integrating it into broader cultures of community care that can sustain more people in relationship to one another." What has been learned about wellbeing and security for individual human rights defenders must now be developed within the systems and practices of organizations, networks, and movements.

This realization spurred Urgent Action Fund's most recent effort to build resilient movements through collective models of care and a collective integrated security approach. Our conversations with activists have revealed a range of integrated security concerns that reduce the effectiveness of organizations and movements. Yet funding to address this type of capacity building or, more aptly, "resilience building," falls outside of traditional frameworks and is almost non-existent.

Through a pilot project begun in 2014, Urgent Action Fund has awarded longer-term grants to networks of defenders in China, Croatia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Turkey, and Ukraine to support activist-defined approaches to integrating wellbeing and security within their organizations and movements. Working in repressive contexts, these networks employ a variety of strategies, including phone trees, texting systems, retreat spaces, and safe houses to protect defenders and increase their access to support.



SISTERS IN THE STRUGGLE

Today the US-based Urgent Action Fund is one of three independent Urgent Action Funds that work in close cooperation. Co-originated with African and Latin American feminists, the Sister Fund model of international philanthropy upends the paradigm of organizations headquartered in the Global North with branches in the Global South. It relies on a constructive balance of autonomy and collaboration. While each fund has its own board, staff, and budget, all are built upon a shared history and set of values, as well as a commitment to sustaining activism and providing rapid response funds. The Sister Funds also share a deep curiosity that drives them to learn and innovate both together and independently.

20 YEARS OF THE SISTER FUNDS MODEL

- **2001**
Urgent Action Fund - Africa is launched in Nairobi, Kenya
- **2009**
Urgent Action Fund - Latin America is launched in Bogotá, Colombia
- **2017 OCTOBER**
Launch date for the newest Sister Fund: Urgent Action Fund - Asia Pacific



In the three years following Urgent Action Fund's founding, more than 40 percent of requests for support came from Africa. It was clear that more outreach and more resources were needed. Beginning in 2001, Kenyan Urgent Action Fund board member Kaari Betty Murungi led the establishment of **Urgent Action Fund-Africa** (UAF-Africa), the first rapid response fund on the continent. Zimbabwean Urgent Action Fund board member Hope Chigudu became its first chairperson. With an emphasis on peacebuilding and transitional justice, UAF-Africa focused immediately on the post-genocide situation in Rwanda and providing support to WHRDs and THRDs active in peace talks to end armed conflicts in Burundi.

UAF-Africa now has a strategic and physical presence across the continent—in East, Central, North, and Southern Africa. As Executive Director Ndana Bofu-Tawamba emphasizes, "It's paramount to us to be close to our constituencies—to tap into their knowledge and energy, and to understand how they are prioritizing their issues and responding to the challenges they are encountering. Being rooted locally allowed us to respond at supersonic speed when a 27-year old Sudanese woman was arrested and sentenced to death for apostasy and adultery because of her marriage to a non-Muslim man. Within hours of receiving the news from her network, UAF-Africa responded by supporting an organization which mobilized a legal team for the woman swiftly. Her freedom was granted when the court overturned the earlier ruling and let her go."

In more recent years, UAF-Africa has taken on emerging issues such as climate change and natural resource governance and responded to regional crises. When the Ebola virus epidemic erupted in West Africa, UAF-Africa was immediately on the ground in Liberia, conducting feminist research and providing rapid support to women's rights groups in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. UAF-Africa was also the first fund to respond during the Tunisian revolution, conducting outreach and

providing grants to mobilize women's participation in the elections that followed. In response to the democratic uprisings that swept the region—and the ensuing conflicts, crackdowns, and violence—UAF-Africa continues to explore ways to support feminist organizing and defenders at risk in Northern Africa.

In 2016, UAF-Africa provided a grant to **an organization in Egypt** to hold a “training of trainers” for 13 women—artists, activists, and storytellers—and create a training manual. The aim was to develop a larger network to facilitate storytelling workshops in various Egyptian cities, enabling more women and men to share their stories and contribute to the growing public discourse on gender-based violence and gender inequity. Drawing upon concepts from the Theatre of the Oppressed and psychodrama, the training introduced ways of constructing storytelling performances and archiving stories. It also focused on the physical and mental self-care of workshop facilitators, as well as security measures for facilitators and workshop participants.

