

TRANSCENDING HATRED AND SYNDEMICS



**Transfemicides of women defenders
and the struggle for justice in Mesoamerica
between 2020 and 2022**

Naming Karla Valentina, María Elizabeth, Jeanine, Mireya, Luisa, Luz Clarita, Alejandra, Scarleth, Cristal, Mía, Carolina, Aline, Cecy, Andrea, Jennifer, Samantha, Avigail, Zashy, Valery, Anahís, and Thalía is a way of remembering that they are missing among us. It is a way of recognizing that their absence not only leaves a void among their loved ones but also in the dignified human struggles that they pursued.



IM-DEFENSORAS

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INTRODUCTION

To name transfemicides/transfeminicides¹ of women defenders is to call out the hate crimes committed by patriarchal powers and their mandates of violence. It also means naming the intention to obstruct and destroy trans social struggles through violence committed against the bodies of trans women defenders.²

1| [According to RADI Blas and SARDÁ-CHANDIRAMANI Alejandra \(2016\)](#), “travesticide/transfemicide is the most visible and final expression of a chain of structural violence that responds to a cultural, social, political and economic system structured by an exclusionary binary gender division.” As the Inter-American Court of Human Rights indicates in *Vicky Hernández et al. v. Honduras*. Judgment of 26 March 2021 (Merits, Reparations and Costs) ([see communication here](#)), the term “transfemicide” or “transfeminicide” is understood as a murder motivated by prejudice on the basis of gender identity and/or gender expression. For ease of reading, we use the term “transfemicide” throughout this report. However, we recognize that there are differences in how the terms are used in countries of the region, similar to the differences in how the terms “femicide” and “feminicide” are used in relation to the murder of a woman because of her gender. For example, [Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua legally classify the crime as femicide, while El Salvador and Mexico legally classify the crime as feminicide](#).

2| The term “trans” is used to describe persons who identify with a different sex than the one assigned to them at birth. Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. [The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons](#).

Transfemicides are not isolated events suffered only by the direct victims; they are the final and cruelest phase of the varied intersections of oppression, discrimination, and pre-existing violence³ – such as difficulties accessing education free from cisnormative stereotypes, denial of employment, mistreatment, physical and sexual attacks, arbitrary arrests, and executions – that trans people and their collectives and communities suffer.

Furthermore, they take place within a patriarchal, capitalist, racist, sex-gender binary, heteronormative and cisnormative system that shapes institutions, norms, symbols, and subjectivities; a system that creates and feeds stereotypes used to abuse trans women defenders. The cases presented in this report shed light on these systemic factors.

The lives of women defenders who were victims of transfemicides were taken from us because they were trans women and because they defended human rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has identified elements that become risks for these women defenders, including their gender identity, the fact that they are human rights defenders, the causes they defend, and the intersection of these factors.⁴ The IACHR also affirms that hate messages and stigmatization of trans women defenders further aggravate these risk factors;⁵ as does the fact that some conduct their work and/or activism in spaces that are themselves high-risk. These elements are interconnected and are relevant when analyzing the expressions of violence against trans women defenders.⁶

³ | Inter-American Court of Human Rights. [Advisory Opinion OC-24/17](#). Par. 36. “...the mechanisms for the protection of human rights of the United Nations and of the Inter-American system have documented violent acts committed against LGBTI persons in all regions based on prejudices. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted, “such violence may be physical (including murder, beatings, kidnapping and sexual assault) or psychological (including threats, coercion and the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, which includes forced psychiatric incarceration).”

⁴ | IACHR. [Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons in the Americas](#), 2015. Par. 336.

⁵ | Statement by human rights experts on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. 17 May 2020. [COVID-19: The suffering and resilience of LGBT persons must be visible and inform the actions of States](#).

⁶ | REDLACTRANS and others. [La noche es otro país. Impunidad y Violencia contra Mujeres Transgénero Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en América Latina](#), 2012, p. 27.

It is worth emphasizing that, despite the serious situation they face, trans women defenders – as well as the different organizations, collectives, and communities that work for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people – have responded to these and other attacks by transcending hatred. Furthermore, they have transcended in an increasingly hostile context, in the midst of a global syndemic⁷ that has severely affected women defenders throughout the region.

This report is the result of the documentation and accompaniment work conducted by the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras) throughout 2020, 2021, and early 2022 as part of its Registry Strategy and through the national networks and articulations of women defenders in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. *The aim of the report is **to shine a light** on the intolerable transfemicides committed against our sister trans women defenders and the **tireless resistance and persistence** in the defense of human rights that trans women defenders continue to exemplify despite the violence.* —

⁷ The term “syndemic” refers to the adverse interaction of two or more diseases that create social and environmental conditions that affect the population, causing more harm than the simple sum of both diseases on their own. Considering that the COVID-19 crisis led to an increase in violence, poverty, and exploitation, with an aggravating impact of increasing domestic and care work, IM-Defensoras uses this term to describe the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and struggles of Mesoamerican women human rights defenders. For more information, please see the report [Unraveling the Crisis, Weaving Futures](#). IM-Defensoras.

VIOLENCE AGAINST MESOAMERICAN TRANS WOMEN DEFENDERS IN NUMBERS

Starting in 2020, we noticed an alarming increase in transfemicides committed against trans women defenders.

In 2017, the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Defenders enabled us to identify the murder of Jennifer López in Mexico and the murder attempts against Venus Caballero and Ludwica Vega Espinoza in Nicaragua, in addition to three other non-lethal attacks against trans women defenders in the region.

In 2018, Ana Greisy López from Guatemala was the only fatality in the documented three attacks on trans sister defenders or organizations.

In 2019, we documented two murders of trans women defenders in the region: Jade Camila Díaz in El Salvador and Bessy Ferreras in Honduras, to which we would add one murder attempt against Ludwica Vega Espinoza in Nicaragua. These were three of the four attacks documented that year that specifically targeted trans women human rights defenders.⁸

⁸ | Data from the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Defenders.

All of these events occurred in a context of violence against the grouping of women who defend the rights of people with diverse gender identities or trans-gender people⁹, as highlighted by the 25 different attacks registered against these defenders between 2017 and 2019.¹⁰

The year 2020 shows an alarming increase in the number of trans women defenders murdered. That year, we registered 11 transfemicides of trans women defenders. Sadly, 2020 was not an exception; the violence persisted throughout 2021, during which we documented another 9 transfemicides.

