



CAWN

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2014-15

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EDITORIAL

This Newsletter provides details and information about CAWN's current work and recent publications. It also provides a round-up of the struggles and campaigns being conducted by women in the Central America region to defend their rights and those of their communities. This issue focuses particularly on the struggles of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD), many of whom are members of indigenous communities in Guatemala and Honduras, who have shown enormous courage in fighting to defend their rights and those of their communities against the interests of large companies and the state. Many WHRDs are attacked, not only because they dare to challenge the establishment, but also because they are women who dare to challenge men. Their courage has not always received the recognition it deserves and it is for this reason that we have chosen to highlight their struggles in this Newsletter.



The Newsletter also provides information about the positive responses and support for WHRDs in the region. For example, this year's '16 days of Activism' theme was *"From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Gender-Based Violence"*. Starting on November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and ending on December 10 (Human Rights Day), these 16 days highlighted the important role of WHRDs in making governments accountable for their violations of human rights and working towards gender equality in public and private spaces. Their actions and courage demonstrate the power of collective struggle to question the status quo and bring about change.

One of the most successful campaigns in the region recently, is the Las 17 campaign for the freeing of 17 women facing long prison sentences in El Salvador, where there is a total ban on abortion, for crimes linked to miscarriages or obstetric complications. This campaign, led by the Agrupación Ciudadana (Citizens Association for the Decriminalisation of Abortion) in El Salvador has attracted worldwide attention and support. We were pleased to meet Morena Herrera, Director of this organisation, during her visit to London, and learn of the impressive work the Agrupación had been doing for women who have been denied a fair trial. Their work in El Salvador is an inspiration for all of us who are involved in struggles to defend women's reproductive rights and to challenge all forms of gender inequality and social injustice.

Justice for the victims of human rights violations also requires official recognition of the violations and crimes that have been committed, no matter when these occurred. This year, the trial against Ríos Montt, former dictator of Guatemala, who has been charged with crimes against humanity, has been resumed. It is to be hoped that justice will be done and that the voices of indigenous women survivors will be heard to make room for national reconciliation.

In Mexico, the involvement of state forces in the disappearance of 42 students from Ayotzinapa (Guerrero) has mobilised the whole country, whose citizens are no longer willing to tolerate such abuses of state power, nor the lack of investigation of the many women who have been victims of femicides. For the 10th year running, the Mothers of Central American Migrants went in their yearly caravan across Mexico looking for their lost daughters and sons.

The defence of human rights is fundamental for a healthy society, and organisations like the Agrupación Ciudadana play a very important role in raising awareness of problems that would otherwise be largely kept out of the papers and the public discussion. We need to make sure that these voices have as much repercussion as possible.

As Morena Herrera, pointed out whilst she was visiting from El Salvador: "The struggle for women's rights is a global one". It is in this vein that CAWN attempts to spread the word as widely as possible to our readers and beyond to raise awareness of the work of women and to encourage women and others to use their voices to bring about positive change.

OUR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Updates, shout-outs, past and upcoming activities, and more



HELP CAWN CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR PARTNERS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

CAWN needs your help in order to maintain our capacity to support the women's movement, as well as the struggles of workers, the indigenous and economic justice movements in Central America, the United Kingdom and Europe.

In these times of austerity CAWN hasn't been able to find funders willing to support us financially. Therefore CAWN needs your support more than ever, in order to remain the platform in Europe for women's rights in Central America.

If you would like to contribute to the continuation and strengthening of our work and support the struggle of the women's organisations we work with, you can very easily [donate](#):

> Through our [Charity profile at BT](#). Our Gift Aid registration number will be available soon.

> By sending a cheque to 44-48, Shepherdess Walk. London, N1 7JP, United Kingdom. Please make them payable to: Central America Women's Network

> By transferring directly to: Central America Women's Network; Account number: 6506 1602 00; Sort code: 08-92-99; IBAN: GB43 CPBK 08929965061602

Thank you!

