



### **Women's Transformation Watch: Women Crossing the Line (Observatorio de Transgresión Feminista)**

This innovative political strategy was invented at a gathering of diverse Central American and Mexican women leaders and feminist activists convened by Just Associates (JASS) in Panama in August 2006 "*Imagining and Re-Building Feminist Movements for the Future*". It takes a fresh approach to building and using collective the power of women across differences to respond effectively to pivotal political moments, opportunities, and crises in the region. Coordinated by a growing number of diverse organizations and activists this strategy involves mobilizing the physical and virtual solidarity of women from near and far, and accessible radio and other communications strategies to spotlight and support the women most affected by injustices—in contexts ranging from widespread violence and repression to elections. The strategy was created to respond to the fact that the everyday ways that women challenge discrimination and oppression are often invisible to the public eye and lost as sources of feminist inspiration that can appeal to the broader public. The watch is a deliberate and complementary alternative to networking around policy opportunities that are often disconnected from the concrete needs and aspirations of the majority of women in the region.

The first regional "watch" was organized around the high-stakes Nicaraguan election where otherwise "progressive" candidates traded away women's basic reproductive rights to gain favor with conservative allies leading up to election day. The watch highlighted women's roles and priorities as candidates and citizens within a broader historical analysis of that complex political situation. The second watch, in Oaxaca in April, accompanied the *Gathering of Women in Resistance*, which mobilized hundreds of women across Mexico and Latin America to support and re-attract public attention to the women fighting state repression, exposing lawlessness and demanding accountability in that city even as that 'story' slips from the headlines. The third will take place in September and feature the many Costa Rican women who have been working closely with environmentalists, trade unionists, grassroots activists, indigenous rights activists and business leaders to educate, mobilize, and build bridges across diverse communities in preparation for the national plebiscite to determine whether the country will sign the Central America Free Trade Agreement. Plans are also in the works for a watch around the November Guatemalan elections, where one of the participants in this initiative is a vice-presidential candidate. The watch will feature the voices, actions and priorities of indigenous women and women's rights leaders whose efforts to participate are often in the shadows during electoral processes, particularly in a context where impunity and violence are rampant.

Each watch involves the collaboration of many different actors. As the strategy matures, the hope is that it will become an "open source tool"—available for different actors to use, adapt and share. However, in its early stages through 2008, it is coordinated by JASS with the many activists and organizations involved in the open movement-building process. Feminist International Radio Endeavour (FIRE) is a critical ally in the communications strategy, offering airtime for a special *Radio Petatera* (Weaver Radio) program—also created in the Panama meeting—to broadcast critical moments from each Watch. JASS has also persuaded the Nobel Women's Initiative to lend their prestigious voice to several watches through public statements of support that reach a broader media audience. A team of allies prepares an electronic bulletin, *La Petatera*, to document the watches through a lens of feminist analysis, drawing insights for how these moments enable diverse women to find common cause across boundaries of class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and location in a way that builds collective power from the ground up to make a difference. Thus the fast-paced political actions can be shared more broadly to expand and deepen learning about effective political strategies for women's rights. Within the next few months, another key related strategy will continue to tap into the excitement of the watch: the launch of the Sea Change Feminist Leadership schools in the region.