

# Executive Summary: 2017 UAF Strategic Planning

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## Introduction

The *Executive Summary: 2017 UAF Strategic Planning* report, with the board's approval, aims to document and foster transparent, collaborative, and effective leadership in UAF's work to protect and advance the civil, economic, cultural, political, and social rights of women and LGBTQI+ people, and play a vital role in social justice movements, including environmental, feminist, reproductive justice, anti-corruption, land rights, youth, and LGBTQI+ movements.

Urgent Action Fund (UAF) for Women's Human Rights supports some of the most courageous women and trans human rights defenders (WHRDs and THRDs<sup>1</sup>) around the world. The *2017 UAF Strategic Planning* report is a snapshot of the UAF board and staff's strategic planning process outcomes, including major lessons and windows of opportunity. This report reviews and updates UAF's values, and seeks to integrate UAF's theory of change and political landscape with board and staff's strategic priorities and planning recommendations.

The report also addresses current gender justice practice and up-to-date thinking on gender inclusion as a fundamental driver of UAF's work.

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<sup>1</sup> In general WHRD will be used in this report and is inclusive of all women-identified people, cisgender and trans. THRD is also used in order to make visible all trans people (defined herein as all non-cisgender people) who experience some of the worst gender oppression.

## Our Values

**Justice.** We work towards a world in which all human rights, including women’s and trans people’s rights, are upheld and regarded as equal. We are committed to removing systemic barriers that WHRDs and THRDs face in their fight for justice. We apply a human rights and social justice lens to all aspects of our work by focusing on particularly marginalized groups and critically analyzing unequal power structures and how they operate.

**Feminisms.** We recognize and respect a multiplicity of feminist traditions, and affirm diverse approaches to achieving equality for all genders. We honor local wisdom and self-led activism. We commit to addressing challenges faced by feminist movements and human rights defenders, while holding space for authentic discussions that build our collective learning.

**Courage.** We proudly support activists who raise critical issues and work on dismantling patriarchal, racist, capitalist, and other oppressive agendas. We stand with activists and join our voices to theirs in philanthropic and advocacy spaces. We respond immediately to the pressing needs of activists and movements and bring gendered perspectives to all platforms.

**Integrity.** We value integrity, which includes the practices of transparency, honesty, reliability, and accountability—especially in challenging moments. We think critically and actively listen to grantees, donors, advisors, partners, and movement allies, with whom we build relationships based on mutual respect and trust. We learn and grow from their constructive feedback.

**Mindful engagement.** Conscious of the exploitive history and present reality of resource accumulation, we fund activists and connect them with resources in ways that upend rather than reinforce traditional power dynamics and empower marginalized voices. We trust the leadership of local activists and their lived resilience.

**Wellbeing.** We promote holistic care within our institution and in activist spaces. We understand that self-care is an important political tool in our ability to fight for justice. For us, the practice of wellbeing, both individually and collectively, is a central tenet to sustaining feminist movements.

## Addressing Gender Justice

Urgent Action Fund (UAF) for Women's Human Rights was founded to provide support and advocacy for women's human rights defenders because WHRDs often face serious backlash not only from government authorities, but also from within their own communities, for transgressing traditional gender norms. Today, we are called to expand our understanding of whose human rights are threatened based on gender. Gender oppression, once conceived as a simple two-category system in which women were the social underclass, has been outed in the 21st century as a spectrum hierarchy in which gender variation itself is the underclass. Around the world, sibling organizations, including Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, are taking on the important question of how to build life-affirming systems for all people whose gender expression varies from standard roles and categories and whose lives are threatened for this reason in the course of defending human rights.

As an organization with a gender justice mission, UAF has an opportunity to participate in innovative gender-inclusive movement building. To seize this opportunity most effectively, we must engage in routine reflective practices, as well as utilize our capacities for flexible and adaptive support for the creativity and vision of grassroots leaders. Importantly, UAF's gender justice stance also includes an intersectional approach that recognizes multiple systems of oppression at work in the world, such as racism, classism, sexism, queer and trans phobia, and discrimination against disabled people. Some current and future themes to address include:

- ***How do we implement our gender focus?*** As we remain a women's organization, how do we build real inclusion for all women-identified people, while also building real allyship with LGBTI+ movements? If we are becoming a gender justice organization, how do we collaborate, cooperate, and transform with our past, current, and future partners, communities, and movements who have known us as a women's organization?
- ***How do we communicate our gender focus?*** As we remain a women's organization, how do we tell a value-add story about this gender focus in current and future movement work? If we are becoming a gender justice organization, how do we tell an inclusive, meaningful story about this evolution that brings people along?