Transfemicides in Mesoamerica 2017 – 2022



Growth in number of transfemicides in Mesoamerica. Source: IM-Defensoras

⁹| [The Yogyakarta Principles](#) on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2006) state, “Gender identity is understood to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.” In [The struggle of trans and gender-diverse persons](#), the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity uses “the term ‘gender-diverse’... to refer to persons whose gender identity, including their gender expression, is at odds with what is perceived as being the gender norm in a particular context at a particular point in time, including those who do not place themselves in the male/female binary.” We understand that many people – including women defenders who are part of the national networks and articulations that make up IM-Defensoras – identify with the terminology of “disidencia sexo-género” in Spanish [which can be understood as “sex/gender non-conforming” in English], which is used to name and vindicate the politicization of identities, cultural practices, and social or political movements that question cisheteronormativity. However, in this report, we decided to use “gender-diverse identities” with the aim of using a broader concept that would allow for greater inclusion.

¹⁰| Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Defenders.

The growth in transfemicides of women defenders coincides with continued and growing authoritarianism in the region, which is accompanied by the weakening of institutions that should guarantee people's rights and the intensification of repressive and militarist policies. These policies have been implemented and consolidated by different governments with the pretext of addressing COVID-19, enabling State security entities to take increasingly arbitrary actions against women defenders¹¹ and the trans community, who experiences public forces as one of their main attackers.¹²

Trans women are affected by discrimination and the specific vulnerability they face in different spaces.¹³ The situation of precariousness, poverty, and extreme poverty suffered by a significant part of this community¹⁴ has been aggravated due to syndemic, and – in the face of this – the response of governments has been insufficient, sustaining and aggravating their vulnerability, especially among those who turned to the informal sector and to sex work. Under these conditions, confinement made them unable to access basic income for subsistence and it transformed precariousness into extreme poverty, to the point of driving some of them into homelessness. Additionally, it forced them to neglect their medical needs, marked in some cases by chronic illnesses, HIV, or hormone treatments.¹⁵

11 | IM-Defensoras. [The Crisis Was Already Here: Mesoamerican WHRDs and COVID-19](#). 2020. Pp. 5-6

12 | On this issue, see [IACHR: Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons in the Americas](#), 12 November 2015, and [Organizaciones LGBTI advierten autoritarismo en presidente Bukele](#). 17 February 2020, Agencia Presentes. “Whenever it comes to policies of the militarization of public life, the LGBTI community is one of those most exposed to abuse by the military.” Statement by Roberto Zapata of the association AMATE. [Own translation.]

13 | This situation is largely because the measures adopted by the governments of the region to curb the pandemic have not included a differentiated perspective or approach that addresses the specific needs and situation of transgender women. Amnesty International. [For many trans women, living in El Salvador is a death sentence. Coronavirus is making it even worse](#), 12 August 2020.

14 | IACHR. [Report on Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons and Their Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights](#) 2020

15 | Amnesty International. [Protecting the human rights of LGBTI people during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 19 June 2020.

Trans women who survive in the informal sector and through sex work must also face the demands from organized crime – a less visible yet highly influential actor that exercises de facto control of the territory and requires unjustified payments in order to be able to work in specific areas.¹⁶ Their actions in some countries of the region are not limited to controlling territories; they also have direct control over the naming of authorities, passing laws, and developing public policies. Their involvement in the matter is therefore significant.

Meanwhile, **our work documenting attacks and accompanying women defenders has revealed that fundamentalist groups connected to churches or extreme-right groups have become key actors opposed to the advances achieved in sexual and reproductive rights and promoting hatred against LGBTIQ+ communities.** Authorities regularly legitimize these groups and their hate speech by spreading narratives that influence legal frameworks and/or State policies.¹⁷

Moreover, we cannot overlook the fact that confinement has left trans women exposed to violence in the domestic sphere by abusive family members and partners.¹⁸ Without doubt, all these factors must be taken into account when analyzing transfemicidal violence during this period.¹⁹

16 | Guillermo Rivera. [México transfóbico. ¿Qué hay detrás del asesinato de una trans?](#)

17 | In March 2022, the Guatemalan Congress approved legislative proposal 5272 that prohibits sexual education and speaking about sexual diversity in schools, and establishes heterosexuality as the only “normal” and thereby making the only option for civil and family ties the one existing exclusively between men and women. Civil society and the international community denounced the unconstitutionality of this initiative and, days after its approval, the Congress of the Republic announced its shelving. For more information, see: [La 5272 una propuesta de ley en defensa de los valores conservadores](#). 7 May 2019. Prensa Comunitaria.

18 | Astrid Valencia and Josefina Salomón. [For many trans women, living in El Salvador is a death sentence](#). 12 August 2020.

19 | Manuel Ruiz Rico. [Los asesinatos de personas transgénero se disparan en Estados Unidos en medio de la pandemia de la Covid-19](#). 13 July 2020. Público

2020: A HEARTBREAKING YEAR REGARDING TRANSFEMICIDES OF WOMEN DEFENDERS

It is widely known that the syndemic triggered by COVID-19 caused an upsurge in violence and other human rights violations against women,²⁰ as well as an increase in rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people across the world.²¹ Among them, we must highlight the rights abuses that trans women have faced.²²

The context of aggravated risk for all women defenders has specific expressions for trans women defenders. Between March and November 2020, the period during which the first COVID-19 measures were implemented, the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders logged 11 transfemicides of women defenders in the region: 1 in Guatemala, 4 in Mexico, 5 in Honduras, and 1 in Nicaragua. In the latter, the death of Carolina Gutiérrez, a transgender political prisoner who had been released from jail, was triggered by the living conditions and violence to which the State subjected her during her imprisonment and whose consequences continued after her release.

Hate crimes and violence committed against those who defend rights – especially against trans women defenders – are not a strange occurrence in Mesoamerica.²³ However, even in a region where violence against people of diverse gender identities or transgender people is a permanent occurrence, 11 murders represent an unprecedented and extremely worrisome number.

20| UN Women. [The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19](#).

21| Amnesty International. [Protecting the human rights of LGBTI people during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 19 June 2020.

22| Amnesty International. [Governments have failed to protect trans people from murder – and from COVID-19](#), 20 November 2020.

23| See: IACHR. [Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons in the Americas](#), 2015.

Transfemicides of women defenders in Mexico²⁴

Karla Valentina Camarena del Castillo

Karla was shot dead by unknown assailants on 29 March 2020, on a public street in San Felipe Guanajuato. Her body was not identified for three days, and the crime report about her murder describes her as a “male victim”.