RECENT EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS



25 October - Workshop "Sisterhood Around the Globe"

For the conference [Feminism in London](#), CAWN and Girl Child Network helped facilitate a workshop on solidarity and the need for a global network, for a collective resistance to the diverse types of oppression which women across the world face on a day-to-day basis.

The workshop presented the work and challenges faced by women's rights movements overseas and discussed what women's groups in the UK can do to support these movements.

[You can read Radha Bhatt's article on the workshop.](#)

7-10 December - Visit of Salvadoran partner from Citizens Group for the Decriminalisation of Abortion

CAWN has been working with the Citizens Group for the Decriminalization of Abortion (Agrupación Ciudadana) on the so-called "Las 17" campaign to free 17 Salvadoran all of whom are facing hefty prison sentences on abortion or attempted abortion charges. Most are poor women from rural areas, who suffered obstetric problems during their pregnancies and many had given birth without medical assistance. These women and those trying to defend the rights of all women to

therapeutic abortion are subject to regular harassment from Salvadoran religious leaders, policymakers and the media.

Morena Herrera, the Director of 'Agrupación Ciudadana', a Salvadorean group working for the decriminalisation of abortion, visited the UK between 7 and 10 December. In a meeting organised by CAWN, Morena provided updates on the campaign for Las 17 and spoke about the work and challenges faced by the Asociación Ciudadana. During her stay, Morena addressed meetings at the Conference *¡Vamos! Participation and Progress in Latin America*, held in Glasgow University, and at Amnesty International. CAWN also set up a meeting with the Salvadoran Ambassador in London who was interested to hear about the Las 17 Campaign and agreed to pass on information about this to the Salvadoran Ministry of Foreign Relations.



[Interview with Morena Herrera](#)

CALLS FOR SOLIDARITY AND ACTION

Calls for international feminist solidarity from Guatemalan and Salvadoran activists translated by CAWN

El Salvador - Petition for the Pardon of Las 17 and the Decriminalisation of Abortion

In previous newsletters, we have shared various actions to engage in the Las 17 campaign headed by the Asociación Ciudadana, which is aimed at freeing seventeen women who are serving sentences of up to 40 years in prison for having obstetric complications or miscarriages. One action was the photo campaign and another is the online petition addressed to the President and the members of the Legislative Assembly in El Salvador, asking them to grant pardons for Las 17. [This petition is still collecting signatures and you can take part here.](#)

There is a new petition by Amnesty International that calls to end the total ban of abortion in El Salvador. This comes after a report published last September on the occasion of the Global Day of Action for the Decriminalisation of Abortion (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)), and at a time when the popular debate on abortion is gaining relevance, after wide coverage of the cases of Beatriz and Las 17.

[Sign the petition to end the total ban on abortion](#)



Guatemala - Criminalisation of Bárbara Díaz Surín

Human rights defender and community leader, Bárbara Díaz Surín, is currently in detention, on fabricated charges of murder. Bárbara Díaz Surín has twice been elected President of the Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo - COCODE (Community Council on Development) of Cruz Blanca in San Juan Sacatepéquez and is a leader of the movement which opposes the construction of the San Gabriel cement plant, proposed by the Cementos Progresos company.

She is being held at the Santa Teresa pre-detention centre for women and will remain in detention until her next hearing. She was detained on 29 October 2014 in Cruz Blanca by a group of 40 police officers. At the court hearing held on the

following day, the judge decreed that she would remain in detention for the duration of the investigation process, despite the defence's plea for house arrest to enable her to look after her seven children. This procedural step was taken without the presence of a Kaqchiquel interpreter. It is also reported that following her arrest, Bárbara Díaz Surín was held in a cell overnight surrounded by men who verbally harassed her.

[Read the press release by IM-Defensoras](#)

[Please take action on behalf of Barbara and other human rights defenders in Guatemala.](#) Copy the letter provided by Frontline Defenders and send it to the address provided.

