

Mobilizing Women's Collective Power

JASS Mesoamerica (Asociadas por lo Justo), the regional network of the international feminist organization, JASS (Just Associates), strengthens and leverages the collective power of women to promote justice, safety, and accountability in a context of impunity and violence. Coordinated by a team of six activists, popular educators, and human rights experts in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua, JASS Mesoamerica partners with diverse social movements and groups of women human rights defenders, indigenous leaders, and feminists to amplify its reach. JASS Mesoamerica's learning and training activities create safe spaces that allow for in-depth political analysis and strategizing among very diverse women, enabling them to bridge differences and build linkages across issues, identities, and movements. These reflection processes are embedded in an ongoing organizing strategy to mobilize political and media pressure at national and regional levels to demand accountability and to gain support for women's agendas and critical contributions to justice.



Threats to Women's Rights & Safety

Mesoamerica is a dangerous place for women and families, and even more so for women human rights defenders (*defensoras*.) Femicide, on the rise in the region, has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of women. The criminalization of abortion, a serious blow to women's reproductive rights and health, has led to the arrest of hundreds of women. JASS strategies enable women to better navigate and confront the dynamics that create this intensifying violence:

- ◆ Governments' reduced capacity and will to ensure women's rights and safety;
- ◆ The growing influence and violence of drug cartels, gangs and organized crime;
- ◆ The criminalization of social protests alongside increased impunity for perpetrators, especially in relation to organized crime;
- ◆ Increasing political and policy influence wielded by well-financed conservative religious groups seeking to reverse women's rights gains and secularism;
- ◆ The marginalization of women and women's rights agendas in other social movements.

At the same time, people are uniting and mobilizing to stop the violence, like the No More Blood movement in Mexico, and to demand democracy and accountability, like the Feminists in Resistance, which is part of the Resistance Front in Honduras. International policies, particularly US drug policy, seem to fuel repression and violence rather than halt it, while international human rights institutions are eager to find better responses but often lack information about the complex situation women face.

Strengthening Women's Movements & Visibility

Following a roadmap originally forged by 30 women movement leaders and feminists at the JASS Movement-building Institute in Panama in 2006, JASS Mesoamerica has developed a two-pronged strategy that links training and reflection (through feminist popular education) to political organizing and action. Since that time, JASS has collaborated with dozens of Mesoamerican women's groups in convening cutting-edge feminist training institutes for diverse women, facilitating an ongoing communications' training program with indigenous and rural women, and mobilizing over 25 urgent actions and two fact-finding missions to spotlight the struggles and challenges of women organizing for rights and justice.



JASS Mesoamerica's Key Initiatives

Mar de Cambios

Sea Change Feminist Leadership Schools

Mar de Cambios fills the urgent need among Mesoamerican women movement leaders, defenders and feminist activists for retooling and for political capacity-building. In safe spaces, women deepen their analysis, knowledge, skills, and defense strategies, developing creative uses of social media to connect, organize and amplify agendas. *Mar de Cambios* is the learning, training and knowledge-generation component of JASS Mesoamerica's strategy, carried out in collaboration with national organizations, including Sinergia No'j (Guatemala) and CEASPA



(Panama). The combination of on-line and face-to-face activities is sustained over several years with a focus on *defensoras*, indigenous and rural women leaders, young women activists, as well as the regional alliance, *Las Petateras*.

Women Human Rights Defenders

On the frontlines of social justice, many *defensoras* suffer threats and even death as reprisals for their work. The violence they experience is gendered and often sexualized. *Defensoras* fight on diverse fronts, from land rights to LGBTI and indigenous women's rights, from reproductive rights to pursuing justice for family members wronged by government or organized crime. Institutions of government and civil society will not protect them, and in some cases, cause the violence. Some women activists are stigmatized or threatened by their own communities and families for their work. In many cases, women do not see themselves as human rights defenders despite being on the frontlines of justice struggles. In response to the increasing violence and inadequate responses, JASS reached out to various women's rights organizations and in 2010, launched an initiative in partnership with six national, regional and international organizations, which:

- ◆ strengthens the skills and confidence of *defensoras* through human rights training and safe spaces for dealing with trauma and isolation;
- ◆ carries out action-research with women to generate analysis and information about the causes and nature of the violence women activists face; including the initial ground-breaking findings contained in the *Regional Baseline Report on Violence against WHRD in Mesoamerica*, which was used by UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in her December 2010 report;
- ◆ creates and improves mechanisms for immediate response to violations and builds an international network that is activated for global solidarity;
- ◆ engages with regional and international human rights institutions, including the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the UN High Commission for Human Rights - in March 2011, partners traveled to Geneva to meet with high level human rights officials including the Special Rapporteur;
- ◆ establishes national networks among *defensoras* for mutual support and protection.

Many of JASS' urgent action and international media strategies are carried out in collaboration with the Nobel Women's Initiative who utilize their star power to enhance the legitimacy and visibility of these justice agendas.

JASS' Partners on the *Defensoras* Initiative

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala (UDEFEQUA), La Colectiva Feminista (El Salvador), Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca (México) and the Central American Women's Fund (FCAM).

Spotlighting Women's Resistance



A primary ally, *Las Petateras* formed at the first JASS regional movement-building institute in 2006. Guided by a shared commitment to reshape and repair the social fabric with democratic and feminist values, this regional women's

alliance mobilizes urgent actions to spotlight women on the frontline. The *Observatorio de la Transgresión Feminista/ Women's Transformation Watch*, a political organizing and media strategy, responds to critical events affecting women by gathering on-the-ground and virtual support and observers. In 2009, in response to the coup in Honduras and the increased violence in Guatemala, JASS co-organized with Feminist International Radio, the Center for Women's Rights in Honduras and others, fact-finding missions to investigate the situation of women in connection with *Observatorios* in those countries.