Karla Camarena, also known as Valentina Ferrey, was a widely recognized defender of LGBTIQ+ rights who led the struggle to recognize the gender identity of the trans community in Guanajuato. She was the coordinator of the first Gay March in the city of Salamanca and, at the time of her death, was coordinator of the National Mexican Network of Trans Women in Guanajuato.²⁵

María Elizabeth Montaña Fernández

María Elizabeth was murdered in the municipality of Huitzilac, Morelos. Her body was found on the side of the Mexico City-Cuernavaca Highway on 19 June 2020, ten days after she was reported missing.²⁶ As a member of the medical community and as an activist, María Elizabeth dedicated her life to ensuring high-quality medical care for the trans community. As coordinator for Health Education of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS for its acronym in Spanish) at Siglo XXI National Medical Center, she headed a national initiative to improve the health system’s care for the trans community, based on protocols and with a human rights approach.

Jeanine Huerta López

Jeanine was found murdered on 27 August 2020 in her home in Tijuana, with several stab wounds on her body. Jeanine was a well-known activist and defender of the rights of transgender people, transsexuals, transvestites, sex workers, and people with HIV in Baja California. In addition to her involvement with the SER Community Center, Jeanine was the first trans woman to participate in a research project at the University of California in San Diego.²⁷

²⁴ | Based on analysis by Montserrat Sánchez. [Transfemicidios, la nueva normalidad](#). Reporte Índigo. 9 June 2020, in Mexico. The situation described took place in a context of growing fundamentalisms and during a wave of murders and hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people, as noted by the 26 murders registered by the organization Letra S between January and April 2020. Twenty of these acts were perpetrated against trans women.

²⁵ | IM-Defensoras. [MEXICO / Trans community rights defender Karla Camarena killed in Guanajuato, Mexico](#), 2 April 2020.

²⁶ | IM-Defensoras. [MEXICO / Trans doctor and rights defender killed in Morelos](#). 22 June 2020.

²⁷ | IM-Defensoras. [MEXICO / Transgender defender Jeanine Huerta killed and re-victimized in Baja California](#), 9 September 2020.

Her family denounced having been re-victimized when they went to claim her body at the Forensic Medical Service (SEMEFO for its acronym in Spanish), as the authorities refused to hand over the body failing to validate Jeanine's legally recognized identity.²⁸ With no legal basis and unnecessarily refusing to hand over the body, SEMEFO Tijuana in fact discriminated against Jeanine's family.

Mireya Rodríguez Lemus

Mireya was murdered in Chihuahua on 3 September 2020. Fellow members of the association *Unión y Fuerza de Mujeres Trans Chihuahuenses* [Chihuahuan Trans Women Strength and Union] found her body inside her home, with signs of violence. Days earlier, members of the organization had reported Mireya's absence from the place where she regularly conducted sex work and where she provided support to other sex workers.

For months, Mireya had suffered threats and received intimidating messages. She defended the human rights of sex workers and trans women, was a health promoter on HIV; she founded the association Chihuahuan Trans Women Strength and Union; she was promoter for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and she organized the first State-wide Gatherings of Trans Women in Chihuahua.²⁹

Thanks to the advocacy work carried out by women defenders, organizations and trans collectives in Chihuahua – with support from women defenders from other states, the authorities were able to identify the alleged perpetrator of the transfemicide. The indictment of the alleged perpetrator makes this one of the few cases in which it has been possible to note an effective response by the Mexican authorities.³⁰

However, authorities in Mexico continue to re-victimize family members of transfemicide victims and trans women survivors of violence.³¹

They have yet to create an official registry of hate crimes due to sexual orientation or gender identity, nor have they succeeded in carrying out effective investigations (with the exception of the case cited here) that lead to identifying the people who are responsible for these acts.

28| Ibid.

29| IM -Defensoras. [MEXICO / Trans defender Mireya Rodriguez killed in Chihuahua](#). 9 September 2020.

30| Leonardo Bastida Aguilar. "[Vinculan a proceso a presunto asesino material de Mireya Rodríguez](#)". Letra Ese web page, 20 September 2020

31| Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal. [Falta de debida diligencia y de aplicación de la perspectiva de género y enfoque diferenciado en la investigación de transfemicidio](#). Recomendacion 2/2019.

Transfemicide of woman defender Luisa Sandoval in Guatemala

Luisa “Wicha” Sandoval Lemus

The body of Luisa “Wicha” Sandoval Lemus was found on 3 March 2020 in the village of Entre Rios de Puerto Barrios, Izabala. Her body showed signs of torture and genital mutilation, and her hair was cut off. She had been reported missing on 27 February 2020. The 24-year-old woman defender was a member of the Trans Organization Queens of the Night (OTRANS for its acronym in Spanish) and of the Izabal Trans Collective.

The types of torture present in Luisa’s case give evidence of the intention of the perpetrator or perpetrators to punish the identity of a body that dissents from gender norms; cutting her hair and amputating her genitals reflects violence directed at her gender identity and expression.

Transfemicides of women defenders in Honduras³²

Luz Clarita Zúniga

Luz Clarita was stoned to death in the city of La Ceiba on 3 May 2020. She was a 23-year-old trans woman who defended the rights of trans people as part of the organization ProUnión Ceibeña (OPROUCE). Luz Clarita had previously reported having received threats while conducting sex work and she was living on the streets as a result of the economic crisis caused by the syndemic.³³

³² | The situation in Honduras is equally worrisome. As in other countries, the COVID-19 health emergency worsened a pre-existing context that was already negatively marked by governmental fundamentalism. At least 313 LGBTIQ+ people were killed in the country between 2009 and 2019. Furthermore, between January and July 2020, the Cattrachas Lesbian Network’s Observatory on Violent Deaths in the LGBTIQ+ Community in Honduras reported 16 hate crimes involving the deaths of eight gay men, one lesbian woman, and seven trans women. According to the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras, five of the murder victims from this community in 2020 were women human rights defenders.

³³ | Preliminary information obtained by the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras. See: Ninoska Alonzo, [No queremos ser más esta humanidad: A propósito de \(trans\)feminismos desde la periferia](#)

Alejandra Ortiz

Alejandra was murdered by unknown persons in Honduras on 28 June 2020. She was a trans woman and member of *Asociación de Prevención en Salud y Sexualidad, SIDA y Derechos Humanos* [Association for Health and Sexual Prevention, AIDS, and Human Rights] in Tela.³⁴

Scarleth Cáceres

Scarleth was murdered in Tegucigalpa on 10 July 2020. Two men on motorcycles with their faces covered came up to her and one of them shot her twice in the head. She died approximately 90 minutes later in the hospital.

Scarleth defended the rights of sex/gender non-conforming people and was a member of *Muñecas Arcoiris* [Rainbow Dolls]; she had suffered four prior attacks. In November 2019, a taxi driver fractured her skull in order not to pay for her sexual services; in January 2020, a car without license plates ran her over; she received rape threats from two police officers; and she was beaten up on 17 May – International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. Scarleth's actions as a rights defender involved filing complaints with the National Human Rights Commission (CONADEH for its acronym in Spanish) and communicating with the protection mechanism for human rights defenders.

