

# Indispensable Measures to ensure The Holistic Protection And Leadership of WHRDs

§ Within the context of the Generation Equality Forum, and re-affirming the analysis and proposals presented in the “Women Radically Transforming the World in Crisis” framework document;

§ As organizations committed to gender justice, protecting our territories, and caring for the lives and rights of women, trans, intersex and non-binary people, which are legitimate struggles for our societies’ radical transformation;

§ Alarmed by the devastating impacts of a system that has created an unsustainable situation of violence against WHRDs, our organizations, and our communities. A system sustained by racism, patriarchy, ableism, and capitalism, and discrimination against those that do not conform to established mandates;

§ Recognizing that any commitment towards equality, justice, and peace is only possible within an environment of protection and respect of the right to defend rights of WHRDs in all their diversity;

§ Acknowledging that violence against WHRDs, as well as gender-based violence and inequities are exacerbated by the COVID crisis, but especially by States’ non-compliance with their human rights obligations, the disproportionate power of corporations and other non-State actors, and an enduring lack of commitment to address structural causes of this violence and injustice;

§ We demand that States, as well as relevant intergovernmental mechanisms and donors, immediately adopt a set of indispensable and urgent measures to ensure the holistic protection of WHRDs, who are working to build a future with dignity and justice for all.

§ **Note:** In this document, the term WHRDs refers to women’s human rights defenders, which includes rights defenders of all ages, races, castes, classes, regions, abilities, sexual orientations and gender identities who engage in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and all people who engage in the advancement of gender justice and equality, either individually or in association with others. This group includes women and other feminist, trans, intersex, and non-binary rights defenders.



# WE DEMAND

## *an end to the killing of WHRDs*

Globally, 28% of human rights defenders killed in 2020 worked for women's human rights <sup>1</sup>. The killing of WHRDs is one of the most evident failures of the democratic system. These killings threaten all WHRDs with punishment if they raise their voices and therefore inhibit their participation in building more just societies.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *States:*

- § Ensure justice and accountability for all killings of WHRDs by State and non-State actors, acknowledge the gravity of these acts and end impunity and complicity between State and non-State actors in this violence;
- § Protect and promote a safe and enabling environment - both offline and online - where defenders and movements can exercise their activism and demand human rights safely. When States fail to guarantee such an enabling environment, they are violating their international human rights legal obligations;
- § Implement robust, permanent, effective, and holistic protection measures to WHRDs, even considering that the ones existing are not working. These mechanisms must have abundant and permanent funding, integrate a gendered and intercultural approach, and center the leadership and decision-making of WHRDs in their creation, implementation and evaluation;
- § Establish systems to track and register attacks against WHRDs with indicators on gender-based violence and the ability to clearly identify perpetrator and hold them accountable;
- § Dedicate particular attention to situations where the killing of a WHRD is connected to diverse identities at the intersection of misogyny, racism, classism, and other systems of oppression and violence that limit access to justice and protection;

- *The international community and human rights mechanisms:*

- § Reinforce States' duties outlined above, specifically denounce the particular impact of these crimes on WHRDs, take action to prevent further killings of WHRDs, and ensure the development and implementation of preventive and responsive integrated protection measures, including against reprisals;
- § Ensure that prevention and accountability for these intolerable acts should be an essential element in cooperation agendas, diplomatic exchanges, and investments.

<sup>1</sup> Front Line Defenders, [Global Analysis 2020](#).