Who answers these questions and how decisions are made moving forward matters. As we seek gender justice, transparency and humility may be important guideposts in the process. That UAF is addressing these questions head on, we believe, is a step in the right direction.

## Theory of Change

Urgent Action Fund supports the work of women and trans human rights defenders (WHRDs and THRDs) in the areas of security and wellbeing, advocacy, and access to convening spaces and solidarity networks. By fostering these capacities, the resilience and efficacy of the feminist movements that WHRDs and THRDs lead and participate in can grow and succeed in changing laws, policies, and social norms to realize equity and justice for women, girls, and trans people.

### *We believe that WHRDs most likely to change the world with the resources UAF can offer:*

- work as part of rights-based, feminist, or gender justice, organizations, networks, or social movements that hold a vision of structural or systemic change;
- work within our Sister Fund geographies: Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, and North America; and
- face multiple layers of discrimination or multiple barriers to accessing resources for their work—WHRDs and THRDs may also identify as LGBTQI+, people with disabilities, discriminated against based on race, religion, or ethnicity, employed in unregulated or unsafe working conditions, migrants, immigrants, or refugees, sex workers, members of indigenous communities, or in other ways.

### *To strengthen the capacities of WHRDs, UAF:*

- provides rapid response grants at the moment they are needed most;
- creates space to grow collective knowledge and networks;
- advocates in partnership with WHRDs and THRDs in philanthropic and policy spaces to foster an enabling environment for the defenders we support; and
- builds alliances and partnerships in which WHRDs are consulted, respected, and celebrated.

### *UAF's most important assets include:*

- its relationship with WHRDs themselves and the trust we have built together;
- the knowledge we have gained from 20 years of listening to the experiences of WHRDs;
- our capacity to move funding very quickly with minimal bureaucracy;
- Board, Staff, and Advisors and their grantmaking knowledge;
- Sister Funds and the Sister Fund locally led and global reach;
- networks and colleague organizations;
- broad community of supporters and donors.

## Political Landscape: Current and Future

As Urgent Action Fund celebrates its twentieth year, it finds itself in a political context in which the resources it offers are needed now more than ever by human rights defenders and social justice movements. A trends analysis indicates increasing restrictions on activism for human rights as well as significant threats to the underlying architecture of international human rights mechanisms and norms. The pressing realities of the increased migration of populations (both voluntary and forced) and the instability generated by rising fundamentalisms and authoritarianism, alongside a steadily changing climate further shape the future context for our work. Yet, a new and growing energy is also palpable in movements for justice, peace, and equality across the globe. New tactics are rapidly emerging alongside new opportunities for advocacy. In short, Urgent Action Fund was made for these times.

*The defenders whom Urgent Action Fund supports face sobering challenges.*

### *Increased state restrictions on civil society.*

Tightening government restrictions on civil society and increased authoritarianism now exist, in different degrees, throughout several influential countries (China, India, Philippines, Russia, Turkey, the United States) as well as many other nations. The result of this is significant number of national contexts in which people find it increasingly difficult to organize into formal associations within civil society, to conduct advocacy, or to seek and receive foreign funding. Activists working on feminist human rights issues are often especially targeted in the implementation of new restrictions or in government crackdowns on demonstrations. Historically excluded from policy-making decisions in their local contexts, feminist groups have become accustomed to responding to these and similar challenges with creativity and innovation, and, in most cases, despite limited resources. Yet, such tough and intrepid resilience must be adequately resourced.