Cristal López

Cristal was murdered on 28 July 2020 at her home in La Ceiba. She was 32 years old. The perpetrators were six masked men who were heavily armed and carried military gear. Cristal worked defending LGBTIQ+ rights as part of the organization *ProUnión Ceibeña* (OPROUCE). She had previously requested a Protection Protocol from authorities, which was never granted; nor was she accepted at women's shelters as she was considered a "man". Despite the absence of an investigation on the origin of all these attacks to identify those responsible for her death, her close circle believes the people involved in these incidents were members of "organized crime".

³⁴ | IM-Defensoras. [Unraveling the Crisis, Weaving Futures Impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and struggles of Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders](#). 2020, p. 17

Mía Colluchi

Mía was murdered on 8 November 2020 in Ampala. She was a trans woman defender who volunteered with the LGBTIQ+ association Horus in Nacome, department of Valle, as well as a member of the organization *Muñecas Arcoiris*. Her body appeared half-naked in Playa Grande de Amapala (in the same department of Valle)³⁵, with signs of having been stoned to death. She had previously received threats. Those responsible for her murder have not been identified. Mía was registered with the last names Zabala Gutiérrez. The gender component of her violent death is evidenced by the nudity in which the defender's body was left, as a message of exposure and hatred.

Death of woman defender Carolina Gutierrez in Nicaragua³⁶

Since protests began in April 2018 over the reform of the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute and the government's repressive response to the mobilizations, a human rights crisis has taken hold in the country leaving more than 300 people murdered and hundreds of activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in exile or deprived of their liberty.³⁷

In this context, eight transgender women – among them defenders, activists, and community leaders – were victims of politically motivated arbitrary detentions, criminalization, and judicialization.³⁸

Various cases have shown the severe conditions of deprivation of liberty that trans women political prisoners have faced. They have been held in men's prisons where they have been constantly subjected to acts of violence, harassment, and humiliation with sexual components.³⁹

35 | [OACNUDH condena el asesinato de Mía Zabala, octava mujer trans asesinada en el 2020.](#)

36 | Information provided by the Nicaraguan Initiative of WHRDs.

37 | IACHR. [Three Years After the Start of the Human Rights Crisis in Nicaragua, IACHR Condemns Ongoing Impunity.](#) 19 April 2021.

38 | Information provided by the Registry Unit.

39 | Yader Luna. [No aguanto estar aquí, el calvario de Celia Cruz, la última presa política trans.](#) El confidencial, 23 August 2020, and [Se deteriora la salud de Celia Cruz la mujer trans presa política del régimen que está en huelga de hambre.](#) La Lupa, 7 October 2020.

The cases of Celia Cruz, Victoria Obando, and Kisha Cristelia López have contributed to raising awareness about the situation in men's prisons, where trans prisoners' gender identity is not respected. Trans prisoners are constant victims of a range of incidents involving sexist and sexual violence, such as being forced to undress in front of their cellmates, suffering denigrating insults, and being subjected to humiliating practices.⁴⁰ At the same time, prison authorities deny trans prisoners their hormone treatments and refuse to provide care for pre-existing illnesses.⁴¹

Along with these conditions, we must highlight the case of Carolina Gutiérrez⁴², who died on 22 April 2020 and *whose case reflects how the imprisonment conditions of Nicaraguan trans political prisoners can present a serious risk to their lives*. Carolina left prison in 2019, with serious physical and psychological scars from the torture, abuse and, lack of medical care during the more than ten months of her imprisonment.⁴³ Her situation was made worse by the serious impacts of the living conditions in which former political prisoners are forced to live, which in Carolina's case included – among other things – the loss of income and social isolation. All this contributed to her death due to stage four leukemia.

40 | Carlos Mikel Espinoza. [Nicaragua: Cárcel y homofobia](#). 100% Noticias, 18 August 2019.

41 | Amnesty International. [Abusos y miedo: Mujeres trans hablan sobre la vida en las prisiones de Nicaragua durante la COVID-19](#), 9 September 2020.

42 | Martha Vásquez y Auxiliadora Vásquez. [La historia de Carolina, la jefa trans del tranque en Diriamba](#), La Prensa, 2 June 2019.

43 | Geovanny Shiffman. [El calvario de Carolina en la cárcel "La Modelo": Sufrió humillaciones, malos tratos y torturas](#). Artículo 66, 24 April 2020, and Carlos Mikel Espinoza. [Nicaragua: Carcel y homofobia](#). 100% Noticias, 18 August 2019.

2021: CONTINUITY OF VIOLENCE DURING THE SYNDEMIC

At least 9 trans women defenders were murdered in Mesoamerica in 2021. This number, together with those from 2020, *points to the alarming trend in increasing transfemicides of women defenders.*

The region maintained measures that restricted movement throughout 2021, varying in levels of severity depending on the COVID-19 transmission rates. Thus, we saw a continuity in the conditions that led to a rise in violence against women defenders⁴⁴ and an increase in rights violations of the LGBTIQ+ community during the first year of the COVID-19 syndemic.⁴⁵ Likewise, the pressing economic conditions that marked 2020 were exacerbated over the course of 2021.⁴⁶

Transfemicide of woman defender Aline Sánchez in Mexico

Aline Sánchez

Aline was murdered on 19 July 2021 in her apartment in San Mateo Mexicaltzingo in Mexico State. Her family found her wrapped in a bedsheet, with her neck sliced open. They found her pet next to her, also viciously killed, probably due to efforts to protect Aline. The woman defender was a member of *Colectivo Mujeres Trans Famosas Toluca* [Famous Trans Women's Collective Toluca].

Aline was 39 years old when she was killed. She had worked for many years to promote the equal marriage and gender identity law in the state of Mexico, which was approved the day after her death.

⁴⁴ | IM-Defensoras. [Unraveling the Crisis, Weaving Futures Impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and struggles of Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders](#). The report shows a 123% increase in IM-Defensoras' WHRD Alerts issued between March and November 2020, compared to 2019.

⁴⁵ | Ibid. The report reveals that mandatory confinement without guarantees for the basic rights of the Mesoamerican population resulted in more poverty and more exploitation, especially for women who – in addition to the economic problems – experienced a rise in their burden of domestic work, care work, and femicidal violence.

