

STATEMENT

November 29th - International Women Human Rights Defenders Day
#Let'sDefendWomenDefenders for a free, egalitarian, just world for all persons and peoples.

On November 29th, **the International Day of Women Human Rights Defenders and all those who work for the Human Rights of Women**, we, of the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras), made up of more than 750 defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México and Nicaragua, recognize the important work done by women human rights defenders in Mesoamerica for peace, justice and equality, and voice our concern over the heightened risks they face due to violence in our region.

Extractive policies and other neoliberal measures, the closing of democratic spaces, the rise in militarization, and the growing intrusion of the powers that be (transnational corporations, organized crime groups and religious hierarchies) in State institutions, have spawned a crisis of unprecedented violence and human rights violations in the region, which is compounded by fundamentalism throughout the world. In this context, violence against women continues to be used as a mechanism of social control, demobilization and fear. Many women defenders are attacked and killed for working in support of human rights and for rejecting the role traditionally assigned to women.

According to an IM-Defensoras assessment report, between 2012 and 2014, a total of 1,688 attacks against women human rights defenders took place in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and México, and a 45.7% rise in attacks was registered. By the same token, between 2012 and 2016, we registered 32 murders of women human rights defenders, and in the majority of these cases, impunity prevails.¹

¹ **MEXICO (16)** 2012 (8) **Agnes Torres Hernández** (Humana Nación Trans), **Regina Martínez** (journalist, correspondent for Proceso magazine), **Durvin Ramírez Díaz** (environmentalist, Intercultural University of the State of Tabasco), **Manuela Martha Solís Contreras** (El Barzón), **Juventina Villa Mojica** (Organization of Ecologist Campesinos in the Sierra de Petatlán and Coyuca de Catalán), **Renata – René Espinoza Reyes** (trans defender), **María Edy Fabiola Osorio Bernaldez** (Guerreros Verdes), **Carmela Elisarraráz Méndez** (Monarcas Libertad of Michoacan); 2013 (4): **Rocío Mesino Mesino** (Campesino Organization of the Sierra del Sur), **Irma Ascencio Arenas** (community defender), **Ana Lilia Gatica** (People's Producers Organization of the Costa Grande) y **María Concepción Martínez Medina** (feminist defender); 2014 (2): **Sandra Luz Hernández** (defender of disappearance victims), **María del Rosario Fuentes** (Valor de Tamaulipas); 2015 (1): **Nadia Vera**; 2016 (1): **Alessa Flores** (Lola Dejavu).
HONDURAS (12) 2013 (2): **María Enriqueta Matute** (territorial defender) y **Mireya Mendoza** (Association of Judges for Democracy); 2014 (5): **Margarita Murillo** (Social Forum of the Valle de Sula), **Alma Janeth Díaz Ortega** (campesina leader), **Uva Herlinda Castellanos** (Bella Vista campesino group), **Marlene Banegas** (prosecuting attorney), **Patricia Eufragio Banegas** (prosecuting attorney); 2015 (1): **Angie Ferreira** (trans collective). 2016 (4): **Paola Barraza** (trans collective), **Berta Cáceres** (COPINH), **Alejandra Padilla** (Trans Feminist Association), **Lesbia Urquia** (COPINH)
GUATEMALA (12) 2012 (4): **Feliciana Raymundo Matom** (indigenous defender), **Feliciana Ceto Matom** (indigenous defender), **Petrona Moran** (territorial defender), **Sandra Saquil Nájera** (territorial defender); 2013 (4): **Blanca Rosa Gonzalez Munguía** (Women's Coordinating Committee of Xalapan), **Kira Zuleta Enriquez Mena**, **Santa Alvarado** (National Health Workers Union of Guatemala), **Lea Marie De León Marroquín** (criminal lawyer in high impact cases); 2014 (2): **Patricia Samayoa** (feminist defender), **Marilyn Topacio Reynoso** (territorial defender); 2015 (2): **Rosalinda Pérez** (indigenous defender), **Marleni Estrada** (Guatemala Workers Union)
EL SALVADOR (2) 2013 (1): **Tania Vásquez** (COMCAVIS TRANS); 2015 (1): **Francela Mendez** (Trans community).
Source: Preliminary data of the IMD Registry for Attacks against Women Defenders.