### *Targeting by fundamentalist groups.*

The rise of fundamentalist groups is a specific threat to defenders of women's and LGBTQI+ human rights as such groups often base their ideology on the forced subjugation of women and the criminalization of LGBTQI+ people. This threat ranges from state and non-state actors in the Middle East responsible for violent attacks on women human rights defenders, to fundamentalist youth groups in Eastern Europe that have targeted domestic violence shelters, to retrenchment on reproductive and sexual rights in the United States. In Western Europe and the United States, this fundamentalism also fuels xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments that are often directed at women and LGBTQI+ people.

***Growing corporate power and the use of violence to suppress activism.***

Defenders of human rights, particularly those that work on environmental and land or natural resource rights issues, are also engaged in intense struggles with corporate actors, particularly the extractive industries. In a disturbing number of recent cases, extractive companies, or their syndicates, have deployed violence and assassination as tactics to dissuade activists. While they act outside of the law, these corporate actors often enjoy a “blind eye” from state officials for their actions. In addition to deadly violence, the extractive industries use defamation campaigns, spurious lawsuits, and other tactics to discourage activism.

***Major global shifts increasingly impact the day-to-day work of both human rights defenders and the Urgent Action Fund.***

***The sometimes voluntary, but often forced, migration of populations as a result of displacement by war, poverty, or climate change.***

Human rights defenders advocate on behalf of refugees and migrants, who may be particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, and, find themselves in situations where they must seek asylum or otherwise flee their homes. Overall, this trend is also misused by authoritarian regimes to sow fear and enflame right-wing populism. WHRDs and THRDs defending the human rights of refugees and immigrants, as well as those responding to anti-immigrant movements, are likely to seek additional support from Urgent Action Fund over the next several years.

***The impact of climate change.***

Urgent Action Fund anticipates that extreme weather events or other aspects of climate change will adversely impact both itself and the defenders it supports during the life of this strategic plan. Additionally, climate justice activists and movements – in particular women leaders within climate justice movements – are likely to need additional support from Urgent Action Fund for their frontline advocacy work.

***Amidst these challenges, Urgent Action Fund can also identify windows of opportunity, or, trends that have a potentially catalytic effect on driving women’s rights activism.***

***Emerging movements and new momentum.***

New social justice and feminist movements are emerging and inspiring one another and in many, women are playing the leadership role. These movements include Black Lives Matter and

#NoDAPL in the United States (both of which were initiated by women) as well as, for example, as the #CzarnyProtest for reproductive rights in Poland. Collectively, emerging movements are engaging millions and bringing new momentum to the decades of advocacy and organizing on which they build. Such forms of activism emerge and mobilize quickly, are increasingly interconnected, deploy the tools of social media and online organizing effectively. Thus, they represent situations in which rapid response funding, as well as digital security and online advocacy expertise, are important resources.

### ***Strategic advocacy opportunities.***

There are an increasing number of opportunities to bridge gaps between grassroots women's rights activism and traditional human rights mechanisms, particularly at international levels as well as between grassroots women's rights activism and traditional human rights philanthropy. For example, Urgent Action Fund now has a seat at the table in the implementation of the European Union's Human Rights Mandate. Such opportunities are the result of decades of advocacy by the women human rights defenders movements globally. In a time of rising nationalisms and undermining and exiting of international institutions, it is especially urgent to strengthen and reclaim multilateral spaces like the EU and the UN. For instance, Urgent Action Fund's partners have started engaging in South-South dialogues to strategize about ways to reclaim the UN Commission on the Status of Women as a feminist space. Additionally, the new grassroots resistance and social justice movements mentioned above are generating renewed enthusiasm for community mobilization and providing opportunities to apply these organizing tactics to UN and other intergovernmental spaces.

### ***Philanthropic momentum.***

Momentum is growing within international philanthropy and development aid to change long-standing dynamics that privileged Global North perspectives and devalued local expertise. In the past few years, we have seen INGOs such as ActionAid and Oxfam International relocate their headquarters to the Global South and the first gathering of funders interested in promoting *community philanthropy* in a more than a decade. Urgent Action Fund has long highlighted the value of public philanthropy models as means to open up philanthropy and hold it accountable to the public good. A commitment to honoring local expertise and self-led activism is also baked into the Urgent Action Fund DNA through years of adhering to these principles. Perhaps most importantly, the unique Sister Fund model, a model of networked, equal partners, as it grows, can become a model for others at this time.