⁴⁶ | IM-Defensoras. [The Crisis Was Already Here](#) states that, in 2020, confinement increased poverty. Millions of people who make their living through informal work lost their livelihoods, or were forced to continue working at risk of contagion. Many others continue migrating to escape poverty and violence, but were detained or abandoned on the way. Entire communities live in hunger.

Transfemicides of women defenders members of OTRANS in Guatemala

Avigail Morales

Avigail was murdered on 10 January 2021, and her body was found in Zone 1 of the Escuintla municipality and department. She was stoned to death, and her body showed signs of sexual violence. She was a member of the Trans Organization Queens of the Night (OTRANS for its acronym in Spanish).

Cecy Caricia Ixpatá

Cecy was beaten to death by two unidentified persons on 9 June 2021 in the Salamá municipality of the Baja Verapaz department. She was found agonizing inside the market where she sold vegetables and fruits. She died in the national hospital of Salamá, where she was taken after being discovered. The woman defender was a member of OTRANS and of the National Network of Trans People in Guatemala.

Andrea Mutz González

Andrea was president of OTRANS. She was murdered on the night of 11 June 2021. The well-known 28-year-old woman defender was attacked by unidentified persons with firearms near her home in Zone 2 of Guatemala City. Two months earlier, the woman defender had filed a complaint with the police regarding death threats that she had received, but the authorities did not investigate the situation nor did they grant her protection measures.

Jennifer Meléndez

Jennifer died on 28 June 2021 from injuries suffered due to extreme violence against her. She was a woman human rights defender and a member of OTRANS. She died in San Benito regional hospital in the department of Petén, after being attacked by family members.

Samantha Argueta Sagastizado

Samantha was a woman defender member of OTRANS. She was murdered on 14 August 2021. Her body was found on the side of the Interamerican Highway in Jutiapa. The Petén branch of OTRANS reported the incident.

Transfemicide of woman defender Zashy del Cid in El Salvador

Zashy del Cid

Zashy was murdered in San Miguel on 25 April 2021. She was 27 years old and was member of *Colectivo Perlas del Oriente* [Pearls of the Orient Collective]; she was part of the grassroots base of the Association for Outreach and Training for Trans Women with HIV (COMCAVIS TRANS for its acronym in Spanish)⁴⁷. The woman defender was shot in the chest, and the bullet perforated her lung leading to her death at the hospital where she was taken.

Zashy had received death threats starting in 2015, and had previously been brutally beaten almost to death. Given the risks she faced and the impunity that protected her attackers, Zashy was forcefully displaced several times throughout her life. This record of violence against her culminated in her murder, for which the MS13 gang is blamed.

The transfemicide of Zashy took place in a context where hate messages against the LGBTIQ+ community are spread with impunity through social media. In March 2021, the Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in El Salvador publicly denounced the transphobia expressed through digital harassment, ridicule, and threats made by groups that speak out against women's rights and against women defenders who are members of this network.⁴⁸

A few months later, in August, the Network in El Salvador denounced that – with absolute disregard for life and using a misogynistic and transphobic narrative – a Twitter account spread the message that “help is needed to kill ten trans”, calling on “anyone wanted to join” in “cleaning up this society” and claiming to have home addresses for potential victims.⁴⁹ [Own translation.]

⁴⁷ | IM-Defensoras. [Transfemicidio contra defensora Zashy del Cid](#). 27 April 2021.

⁴⁸ | National Network of WHRDs in El Salvador. [Acoso digital, burlas, amenazas y transfobia a defensoras por parte de grupos que están en contra de los derechos de las mujeres](#). 12 March 2021.

⁴⁹ | National Network of WHRDs in El Salvador. [Organizaciones y colectivos trans denuncian amenazas de muerte e incitación a crímenes de odio contra mujeres trans](#). 14 August 2021.

Transfemicide of woman defender Valery Pereira in Honduras

Valery Pereira

Valery was murdered on 14 May 2021. The body of the 23-year-old woman defender was found by neighbors on the sidewalk near the health center in the Cerrato neighborhood of La Lima. Bloody stones were found next to her body, which are assumed to have been used to attack her and murder her.

Transfemicide of woman defender Anahis Contreras in Nicaragua

Anahis Contreras

Known as Lala, was cruelly murdered on 2 March 2021 in the Somotillo municipality of the Chinandega department. The 22-year-old woman defender was tied to a horse and dragged to her death. Bernardo Arístides Pastrana Ochoa, 29, and Jorge Luis Mondragón Acosta, 25, were convicted as perpetrator and co-perpetrator of the crime.

2022: A DISCOURAGING START TO THE YEAR

The scenario for defending human rights in the region at the start of 2022 is already discouraging. Although the first four months of the year do not allow us to reach conclusions, *we can describe the start of a year with a continuation of the conditions and challenges that existed in 2020 and 2021.*

Based on the information published in early 2022,⁵⁰ homophobic and transphobic violence and discrimination persists in the region. Linked to this are the protection challenges for LGBTIQ+ persons and the struggle against the impunity prevalent in these situations. Another important matter is the role of the police and gangs in committing this violence, as well as the fact that LGBTIQ+ people are often forced to flee their countries to seek protection.

The first four months of the year already include the documented transfemicide of woman defender Thalía Rodríguez in Honduras. Thalía was murdered on 11 January 2022 in her home, located on the slopes of Juana Lainez Hill in Tegucigalpa. Several armed men entered her house and shot her in the head. The woman defender was a member of the Cattrachas Lesbian Network and was a leader in her community, where she did remarkable work defending the rights of transgender people, as well as in promoting the right to health for the community and people living with HIV. Her leadership was widely recognized in Honduras.⁵¹ —

50 | Challenges to protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people persist in Guatemala. In El Salvador, LGBTIQ+ people continue being targets of homophobic and transphobic violence committed by – among others – the police, gangs, and society; in many cases, LGBTIQ+ people flee the country in search of protection. In Honduras, LGBTIQ+ people are often targets for discrimination, extortion, and violence committed by gangs, the national civil police and military police, as well as society at large; migration for these motives are also common. In Nicaragua, human rights defenders continue to be targeted with death threats, attacks, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, online defamation campaigns, detention, and arbitrary criminal procedures. In Mexico, violence against human rights defenders is almost never investigated or punished. Based on Human Rights Watch. [World Report 2022: Annual review of human rights around the globe](#). January 2022

51 | IM-Defensoras. [Transfemicidio de defensora Thalía Rodríguez](#). 10 January 2022

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY AGAINST TRANS DEFENDERS IN MESOAMERICA

Through the registry, we were able to identify systematic expressions or patterns of violence and impunity in the documented transfemicides, as well as in the State response to these attacks. These are underpinned by transphobia, misogyny, and cisnormative stereotypes.⁵²

⁵² | In its [Advisory Opinion OC-24/17 on Gender Identity, and Equality and Non-Discrimination of Same-Sex Couples](#), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights includes a glossary of terminology that defines cisnormativity as the “idea or expectation that all people are cisgender, and that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women.” Heteronormativity “refers to the cultural bias in favor of heterosexual relationships, under which such relationships are deemed normal, natural and ideal, and are preferred over same-gender or same-sex relationships. This concept is composed of legal, social and cultural rules that require individuals to act according to dominant and ruling heterosexual patterns.”