Inspired by the dynamic performance of the first Sister Fund and by conversations with activists in South America and the Caribbean, **Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean** (UAF-Latin America) was established in 2009 in Bogotá, Colombia. Just as with UAF-Africa, Urgent Action Fund board members played a key role in the expansion. Eleanor Douglas, an Urgent Action Fund board member, became its first Executive Director while another board member, Amalia Fischer from Brazil, transitioned to UAF-Latin America's board.

UAF-Latin America built upon the model established by the Sister Funds and added a strong emphasis on the defense of land and territory as well as accompanying indigenous, Afro-descendant, and environmental defenders, organizations and networks—helping to articulate the connections across these diverse identities.

Through a regional collaborative initiative, UAF-Latin America has brought together activists working to protect nature and territory, most often from extractive industries, and captured their experiences, learning, and recommendations in multiple publications, such as the book *Women Defending Territory: Participatory Experiences in Latin America*. This work has called attention to the recent increased violence and criminalization of WHRDs in Latin America. In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders cited several of the fund's publications when describing the higher risks facing women environmental defenders, particularly those in Latin America, in his report to the United Nations.² Through another collaborative initiative, it has highlighted the impacts of the American ‘war on drugs’ on women and women's resistance, especially in the Andean Region, Central America, and Mexico.

² United Nations, General Assembly, Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom, A/71/150, (3 August 2016), available from undocs.org/A/71/150.

Like its Sister Funds, UAF-Latin America has played a key role in responding to armed conflict, drawing attention to the persistence of attacks on activists and providing grants to support women's organizing in Colombia—home to the region's longest-running conflict. A grant in 2016, for example, supported a convening to create security plans for women and rural communities living in one of the six regions where demobilization and disarmament of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) would take place after the signing of a final accord.

UAF-Latin America has also forged a new path, developing an intercultural approach to collective forms of protection. This approach affirms the knowledge of indigenous and Afro-descendent women and recognizes that they have their own forms of protection rooted in powerful ancestral beliefs and practices. According to Executive Director Tatiana Cordero, this is of critical importance not least because “indigenous women don't want to resort to relocation; they want to stay in the territory.”

One of the great advantages of the Sister Fund model is that it enables shared learning from these diverse contexts and from the experiences of WHRDs and THRDs across regions. As Tatiana describes it, “It's like a snowball. Something starts in one region and continues to be fed by the realities of the other regions. It's a very enriching process.” Though a trend may look slightly different in another place, the funds can develop a global picture together and bring activists together to strategize. Additionally, each fund brings its connections and relationships that can be leveraged to organize and advocate on a global level.

In 2014, the Dutch organization Cordaid supported a unique collaboration between the Sister Funds to amplify women's voices in conflict regions, increase information sharing, and develop tools for measuring and documenting the security needs of women whose lives are impacted by conflict. Working with grassroots partners, the three UAFs carried out assessments of the security concerns and needs of more than 45 local women's groups and WHRDs in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Northeast India. This information shaped the agenda for a workshop convening 15 WHRDs from those areas. Over four days, activists talked about the threats that women in their countries face and shared the skills they used to stay safe. They learned to use tools for analyzing and mitigating risks. And they explored self-care and wellbeing at both the personal and organizational or movement level. Afterward, an activist from Colombia reflected, “Listening to the stories of the women from other countries helped me to learn new aspects to protect myself and my community.” Another WHRD from the DRC added, “Despite being made up of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and religions, we have similar interests and needs as WHRDs. Together, we feel that we can use the information learned during the convening to raise our collective voice to demand the human rights of women in our communities.”