## Strategic Priorities and Planning Recommendations

Over the next five years, UAF will pursue strategic priorities in three areas utilizing the following planning recommendations as a road map. The three strategic priority areas are: I) *increased and more accessible resources to support and protect WHRDs and THRDs*; II) *increased voice and participation in advocacy work by WHRDs and THRDs to transform the work through lived experience and to create systems that work for the people using them*; and III) *deepened alliance with UAF Sister Funds to increase collective movement impact*.

*I. UAF will contribute to increased and more accessible resources to support and protect women and trans human rights defenders by A) focusing on rapid response grantmaking and collective responses to security; B) sharing knowledge, learning collectively, and holding convenings; and C) building partnerships and alliances.*

A. Urgent Action Fund's **rapid response grantmaking (RRG)** has been the pillar of our programmatic work since its inception 20 years ago. Our rapid response grants **support women- and trans-led organizations and individual women and trans human rights defenders at critical moments** of their activism with the goal of ensuring they are able to continue doing their work. These resources increase the resilience of movements and activists by supporting the activists, organizations (including emerging groups), and networks that form movement infrastructure and by responding to critical moments. Rapid response grants are currently up to \$5000.

**Advocacy and opportunity grants** are made when an unexpected opportunity for advocacy or direct action may result in the advancement of women's or LGBTQI+ rights—such as changes in legal decisions, policy, and laws, or shifts in public attitudes and practices. **Security and safety grants** are provided at critical moments when the safety and security of defenders or organizations are threatened due to their human rights work.

Women and trans human rights defenders continue to face risks: security threats, loss of income, loss of liberty, exhaustion, stress and harassment, to name a few. In light of the deteriorating security situation for women and trans activists, we are committed to finding strategies that bridge an individual's security and wellbeing with structural change. **Collective responses to security help address long-term security needs of activists** and are complementary to UAF's rapid response grantmaking program.



Finally, the regional focus of rapid response grantmaking will be impacted over the next five years with the launch of UAF Asia Pacific in October 2017. The grantmaking region for Urgent Action Fund will become Central Asia and Turkey, Europe, Middle East, Canada and the United States.

### ***Five-Year Planning Recommendations***

#### **1. Rapid Response Grantmaking—Regional Focus**

- Focus and strengthen the grantmaking reach in Central Asia and Turkey, Europe, Middle East, and North America.
- Strengthen outreach, partnerships, and advisor networks to ensure that RRGs reach diverse, marginalized communities traditionally excluded from mainstream donors.

#### **2. Rapid Response Grantmaking—Grant Limit and Time Frame**

- For advocacy grants, increase the maximum grant size to \$8,000. (For security grants, maintain a \$5,000 maximum.)
- Extend the timeline for activities covered by advocacy grants from three to six months.

#### **3. Collective Responses to Security**

- Document learnings and outcomes from past and current grants in order to Conduct to strengthen our understanding of *collective* approaches and to ensure common understanding between staff, advisors, and members of the initiative.
- Support locally designed approaches to collective security and safety by awarding three to six grants per year in UAF regions in order to continue growing the community of practitioners and champions (grantee organizations, advisors, facilitators, funders, and individual activists).
- Promote UAF’s position as a leader in innovative and sustainable approaches to addressing women and trans human rights activists’ security through publications and other media that highlight our learnings, panels at conferences, and convenings for participants.

B. Urgent Action Fund’s ability to provide support through a rapid response model largely depends on the network of advisors, as well as the depth of our relationship with them. The UAF advisory network includes advisors who have known UAF for many years, but also those who provide occasional inputs on very specific requests. Attempts to formalize the network have proven to be challenging due to this diversity and the fluid nature of rapid response. Most of our advisors report being satisfied with the current structure, but with additional suggestions for deeper engagement.

By supporting and facilitating spaces where WHRDs can *share knowledge and learn collectively*, Urgent Action Fund simultaneously supports **a community that can build alliances and increase their solidarity in support of common agendas** to address opportunities and threats to women’s and LGBTQI+ human rights.