The transfemicides were preceded by assaults or threats⁵³, including death threats that were regularly reported to the authorities without the latter doing anything to investigate the events or protect the complainants. This pattern is clear in various cases, including Mireya Rodríguez Lemus (Mexico 2020), Luz Clarita Zúniga (Honduras 2020), Scarleth Campbell (Honduras 2020), Mía Colluchi (Honduras 2020), Andrea Mutz González (Guatemala 2021), and Zashy del Cid (El Salvador 2021). All of them had previously received threats. Scarleth was sexually threatened by two police officers; there is documentation that one month prior to her murder, Andrea had denounced threats she received with the police; Zashy had previously been the victim of a brutal beating. We have also noted this pattern in relation to women defenders in other spheres, such as those defending land, territory, and access to justice.⁵⁴

We also identified systematic violence and the viciousness and symbolism with which it is expressed during the deadly attacks.⁵⁵ In some of the cases reported, evidence was found of previous torture, injuries from stone throwing, sexual violence, genital amputation, and one of the victims was even dragged by a horse until she died. Sometimes their bodies appear naked and with their hair cut off, exposing symbolic violence. This was exemplified in the cases of Luisa “Wicha” Sandoval (Guatemala 2020), who showed signs of torture, genital amputation and haircutting; Mireya Rodríguez Lemus (Mexico 2020), whose body showed signs of prior violence; Valery Pereira (Honduras 2021), who had signs that her death was caused by stones and bullet wounds; and Anahí “Lala” Contreras (Nicaragua 2021), who was tied to a horse and dragged to death.

⁵³ | This can be found in the transfemicides of Mireya Rodríguez Lemus (Mexico 2020) who had suffered threats and received intimidating messages months before her murder; Luz Clarita Zúniga (Honduras 2020) who had reported threats; Scarleth Campbell (Honduras 2020) had received rape threats from two police officers; Mía Colluchi (Honduras 2020) had previously reported threats; a month before she was murdered, Andrea Mutz González (Guatemala 2021) had reported to the police having received death threats.

⁵⁴ | Forty-five attempted killings of women defenders of land and territory were documented between 2015 and 2019, according to the report: IM-Defensoras. [Tendencia en defensoras de tierra, territorio y justicia. 2021](#). p. 4

⁵⁵ | A pattern of viciousness and cruelty can also be observed in the acts of violence against LGBTIQ+ persons in the region. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). [IACHR Expresses Concern over Recent Violent Attacks against LGBTI People in the Americas](#), 14 March 2019.

A third pattern identified relates to the profile of the women defenders who face these incidents, as most of them were well-known leaders whose prominence contributed to raising the visibility of the community they represented, and who were seen as key point persons in the trans movement and in the struggle for trans rights.

Karla Valentina Camarena del Castillo (Mexico 2020) led the struggle to recognize the gender identity of the trans community in Guanajuato. María Elizabeth Montaña Fernández (Mexico 2020) worked as coordinator for Health Education of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS for its acronym in Spanish) and she headed a national initiative to improve the health system's care for the trans community based on protocols and with a human rights approach. Jeanine Huerta López (Mexico 2020) was involved in the SER Community Center, and she was the first trans woman to participate in a research project at the University of California in San Diego. Mireya Rodríguez Lemus (México 2020) founded the association Chihuahuan Trans Women Strength and Union and was promoter for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Aline Sánchez (Mexico 2021) was a member of the Toluca Collective of Famous Trans Women and worked for many years to promote the equal marriage and gender identity law. Andrea Mutz (Guatemala 2021) was the legal representative and president of OTRANS, a pioneer organization in the defense of trans rights that has worked for years to achieve recognition and respect for sex workers in Guatemala.

In this sense, we can affirm that their role as women defenders seems to be the determining factor in at least some of these crimes. *The Inter-American Court of Human Rights states that “violence against LGBTI⁵⁶ people has a symbolic purpose; the victim is chosen in order to communicate a message of exclusion or subordination.* On this point, the Court has indicated that the use of violence for discriminatory reasons has the purpose or effect of preventing or annulling the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the person who is the object of the discrimination, regardless of whether that person identifies themselves with a determined category.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ | The acronym LGBTI is specifically used by the Inter-American Court as quoted here. Throughout this report, when not directly quoting others, we use the acronym LGBTIQ+.

⁵⁷ | Inter-American Court of Human Rights. [CASE OF AZUL ROJAS MARÍN ET AL. V. PERU. Merits, reparations and costs.](#) Judgment of 13 March 2020. Par 93

Finally, we found a pattern of impunity in relation to the crimes,⁵⁸ linked to the failure of States to investigate and punish those responsible. Impunity in cases of violence against trans women defenders increases the community's vulnerability and makes it more difficult to formally identify the motive for the attacks they face, to link them to the political defense work they conduct, and to respond appropriately. Only two of the cases of transfemicides documented in this report include an investigation and the arrest of some of the perpetrators of the crimes. The rest remain in impunity.

It is worth mentioning that cisnormative gender stereotypes, misogyny, transphobia, the absence of specialized legislation, and/or the human rights-based application of existing gender and intersectional laws prevent the full guarantee of trans women's fundamental rights. This makes it even more difficult for State authorities to identify patterns of violence and act to punish those responsible. —

58 | Only two of the transfemicides documented included a report of an investigation and arrest: in the case of Anahís Contreras, murdered in Nicaragua on 2 March 2021, 2 men were arrested for the crime; and in the case of Mireya Rodríguez Lemus, murdered in Mexico, where the investigation shows some progress.

TRANSCENDING HATRED

Naming Karla Valentina, María Elizabeth, Jeanine, Mireya, Luisa, Luz Clarita, Alejandra, Scarleth, Cristal, Mía, Carolina, Aline, Cecy, Andrea, Jennifer, Samantha, Avigail, Zashy, Valery, Anahís, and Thalía is a way of remembering that they are missing among us. It is a way of recognizing that their absence not only leaves a void among their loved ones but also in the dignified human struggles that they pursued.