In 2017, the newest Sister Fund will launch. UAF-Asia Pacific will be a regional hub that implements Urgent Action Fund's core model of rapid response grantmaking and builds capacities among defenders on the ground in Asia and the Pacific. In preparation for the launch, Urgent Action Fund and the members of a Steering Committee for UAF-Asia Pacific consulted with over 163 women's groups, advisors and activists in the region to assess the role that UAF-Asia Pacific can and should play. These conversations revealed that many WHRDs raise their voices despite discrimination and retaliation. With the persistent rise of fundamentalisms in the region, women who speak out, organize and take leadership positions pay a high price. At the same time, momentum is building for change and activists are ready to create and lead a new resource for human rights work in the region.

UAF-Asia Pacific will carry forward the work led by Urgent Action Fund for twenty years in the region, weaving a web of resources and care, enabling defenders in need to find the kind of protection and support that is meaningful for them. The new fund aspires to foster a culture of learning within and across social movements in Asia and the Pacific, developing a new body of knowledge about WHRDs' and THRDs' struggles and resilience across the diverse, changing contexts of the region. It also aims to establish a strong core of committed philanthropists in the region who will take collective leadership in growing this resource base and exploring new ways of sustaining activism.



URGENT ACTION FUND

SISTER FUNDS

URGENT ACTION FUND - LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Founded in Bogotá,
Colombia, in 2009

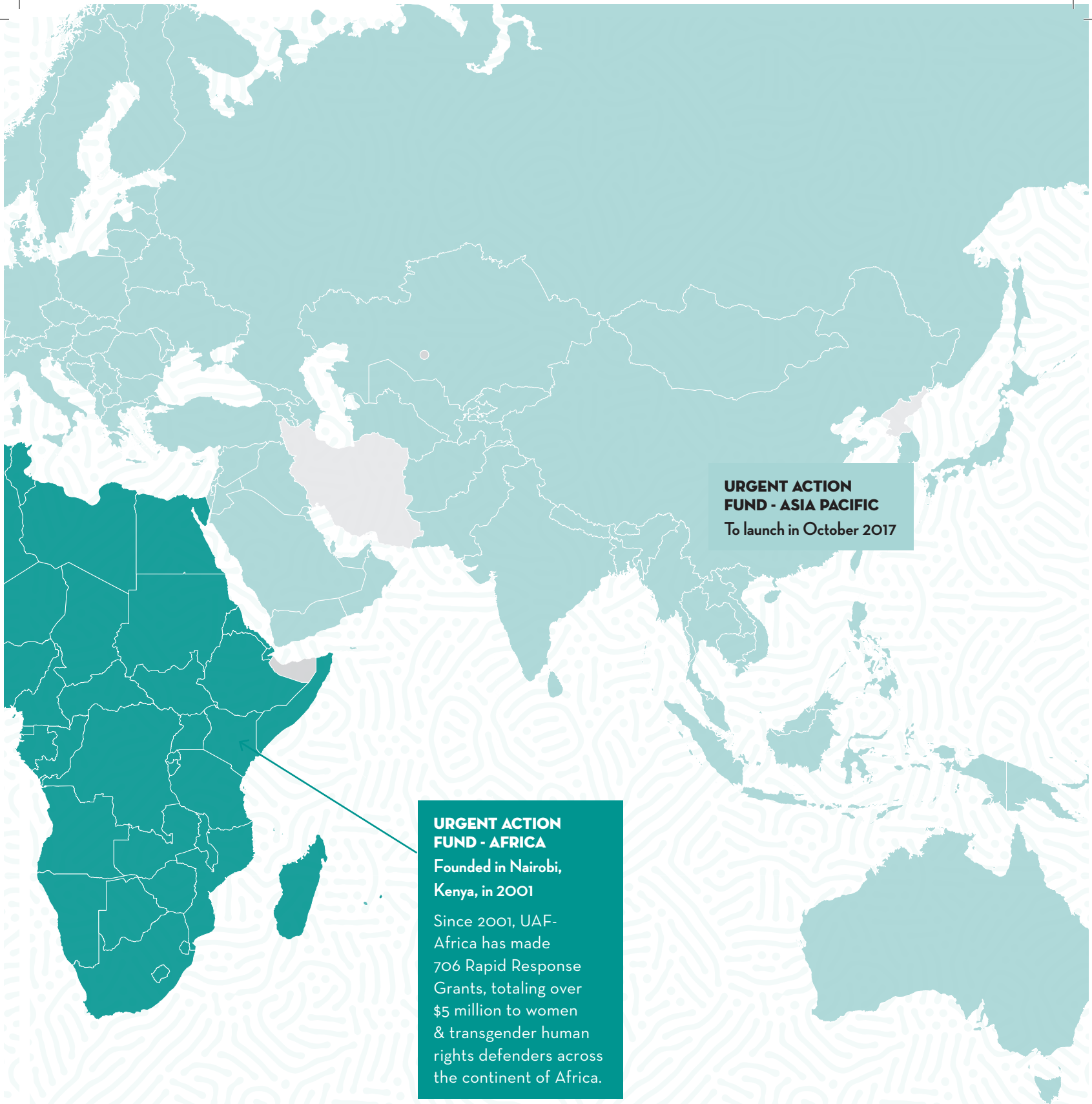
Since 2009, UAF-LA has
made 412 Rapid Response
Grants, totaling over
\$1.8 million to women &
transgender human rights
defenders throughout Latin
America and the Caribbean.