Specifically, *convening* activists is a strategy **to amplify and strengthen UAF’s work** by building solidarity and networking through deepening UAF’s relationships with grantees, advisors, and partners, as well as informing UAF’s strategic development, grantmaking, and advocacy priorities. Convenings allow WHRDs to share tools and other resources for safety, security, and overall wellbeing.

### *Five-Year Planning Recommendations*

#### **1. Knowledge Sharing and Collective Learning**

- Develop guidelines for added roles for core advisors,<sup>2</sup> as well as advisor criteria, and develop an engagement plan to solidify a sense of a *network* among advisors.
- Develop conference and outreach roles, provide consultations, offer co-authorship opportunities, and create other exciting and actionable ways of engaging advisors.
- Do additional outreach to boost our advisors from the trans community, among activists living with disabilities, from youth-led movements, immigrant/refugee, domestic/migrant/low-income workers and within countries that constitute our geographic regions (Middle East, Russia and Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and North America).

#### **2. Convenings**

- Utilize emerging themes, issues, trends, approaches, and strategies that come out of convenings to inform UAF’s programmatic focus and strategy.
- Build Regional Advisory Networks to strengthen and deepen current advisory networks and to facilitate cross-regional and cross-movement dialogue.
- Hold convenings that respond to shifts in the landscape and to activists’ needs.
- Ensure convenings are locally led, including process and agenda development, in part by partnering with a local co-sponsor organization.
- Support a multiple convening model when necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> Core UAF advisors are defined by the program team as a group of advisors whose involvement with UAF extends beyond providing endorsements. Examples include, but not limited to, providing advice on our mandate, representing us at a conference, or being exceptionally supportive around outreach.

C. Since its founding, Urgent Action Fund has worked within alliances and partnerships as a way of expanding both the organization's reach and impact. As a small organization with a global mandate, UAF benefits from affiliations that allow it to extend across borders, join with allies, and speak with a collective voice whenever it is strategic to do so. Being a part of the UAF Sister Funds also makes UAF naturally inclined towards collaboration as a means of magnifying its impact.

**Building partnerships and alliances expands the reach and impact of WHRDs and THRDs, as well as the overall pool of funding available to WHRDs and THRDs.** Through formal partnerships (those governed by joint agreements or fiscal sponsorship agreements), UAF will provide additional administrative infrastructure and support for movements, increasing the ability of emerging groups to respond to particular moments or emerging needs for WHRDs and THRDs. Alliances are also key to Urgent Action Fund's goals for advocacy (through participation in the WHRD International Coalition, for example) and resource mobilization (through joint proposals). Engaging in diverse coalitions enables UAF to be more effective and holistic as well as strengthen alliance and movement building across the intersectional spaces we inhabit. Thus, in this next phase of UAF's evolution, working through partnerships and alliances will remain a central pillar of our strategy.

### *Five-Year Planning Recommendations*

#### **1. Adopt the Following Criteria for Potential Partnerships or Alliances**

- Allows a WHRD and THRD lens.
- Reaches new communities or gains new expertise relevant to WHRDs and THRDs.
- Supports emerging initiatives that will enhance the resources available to WHRDs and THRDs, including funding, training, and access to facilities (such as retreat centers).
- Amplifies UAF's own work in the areas of philanthropic or human rights advocacy, communication about the needs and priorities of WHRDs and THRDs, or funding for our key programmatic offerings to WHRDs and THRDs.

***II. To ensure that the lived experience of women and trans human rights defenders informs the funding and advocacy in both philanthropic and advocacy landscapes, UAF will lift up the voices and expand the participation of WHRDs and THRDs in both A) philanthropic advocacy and B) human rights advocacy.***

A. With the closing of civil society spaces and the scarcity of resources to support women's and

trans human rights activism, UAF will actively contribute to changing the context and conditions in which both the philanthropic sector and the policy landscape operate towards women and trans human rights defenders. We will approach this with an “uplift and invite” framework— both lifting up the voices of WHRDs and THRDs in these key spaces and inviting actors from these spaces to participate in and to learn from women’s rights gatherings.