Their absences are felt in spaces and collectives where the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community and equal marriage are defended, where sex education is provided and the rights of people living with HIV are defended, where recognition of the gender identity of trans people is promoted, where improvements in the care they receive from the health system are demanded, where the struggle to end the precariousness of sex work and to recognize their right to work is fought.

In this difficult context, trans women defenders have become increasingly visible and continue to carry their voices and demands increasingly further. They have succeeded in TRANScending hatred, violence, the syndemic, and a history of crises caused by a patriarchal and capitalist system that is structurally unequal, discriminatory, and violent.

There have been significant advances in the struggle for justice in the murders trans women in Mesoamerica during 2020 and 2021. Trans women defenders have been able to make visible causal links between the significant prejudices that prevail against trans women and the impunity in which the violence they face remains. One example of this is the case of Francela Méndez, trans woman defender from El Salvador and member of the Alejandría Collective, murdered in 2015. The investigations into her murder have been marred by assumptions that trans women are sex workers, that they are involved in drug dealing or that they are connected to gangs, all of which are determining factors in the failure to investigate these cases.⁵⁹

The efforts of women defenders of the organization Aspid-Arcoiris Trans⁶⁰ regarding the murder of Camila Díaz⁶¹ in El Salvador led in 2020 to the first-ever sentencing of police officers as responsible for the violent death of a trans woman in their custody. This is a historic sentence in a country that insists on making the reality of sexual diversity invisible and that denies the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. Camila Díaz was a community leader involved with COMCAVIS TRANS, and she participated in other civil society spaces defending LGBTIQ+ rights. Her body was found on Saturday, 9 November 2019 floating on the Torola River, bound by her hands and inside a bag with stones.

Although the case was not considered a hate crime, nor was it qualified as such in the sentencing, this conviction sets an important precedent in the fight against impunity in El Salvador. This sentence counters the message of tolerance towards this type of acts conveyed by the involvement of the police, and that “leads others to believe that they can harm people with non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities with impunity.”⁶² It is also a firm step forward towards access to justice for LGBTIQ+ people in the country⁶³, opening the door for the other ten transfemicides that took place in El Salvador between 2019 and 2020 to have a similar outcome, thereby breaking with the historical impunity that has protected the murderers.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ | The Police Chief linked Francela’s murder to activities related to drug dealing.

⁶⁰ | Information provided by the National Network of WHRDs in El Salvador.

⁶¹ | Jade Camila Díaz, community leader involved with COMCAVIS TRANS in the Morazán department in the Eastern region of the country, and participant in other civil society spaces defending LGBTIQ+ rights. Her body was found on Saturday, 9 November 2019 floating on the Torola River in the Morazán department, bound by her hands and inside a bag with stones; the identity of the perpetrators in unknown. Paula Rosales. [LGBTI por prejuicio y que todavía siguen impunes](#). Agencia Presentes, 12 November 2019.

⁶² | Human Rights Watch. [El Salvador: Police Officers Convicted for Transgender Murder](#), 31 July 2020.

⁶³ | María Luz Nóchez. [Camila, la primera víctima trans que encontró justicia en 25 años](#). El Faro, 25 August 2020.

⁶⁴ | Seven trans women were murdered over the period of five months: Anahy Miranda Rivas, Jade Camila Díaz, Victoria Pineda, D. Rosa Granados, Cristi Conde Vásquez, Briyit Michelle Alas, and Tita. Ibid.

In the case of Mireya Rodríguez Lemus, the trans women defenders from the organization Chihuahuan Trans Women Strength and Union succeeded in 2020 in having the alleged perpetrator identified and brought to trial. The trans women defenders began their work when Mireya's body was found in her home. From that moment on, they mounted guard to prevent any break-in of the house and disturbance of the crime scene while waiting for the authorities. They ensured that the investigation and follow-up of the case was taken seriously, and organized themselves to be attentive to the steps taken by the authorities and to provide information to the community. They designed a political advocacy strategy in which they mobilized several organizations at the state and national level, and sent a petition to the Attorney General and the Governor of the State requesting that the case be taken forward with objectivity and diligence, opposing lines of investigation that sought to make Mireya look like a criminal. Thanks to the trans women defenders' efforts, Mireya's case continues to proceed. A trial will begin in May 2022, during which the court is expected to hear from more than 140 witnesses, including Mireya's sister defenders who succeeded in ensuring that her case does not go unpunished. This will be the first transfemicide of a trans woman defender to be tried in the state of Chihuahua.

On 26 March 2021, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a judgment against the State of Honduras for the transfemicide of woman defender and leader Vicky Hernández.⁶⁵ Vicky was the first extrajudicial execution victim of the de facto regime that followed the 2009 coup d'état; she was a sex worker and a recognized activist of the trans women's human rights organization *Unidad Color Rosa* [Pink Unity] in San Pedro Sula.

According to the Court's sentence, the events took place on the night of the coup d'état, since Vicky Hernández was last seen on 28 June 2009 fleeing from a police arrest after a curfew had been declared.

The Court's ruling acknowledged that, although some investigative steps were made regarding the transfemicide, up to the date of the judgment the investigations had not yielded results. The ruling recognizes that the incident had taken place in "a context of discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons in which trans women sex workers were victims of lethal and non-lethal violence that mainly involved police officers", and that most of these incidents remained in impunity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ | Inter-American Court of Human Rights. [Vicky Hernández et al v. Honduras. Merits, reparations and costs](#) Judgment of 26 March 2021. And Inter-American Court of Human Rights, [Hearings on the Case of Vicky Hernandez et al v Honduras. \(11 November and 12 November 2020\)](#)

⁶⁶ | Inter-American Court of Human Rights. [Vicky Hernández et al v. Honduras. Merits, reparations and costs](#) Judgment of 26 March 2021. Par. 93 [Own translation.]

In its Judgment, the Court found that the State of Honduras was responsible for violating the rights to recognition as a person before the law, to personal liberty, to privacy, to freedom of expression, and to a name.⁶⁷ It also holds the State responsible for the violation of Vicky Hernández's rights to life and to personal integrity⁶⁸. Furthermore, it stated that State responsibility had been established through evidence of the participation of State agents in the events and a finding that the violence committed against her was due to her gender expression or identity. It added that the Honduran State failed to comply with the obligation to "*refrain from engaging in any act or practice of violence against women and to ensure that their authorities, officials, personnel, agents, and institutions act in conformity with this obligation,*" as established in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.⁶⁹

Moreover, the Court found that the rights to due process and judicial protection⁷⁰, and the obligation to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish violence against women – as established in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women – were violated in the case of Vicky Hernández's family members. Furthermore, the Court declared that the right to personal integrity of the woman defender's family members was violated, due to the impacts on her family of Vicky's death and the lack of resolution of the case.⁷¹

It cannot be overlooked that the demand for justice in this case has led to acts of intimidation and violence against the persons involved in the process, which led the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to grant provisional measures for Vicky's mother and members of Cattrachas, the organization that has litigated the case.⁷²

⁶⁷| Articles 3, 7, 11, 13, and 18 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

⁶⁸| Articles 4 and 5 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

⁶⁹| Article 7.a of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.