URGENT ACTION FUND FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS (URGENT ACTION FUND)

Founded in San Francisco,
United States, in 1997

Since 1997, Urgent Action
Fund has made 1681 Rapid
Response Grants, totaling
over \$8 million, to women
and transgender human
rights defenders globally
(with the launch of its Sister
Funds, Urgent Action Fund
concentrates its support to
defenders in Asia and the
Pacific, the Middle East,
Europe, and North America.)

- UAF
- UAF Latin America
- UAF Africa



**URGENT ACTION
FUND - ASIA PACIFIC**
To launch in October 2017

**URGENT ACTION
FUND - AFRICA**
Founded in Nairobi,
Kenya, in 2001

Since 2001, UAF-
Africa has made
706 Rapid Response
Grants, totaling over
\$5 million to women
& transgender human
rights defenders across
the continent of Africa.

SUSTAINING SOLIDARITY



Activism is hard work. It is often dangerous work. It is sometimes terrifying, sometimes joyful, always purpose-driven work. Urgent Action Fund's work, quite simply, is to have the backs of our sisters when they take a stand and engage in activism to defend the human rights of others.

As we enter our third decade, we have arrived at an incredibly complex and challenging moment. We see increased attempts to criminalize activism and restrict civil society. Women and transgender activists are most likely to be targeted—particularly those who also face discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class or caste, disability, or religion. At the same time, new social movements are emerging all over the world and using creative strategies. More women are accessing the internet than ever before and leveraging its tools

to organize and share information in new ways. And there is growing momentum to change the long-standing dynamics in international philanthropy and development aid that privilege Global North perspectives and devalue local expertise.

This is a moment that calls for great flexibility, comfort with risk, and the capacity to work and adapt rapidly. Urgent Action Fund was made for this moment. We are uniquely positioned to respond to today's realities in a way that centers the safety and security of women and transgender human rights defenders. A commitment to honoring local expertise and self-led activism is baked into our DNA. Perhaps most importantly, the Sister Fund model of networked, equal partners can thrive in this context.

Collaboration among the Sister Funds is deepening, and we are full of excitement about the possibilities that our newest sister, UAF-Asia Pacific, embodies. In the coming years, we will grow our collective ability to support movements and the resilience of defenders. Simultaneously, Urgent Action Fund will continue to strengthen its rapid response grantmaking to support activists in the Middle East, the United States and Canada, Central Asia, and Europe. We will aid activists in building solidarity and learning from one another, and center their needs in partnerships and alliances that expand their reach and influence. We will keep pushing for better and increased funding, and for international human rights standards that enable women and transgender human rights defenders' work and respond to their lived experiences.

Over the past twenty years, many, many people have influenced and nourished Urgent Action Fund's development. We are deeply grateful to our advisors, grantees, donors, board members and staff—past and present—who have contributed so much to our learning and growth. The spirit of solidarity, care, and ingenuity that has animated Urgent Action Fund from the beginning comes from you. It will sustain us through all that lies ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kate Kroger". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kate Kroger
Executive Director

"I still think that what Urgent Action Fund does is fundamental and that its work is more important than ever. The philosophy is being there at the moment while also building networks. Even as it has grown, Urgent Action Fund has maintained flexibility and continues to do really crucial work."