Within organized philanthropy, UAF advocates for more and better funding for women and trans human rights defenders. That means that our **philanthropic advocacy both increases funding to the issues of concern to WHRDs and THRDs, as well as delivers funding in the least burdensome way to WHRD organizations**. Such funding is a) flexible and can be directed to the grantee’s own priorities, b) offered with a minimum of paperwork or bureaucracy, c) accessible to activists in diverse contexts and in unregistered groups, and d) available for both long-term and rapid response needs.

At philanthropic conferences and within funder networks, UAF also highlights specific issues of concern. For instance: protecting and expanding space for activism and civil society, the challenges faced by WHRDs and the need to invest in wellbeing and security practices as a result, the use of sexual violence against WHRDs as a means to dissuade their activism, and the need for funding at the intersection of issues, such as for activists who address both climate change and gender justice.

### **Five-Year Planning Recommendations**

#### **1. More and Better Resourcing**

- With European governments, particularly the European Union, and within the philanthropy networks in the United States and Europe (IHRFG, Ariadne, and others to be determined annually based on an analysis of the most strategic upcoming opportunities to make this case) document and highlight discrepancy in resources available to WHRDs and THRDs (as compared to the resources available to male defenders).
- Contribute UAF’s own grantmaking data to at least three efforts within the field to map the relatively availability of resources to WHRDS and THRDs: 1) IHRFG/Foundation Center’s annual data collection, 2) Prospera/INWF’s annual data collection, and 3) ProtectDefenders.EU’s efforts to map the availability of resources for HRDs.
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#### **2. Evidence-Based Presentation**

- Document and promote good practices of rapid response grantmaking, especially with

new philanthropies opting for this approach. Produce at least one blog/article and give at least one presentation to a philanthropy conference annually that promotes good practice in rapid response grantmaking.

- Continue and expand the sharing of evidence-based practices for well-being and integrated security for WHRDs/THRDs via communications products via a dedicated social media platform and by highlighting such practices in at least two other communications publications or products by 2020.

### **3. Sharing Stories and Trends Affecting the Lives of Frontline Activists**

- Advocate for intersectional philanthropy that invests in the people doing the hard work of transformative change without silo-ing them into single-issue categories. Specifically, produce 2-3 communications products (Courage Cards, Annual Report, etc.) annually that reveal the intersectional nature of WHRD's and THRD's activism.
- Make more visible within philanthropy the ways in which issues intersect (for example, migration and gender) and the ways in which discrimination based on gender is compounded with discrimination based on race, class/caste, sexual orientation, disability status, and, other aspects of identity. Annually, develop a proposal for a conference or articles for publication that has an intersectional theme. (For instance, the work of WHRDs in the United States to secure both racial and gender justice.)
- Produce sharable social media content on at least three platforms that reveals the lived experiences and celebrates the stories of WHRDs and THRDs.

B. Due to the nature of our work and the activist culture of Urgent Action Fund, the organization has always engaged in advocacy informally in a number of global and regional spaces. In 2015, we conducted an advocacy assessment with diverse internal and external stakeholders, which informed an initial advocacy plan. Our current advocacy work mainly happens within the Women's Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. We help lead the advocacy working group within the Coalition. We are also present at several key advocacy spaces, including the Special Procedures Mandate Holders Annual meeting and the Commission on the Status of Women. Since deciding to focus more intentionally on human rights advocacy starting in early 2015, Urgent Action Fund has signed on to over 70 sign-on letters related to issues concerning women and trans human rights defenders.

In 2016, we took stock of our *human rights advocacy* work to date and reevaluated our priorities based on our challenges, successes, and learnings thus far. As we collectively imagine the rebirth of our organization through our ongoing strategic planning process, it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to take **a more ambitious and creative approach to our advocacy in order to be both responsive and proactive in the face of intensifying threats**

**against defenders.** The time is ripe to take the courageous and intentional step of building an advocacy program. The recommendations below sketch a preliminary vision for this program.

### *Five-Year Planning Recommendations*

#### **1. Bold Vision**

- Amplify the voices of WHRDs, THRDs, and feminist movements.
- Understand and build on our rapid response grantmaking, as well as remain rooted in an intersectional analysis and community organizing and direct action framework.
- Expand presence and activities in New York and Geneva to strengthen the synergy among advocacy spaces, thereby enhancing our ability to influence decision makers and include WHRD and THRD experiences and voices in policies and normative standards.