In the attacks committed against women human rights defenders and organizations working for the rights of women, it is common to find expressions of discrimination and gender violence, such as smear campaigns based on gender stereotypes, sexual aggression or rape threats, attacks on defenders' families, and even cases of femicide/femicide. Although the main aggressors are State authorities and institutions, women human rights defenders are also attacked by private actors, including private companies, news media, religious groups and organized crime groups. Moreover, they may also be subjected to gender violence in their own immediate environment, families, and organizations and movements. Violence against women defenders is also expressed in reduced support and access to resources that they and their organizations have for defending their rights.

We are especially concerned about violence against women human rights defenders working in rural or community situations, the defense of territory and natural resources, opposition to gender violence, and support for sexual and reproductive rights. They are all subjected to an economic, political and cultural model that imposes the interests of a few on the rights of the majority through violence and discrimination.

The impact of this situation on the lives of women defenders and their causes has been recognized by the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, and in specific UN resolutions:

“Women human rights defenders face unique challenges, driven by deep-rooted discrimination against women and stereotypes about their appropriate role in society... The impacts of discrimination against women on the life and public participation of women human rights defenders are also multiple: increasing the risks they face in carrying out their work; affecting their health, their life, their relationships with their families and communities; diminishing their ability to contribute, thus affecting the work of the organizations in which they participate and the causes for which they struggle.”²

In order to move towards the construction of a safe and secure environment for the work of women human rights defenders, on December 18, 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted this Resolution: “Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: protecting women human rights defenders. UN General Assembly”.

Based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Women Defenders Resolution informs the States of their obligation to protect and create a secure environment, free of discrimination against women actively participating in the defense and promotion of human rights. In agreement with this Resolution and the calls for support for women defenders that we of IM-Defensoras have consistently issued, we raise the following demands today:

The States should:

- Take urgent action to change the economic and political model sustained through discrimination and violence against women, and based on human rights violations and attacks against women defenders.

² International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, November 29, 2016. In a context of heightened fundamentalism and populism, now more than ever, the States should protect women human rights defenders through a struggle against discrimination against women.

<http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20936&LangID=S#sthash.SjorTmCB.dpuf>

- Assure full compliance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Convention 169, placing special emphasis on the protection of women human rights defenders who are defending territory and natural wealth.
- Avoid and combat all forms of criminalization of women defenders, which implies recognizing and sanctioning smear campaigns and the use of macho expressions by State and non-State agents against women human rights defenders; investigating and ensuring with all due diligence access to justice for defenders who have suffered attacks; and eradicating any and all legislative measures that promote the criminalization and violence against women.
- Develop measures for modifying sociocultural patterns behind violence against women human rights defenders. This implies, among other things, developing necessary measures with a gender perspective for ensuring the protection of women defenders and creating a safe and secure environment for their defense of human rights.

To international cooperation:

- Encourage the empowerment of the women defenders themselves, along with women's organizations that bring a gender perspective to protection strategies and mechanisms. To achieve gender-based protection, it is indispensable for defenders and women's organizations to have favorable conditions for carrying out their work and developing networks and protection strategies.
- Assure that investments and cooperative development policies are implemented in strict compliance with the implementation of human rights.

Organizations and social movements:

- Prevent and combat all forms of gender discrimination inside organizations and movements by initiating actions that foster the leadership of women, assuming the rights of women as a central element in all agendas for social change, and denouncing any and all situations of sexual harassment or other forms of gender violence committed.
- Eliminate political and organizational practices leading to greater risks and more wear and tear on women defenders. Promote the development of self-care and collective care. Place special emphasis on eradicating gender mandates that mean longer work days for women defenders and sacrificial models of activism that put the integrity and sustainability of the organizations and movements themselves at risk.

This November 29th and every day, #Let'sDefendWomenDefenders for a free, egalitarian and just world for all persons and peoples.