– Mahnaz Ispahani

THE VISIONARIES: URGENT ACTION FUND'S FOUNDERS AND FOUNDING DONORS

Julie Shaw
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Margaret Schink
Kathy Barry
Chela Blitt
Marta Drury
Cindy Ewing

Betsy Fairbanks
June Hope Kingsley
Hannah Kranzberg
Christine Pielenz
Judy Sturgis
Effie Westervelt
Anonymous

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THIS IS COURAGE



MU SOCHUA
CAMBODIA

"I strongly believe in a life free from fear and violence. More than once I have come face to face with armed police and military. My strategy for self-protection is to remain vocal, visible and high profile. As a woman leader, I lead with the strong belief that women bring stability and peace, at home, in their communities and for the nation."

Photo: Philip Stockowski, www.stockowski.com

THIS IS COURAGE



YANAR MOHAMMED
IRAQ

"The US government and CNN bless the uprisings of Libya and Syria, while ignoring Iraqi struggles, as they had told the whole world that we prosper in their democracy. Scenes of 100,000 Iraqi rebels on February 25 still echo in our minds. Youth such as Aya, a woman who was kidnapped and tortured, led those demonstrations, and may still bring about a final uprising."

THIS IS COURAGE



FARIDA LANSAROVA
KYRGYZSTAN

"I decided to use social media to talk about gender issues. I blogged, Tweeted and Facebooked about sexism and spoke openly about my experience as a young woman and the violence that I endured."


THIS IS COURAGE



LIAN GOGALI
INDONESIA

"The more you give women a chance to negotiate the terms of peace instead of men, the more likely you are to come through with a peaceful solution."

THIS IS COURAGE



QUETZALLI ENRIQUE
UNITED STATES

"My vision is to expand opportunities for young Indigenous women to have their voices heard and to be active participants in defending our rights."


THIS IS COURAGE



CANAN ARIN
TURKEY

"That is why it is especially difficult for young women in Turkey... Girls are forced to marry early because women are not considered human beings but the property of their families."

THIS IS COURAGE



SANA SALEEM
PAKISTAN / HONG KONG

"Women remain a significantly small fraction of the refugee community, which makes their plight even more invisible."

THIS IS COURAGE



KAMILA MANAF
INDONESIA

"Your silence will not protect you. When you face discrimination, you have to speak out."


THIS IS COURAGE



XIAO MEILI
CHINA

"In China, we blame victims, not abusers... That's what we're trying to change."

THIS IS COURAGE



DR. RENU RAJBHANDARI
NEPAL

"It came out like a fire. Women from all over the country were there. They said no, we will not tolerate sexual violence."

THIS IS COURAGE



KEMAL ORDEK
TURKEY

"Unless transgender women are guaranteed with rights and protection against violence, all women will remain vulnerable to human rights violations."

THIS IS COURAGE



CAT BROOKS
USA

"There is an epidemic of police violence in America: An epidemic so severe that if it were happening in any other country, we would call it genocide... We will continue to respond until America's business is no longer about the killing off of Black lives."

THIS IS COURAGE



EVA BANDE
INDONESIA

"The government must be willing to create real solutions and to act against private companies taking land illegally and with force."

THIS IS COURAGE



OLENA SHEVCHENKO
UKRAINE

"Nobody will just bring equality for LGBTIQ people, we need to fight for this every day. But don't be discouraged, this fight is making the world a better place for everybody."

URGENT ACTION FUND FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

THIS IS COURAGE




NIGHAT DAD
PAKISTAN

"By going online, Pakistani women empower themselves. However, by doing so they are subject to physical and virtual violence and vulnerable to hacking, harassment, and blackmail. We must work together to fight these inequalities."

URGENT ACTION FUND FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

THIS IS COURAGE



NATIVE YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK

"We are led by and for Indigenous youth. We address reproductive justice, sexual health, and gender diversity issues. Our aim is to reduce the harm of over 500 years of colonialism."