⁷⁰| Articles 8 and 25 of the American Convention on Human Rights.

⁷¹| Article 7.b of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.

⁷²| Resolución de la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos de 12 de noviembre de 2020. [Caso Vicky Hernandez y otros Vs. Honduras. Adopción de Medidas Provisionales.](#)

Trans women defenders also won significant victories in 2022. The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice of El Salvador issued a partial ruling on 22 February, recognizing that trans persons can change their name on their identity documents according to their self-perceived gender. The ruling came in response to a constitutional complaint filed in 2016 warning that Articles 11 and 23 of the Law on the Name of the Natural Person (LNPN for its acronym in Spanish) violated the rights of trans persons to change their name.

Although the ruling does not address trans people's ability to legally change their gender identity, it states that "the Legislative Assembly must issue the necessary reform to provide for the conditions that must be met by any person who wishes to change their name to be compatible with their gender identity."⁷³

Equally important has been the resolution issued on 3 March by Mexico's Supreme Court of Justice⁷⁴ in response to claim 73/2021 filed by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH for its acronym in Spanish). The resolution stipulates that trans children should not have to wait until the age of 18 to apply for a birth certificate recognizing their gender identity. The procedure, it states, should be fast, prompt and free of charge, based on free and informed consent, and designed with an intersectional perspective.⁷⁵

The key protagonists of these advances have been LGBTIQ+ defenders, collectives, and – especially – trans women who, facing discrimination in access to the justice system and the impunity of the perpetrators of crimes against them, have managed to produce highly relevant judicial responses at both the national and international levels. —

⁷³ | [El Salvador: LGBTIQ+ Population Asks for a Law on Identity](#), 25 February 2022. TeleSur.

⁷⁴ | Suprema Corte Justicia de la Nación. [Suprema Corte invalida la exigencia de tener 18 años cumplidos para solicitar el levantamiento de una nueva acta de nacimiento para el reconocimiento de la identidad de género autopercebida de las personas trans](#). 3 March 2022. [Own translation.]

⁷⁵ | Some challenges nevertheless persist in the nation-wide implementation of this decision. Seventeen Mexican states have issued gender identity laws that allow name change and self-perceived identity, however 15 states have not yet implemented the relevant legislative changes; a similar situation exists with equal marriage legislation, where 8 states have yet to implement it.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the cases presented and the analysis conducted, we can assert that there is a worrying increase in the rate of transfemicides of women defenders in Mesoamerica starting in 2020, which continued throughout 2021. This situation relates both to the increase in violations of LGBTIQ+ rights and to the increase in violence against women, and specifically women defenders, in the authoritarian and repressive context in which many States responded to the COVID-19 health crisis in the region.

Analyzing the transfemicides of women defenders during 2020, 2021, and 2022 reveals expressions of systematic violence in three key moments: prior to the murder – with documented threats and incidents of violence that remain in impunity; during the transfemicidal act – featuring a viciousness in the actions as well as symbolic elements in the types of violence; and in the period after the murders – which proceed with almost complete impunity. These factors, as well as the fact the attacks were directed at high-profile women defenders, allow us to affirm the existence of patterns in the attacks.

The majority of the cases described in this report have been marked by impunity, not only in relation to the attacks and threats that the direct victims faced prior to their death, but also in relation to the transfemicides. Trans-hating cisnormative stereotypes permeate the institutions and their civil servants, determining the reactions of the States to these crimes, affecting not only the surviving victims – family members, collectives, and community – but also society as a whole, which receives the message that violence against trans women defenders is tolerated and accepted.

Outside the support networks of collectives, organizations, and civil society networks, the work and lives of trans women defenders in Mesoamerica remain in a serious situation of vulnerability and very far from receiving due protection from the State. Nonetheless, trans women defenders and their organizations continue to conduct their highly important daily work, with significant achievements in facing and preventing the multiple human rights violations against the trans community.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AUTHORITIES:

We urge States to:

1. Refrain from acting in a discriminatory manner against persons of diverse gender identities or transgender persons.
2. Enact the necessary measures to ensure the effectiveness of specialized legislation, including gender identity laws⁷⁶, to protect women human rights defenders in a comprehensive manner that is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ persons, and to create enabling environments for the development of their work.
 - a. Conduct systematic and ongoing training and awareness-raising for public officials, including justice operators and law enforcement officers on the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
3. Adopt all necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of trans women defenders and prevent these crimes.
 - a. Ensure that protection norms and mechanisms for defenders respond to the specific protection needs of trans women defenders.

⁷⁶ Countries of the region and the Mexican states without gender identity laws that allow the issuance of an identification document or passport according to the identity of trans women make it difficult to defend rights. This is due to the reality that official institutions request official identity documents in order to process a formal consultation or procedure. Trans women defenders are thus denied the exercise of their rights. They are further limited in their ability to defend rights due to travel restrictions because of lack of documents.

4. Conduct effective, diligent, and stereotype-free investigations of cases of violence and discrimination against trans women defenders. Investigations should take into account the work carried out by the victims and seek to identify and punish the assailants, whether they are State agents or private individuals, in order to reverse the perception that these crimes are tolerated by the authorities in the region and to enable reparations to be made to the victims. We therefore demand that authorities:
 - a. Develop spaces for collaboration and coordination between civil society organizations and the State institutions responsible for ensuring justice, in order to (among other):
 - I. Analyze how transphobic violence is linked to the violence that trans women defenders face because of their work defending rights.
 - II. Develop specialized protocols to investigate violence affecting the rights of trans women defenders and the collectives that defend LGBTIQ+ rights.

FOR OUR PART, THE NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN DEFENDERS MUST:

- ▶ Ensure the participation of trans women defenders in spaces to discuss, analyze, and address violence against women defenders, creating safe spaces free of transphobia.
- ▶ Address the specific protection needs of the trans community and their organizations, based on their experiences and knowledge; ensure that the protection measures implemented by civil society respond to these needs, and that those promoted by States respond to this same logic.
- ▶ Analyze and develop intersectional Feminist Holistic Protection actions that address misogyny, transphobia, and cisnormativity in all aspects of trans women defenders' lives, including within women's and feminist movements.

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