# WE DEMAND

## *the recognition of WHRDs and an end to stigmatization and hate campaigns against WHRDs*

Worldwide, the increased presence and influence of feminist movements and WHRDs has been met with backlash from both State and non-State actors seeking to discredit and slander them. Planned and well-financed campaigns target and harass WHRDs, both online and offline, to cast doubt on the legitimacy of WHRDs' work and to stigmatize them. There has also been an alarming increase in online attacks against us, exacerbated by the shift to virtual platforms during the pandemic.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *States:*

- § Hold accountable every public official when they publish messages or orchestrate campaigns on social media to stigmatize or attack the legitimacy of WHRDs' work or identity. The use of public resources to organize and implement this type of campaigns should be recognized as particularly egregious;

- § Work with justice institutions to hold accountable non-State actors within their jurisdiction that engage in targeted attacks against defenders, through systematic and coordinated campaigns;

- *Corporate owners of social media platforms:*

- § Develop and implement policies to end stigma against WHRDs and ensure that rights to privacy are respected through measures that are necessary and proportionate;

- *International human rights mechanisms and other multilateral bodies:*

- § Conduct regular campaigns to recognize and support WHRDs' work and legitimacy.

# WE DEMAND

## *freedom for WHRDs who are political prisoners and an end to the criminalization and repression of protest*

We face a dangerous scenario for human rights defense due to the illegitimate, and in many cases illegal, use of law enforcement and justice institutions to arbitrarily detain and incarcerate WHRDs and repress their just demands. When WHRDs are criminalized, they face additional impacts such as family and social isolation and sexual violence and misogynist practices in justice systems.

Legal, fiscal, and financial frameworks in many countries increasingly restrict civic participation, freedom of association, and freedom of expression. In many cases, human rights organizations come under heavy scrutiny or are simply unable to obtain legal registration. This trend has been exacerbated during the pandemic, posing an existential threat to many WHRD organizations. The increasing adoption of counter-terrorism laws under the pretense of ‘national security,’ as well as sedition laws, is being used to penalize and incarcerate WHRDs and dissidents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many States have increased the policing of public space, sometimes with the deployment of law enforcement and military, which has made it even harder for people to collectively demand their rights.

Additionally, laws which are purported to fight disinformation, hate-speech, and fake news both online and offline, are increasingly used to silence dissent and detain those who speak out against human rights abuses.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *States:*

- § Immediately release detained WHRDs, end criminalization processes, and take steps to repair the harm done. This includes public communications to counter criminalization-related misogynistic and transphobic campaigns;

- § Immediately eliminate measures that ban foreign travel, restrict visas, create difficulties for civil society organizations to maintain their legal registration, freeze personal or organizational bank accounts and laws that restrict funding for their work

- § Refrain from using counter-terrorism laws, national security policies, and any laws and policies that restrict and criminalize speech, including online, to target and criminalize WHRDs;

*We demand freedom for WHRDs who are political prisoners and an end to the criminalization and repression of protest*

• *States:*

- § Take accountability for acts of surveillance against WHRDs, both online and offline;
- § Urgently adopt internal control mechanisms to sanction officials who use the justice system to criminalize WHRDs;
- § Dedicate particular attention to criminalization processes involving corporations that use the justice system to silence defenders and communities affected by their projects;
- § In accordance with existing international standards, assess and limit the presence of armed security forces at demonstrations, which constitutes one of the main sources of risk and attacks against protesters. Sexual violence and other forms of violence committed by security forces must be prevented and addressed to end impunity and ensure redress and access to justice for survivors and their families and communities;

• *Human rights mechanisms:*

- § Prioritize the release of WHRDs who are political prisoners, the non-criminalization of WHRDs, and the non-repression of social protest. All international cooperation agendas, diplomatic exchanges, and investments must adopt these principles.

# WE DEMAND

## *protection for WHRDs who migrate, seek asylum, and suffer from forced displacement*

The extreme violence that WHRDs face often forces them into exile or to seek asylum or migrate for safety. In the process, they too often experience more violence, -including sexual violence- and harsh migration restrictions and border policies, as well as a heavy impact on their work, families, organizations, communities, and movements.