#### **2. Proven Strategies**

- Identify and increase financial and human resources for an advocacy program.
- Strengthen relationships and alliances with key existing and new thought partners.
- Improve our ability to respond quickly, better hold decision makers accountable, and learn in real time from experiences in different spaces (e.g., CSW Agreed Conclusions, HRC Resolutions, and recommendations to UN Women).
- Reclaim global democratic spaces through stronger connections between concrete realities of defenders and international human rights mechanisms.
- Work with defenders and partners to develop flexible and creative security strategies to respond to backlash and new and constantly evolving threats they encounter when engaging in advocacy.

### ***III. Urgent Action Fund will deepen alignment with the UAF Sister Fund community to increase UAF's collective movement impact and resilience for WHRDs and THRDs.***

One of the most important relationships UAF has is with its **Sister Funds**. 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 is separately registered, with 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 for both advocacy and security needs of WHRDs and THRDs. This vision of political decentralization existed from the beginning, recognizing that funds rooted in and

responsive to local contexts would be more effective in supporting WHRDs and building resilient movements around the world.

The Sister Funds recognize that balancing each UAF's autonomy with the unity of the Sister Fund model is not restricted to the philosophical but has very practical implications, as well. In the realm of organizational capacity, it means incorporating joint, strategic work in the job descriptions and responsibilities of staff and board. Doing so recognizes the additional time and energy that collective work among the Sister Funds requires. All the Sister Funds see dialogue and flexibility as the key to apportioning shared work in any collaborative endeavor, with concrete agreements established in advance whenever possible. As part of an interconnected, interdependent growing community of Sister Funds, **UAF seeks to contribute to the collective impact and success of all Urgent Action Fund Sister Funds.**

### *Five-Year Planning Recommendations*

#### **1. Fundraising**

- Seek joint funding for collectively identified collaborative and independent work, advocacy events, and knowledge production. The decision to approach a funder for joint funding will be a collective one. In cases where one or all Sister Funds share a donor, independence in negotiating support will be respected, unless agreed otherwise.
- Encourage joint work among fundraising and other relevant staff of each Sister Fund, and contract with experienced fundraising consultants, as necessary, to develop additional joint funding proposals for submission to bilateral and other major funders.

#### **2. Communications**

- Develop joint language and branding for the UAF Sister Funds that resonates appropriately in the sisters' different contexts in an effort to increase global visibility and attract support for the UAF network from shared women's rights and donor audiences.
- Develop language that clearly explains the Sister Fund model to external audiences, adapting it as the model evolves.
- Develop a unique voice for the Sister Funds that differentiates them from other women's and human rights funds, emphasizing the UAFs' unique approach and political vision, emphasizing their feminist agenda.
- Collaborate on travel plans and presentations at international forums to assure that the issues upon which the funds collaborate are visible and well represented, so that UAF's network and base of support are broadened and Sister Fund staff can also avoid duplicative travel when one can stand in for the group.

### **3. Advocacy**

- Hold joint events and make joint statements that highlight the situation of WHRDs at major international meetings/events, such as the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Undertake philanthropic advocacy to influence donors of all kinds to provide sustainable and more resourcing for women and girls.

### **4. Learning and Impact**

- Utilize shared funding to improve joint learning about what works and what doesn't work, strengthen working relationships and each fund's capacities for monitoring and learning, and develop collective monitoring and reporting capacities.
- Create a uniform system for data collection and trend analysis to enable all Sister Funds to synthesize strategic learning.
- Communicate the collective impact of the Sister Funds and highlight the power of our transnational movement.
- Use findings to identify when and how to initiate collaborative, strategic interventions.
- Commit to an ongoing process of documenting learning and using it to adapt programming and to share lessons with the field, as well as ensuring the retention of institutional memory of all UAF Sister Funds.
- Support the design, transition, and launch of UAF Asia Pacific.
- Support the implementation of the Sister Fund Collective Agreement and the areas of alignment and collaboration it outlines, including but not limited to: fundraising, communication, learning and impact, and advocacy.
- Further strengthen the linkages between the Sister Funds through gatherings of UAF board, staff, grantees, and key partners.