WHRDs who have to relocate or are exiled face many difficulties in the places they relocate including economic precariousness, uprooting, harassment and sexual violence, racism and xenophobia, lack of support networks, and barriers to their families joining them. Asylum policies are highly restrictive and often subject to governments' discretionary and political decisions, making it very difficult for WHRDs to be granted asylum.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *States:*

- § Provide protection and asylum policies specific to foreign or migrant WHRDs, including special visas as well as integrated and collective protection programs that support the specific needs of WHRDs, including those of their families and organizations;

- § Ensure that temporary relocation programs incorporate shelter arrangements where WHRDs can be with their families, dedicate particular attention to the specific violence WHRDs face, and provide possibilities for permanent stays or accompaniment for asylum processes;

- § Provide access to jobs, housing, emergency grants, and unfettered access to bank accounts to WHRDs who are temporarily relocated or exiled so they cannot only live with dignity and autonomy, but also continue their human rights work.

# WE DEMAND

*that corporate actors stop dispossessing communities and killing and attacking WHRDs who defend environmental justice, land, and territory*

Since 2015, an average of four people are killed each week for speaking out against companies appropriating territories and wreaking havoc on the environment<sup>2</sup>. Transnational corporations have accumulated unprecedented power and wealth, and many earn their profits at the cost of violently killing, attacking, and defaming WHRDs. States, military institutions, and corporations are often acting in collusion, and place profit at the center of their policies and decisions.

WHRDs and their communities are the foundation of movements that defend their territories and offer vital alternative paradigms to counter the climate crisis and the conflicts created by the current economic model and imperialist foreign policies. This is why corporations, with State complicity, use their power to attack WHRDs, frequently through misogynist, racist, and transphobic assaults.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *State actors, development and finance institutions, and corporations::*
  - § Uphold Free Prior and Informed Consent principles and practices in good faith and withdraw from projects resisted by WHRDs and their communities;
  - § Stop activities when threats, harassment, assassinations, smear campaigns, or any other form of aggression against WHRDs or communities are reported;
  - § End impunity for any collusion between State and non-State actors to surveil WHRDs and support their criminalization;

<sup>2</sup> Global Witness, [Global Witness records the highest number of land and environmental activists murdered in one year – with the link to accelerating climate change of increasing concern](#), July 29, 2020.

*We demand that corporate actors stop dispossessing communities and killing and attacking WHRDs who defend environmental justice, land, and territory*

• *States:*

- § Fulfill their legal obligations to hold accountable corporations and other non-State actors within their jurisdiction when they violate human rights;
- § Support the development and implementation of domestic and international legally-binding mechanisms for corporate accountability, including the process to establish a UN and EU legally-binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights;

• *Development finance institutions:*

- § Take concrete measures such as requiring human rights due diligence reports as well as establishing or strengthening complaints mechanisms;

• *Corporations:*

- § Act in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and take into account the Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles<sup>3</sup>;
- § Commit to transparency in data collection and processing methods and respect the right to privacy as a fundamental human right in the context of data protection.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, [Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), Nov 22, 2019.



# WE DEMAND

## *abundant, predictable, and flexible resources for the holistic protection of WHRDs*

The lack of flexible and predictable financial funds for WHRDs' organizations and movements in all their diversity hinders their capacity to respond to and protect themselves from the violence that affects them and their communities. Access to general operating support that includes holistic protection strategies is vital to ensure the sustainability of their movements and struggles.

*In response, we demand that:*

- *Donors, in all their diversity:*

- § Finance holistic protection programs that are designed along with WHRDs in order to appropriately respond to the needs of WHRDs and their communities and movements;

- § Ensure timely and adequate financial resources to support the struggles of WHRDs and their organizations and movements. This includes multi-year, flexible, core funding to enable them to operate sustainably, as well as support for strategies that strengthen their holistic protection capacities (especially at the territorial and national level), such as resources for psychosocial care and healing, safety and security, protection networks, and infrastructure, including digital security exchanges of experiences, and protection tools;

- § Find ways to support WHRDs despite increasing restrictions, including through collaboration with WHRDs working in the most violent and restricted contexts to create alternatives that ensure funding to support their struggles effectively and safely;

- § Leverage their resources and influence to advocate against such restrictions and to counter the political persecution and isolation of defenders in national contexts and at all levels.