Guatemala - Temporary Detention, And Subsequent Release, Of Human Rights Defenders Following Peaceful Demonstration Against Mining Activities

On 17 and 18 September 2014, peaceful anti-mining protests took place across Guatemala demanding the repeal of several laws approved by Congress over the last year and a half. These included Decree No. 19-2014, of 10 June 2014,

known as “Ley Monsanto” and Decree No. 12-2014, of 25 April 2014, which has been widely criticised by civil society for legalising the criminalisation of those who legitimately oppose mining activities and the installation of mining infrastructure. The Council of Mayan Peoples of the West has made an application to the Court of Constitutionality to strike out the latter legislation.

On 22 September 2014, Norma Sancir, Carlos Juárez and three members of the Ch'orti indigenous community, were released from prison following three days incarceration after a judge declared a lack of merit in the cases against them.

‘Front Line Defenders’ believes that these arrests and detentions were an attempt to target and criminalise human rights defenders for their legitimate participation in peaceful demonstrations against mining activities in Guatemala, and that it is aimed at instilling fear in all of those engaged in legitimately defending their lands and their rights from the interests of national and foreign extractive companies.

[More](#)

NEWS AND ANALYSIS

News from external sources and analysis by CAWN supporters and members

WOMEN, LAND STRUGGLES AND STATE VIOLENCE



Guatemala - Indigenous Women Demand an end to State of Prevention in San Juan Sacatepéquez

On October 24, the women of San Juan Sacatepéquez and their supporters marched through the streets of Guatemala City denouncing the violation of human rights in their communities

by the military and calling on the Federal Government of President Otto Pérez Molina to end the *state of prevention*, which suspends constitutional rights in their communities. According to the women, the presence of police and soldiers in their communities amounts to an occupation, and residents are suffering from psychological and physical attacks at the hands of the military and police.

The Guatemalan Government declared a *state of prevention* on September 21 in the 12 communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez, after workers from the cement factory provoked a series of violent attacks on September 19 and 20, which left more than 8 people dead, and many more injured. Since the attacks, these communities have suffered from fear, intimidation, and severe economic hardships. This state was only lifted in October 31.

[More](#)

[Press release issued by 'Convergencia por los Derechos Humanos' on September 20 on the attacks that led to the application of the Martial Law.](#)

Guatemala - Military commands taken to court for rape, sexual slavery and by domestic violence in Sepur Zarco

On October 14, 2014, after three hearings with the Public Affairs Ministry, the Prosecutor, the plaintiffs and the Defense of two accused military officers, Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez order army colonel Esteelmer Giron Reyes and former military commissioner Heriberto Valdez Asij to attend an oral and public trial.

Esteelmer Reyes Francisco Girón is accused of crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence, sexual slavery and domestic slavery, murder and humiliating treatment. Heriberto Valdes Asij is accused of forced disappearances and sexual violence.

[More](#)



Guatemala - Indigenous communities get together to create political platform for 2015 Elections

People from different remote areas in the western regions of the country came together to participate in a consultative assembly, gathering four ethnic groups coexisting in Guatemala: Maya, Mestizo, Garifuna and Xinca, to make a historic decision to run senatorial candidates in the fall 2015 presidential election.

Lolita Chávez, a Mayan Quiché community leader, stood on one of the pyramid-temple ruins in front of the participants, and declared: "We are making a unanimous decision to participate politically, so the indigenous peoples can get into power."

[More](#)

Honduras: Eviction of Garífuna Community of Barra Vieja

The Garifuna Women of the Tornabe Network, Honduras, informed our partners that on September 30, at dawn, their families were evicted and their homes destroyed. (Below, more information from AlbaTV and Radio Mundo Real)

Barra Vieja is situated near the Honduran elite-owned tourism project Indura Resort. According to Nahum Lalin, leader of the BHonduran Black Fraternal Organisation (OFRANEH), there have been repeated attempts to evict them there have been repeated failed attempts to evict them since last August:

"Right now we are being evicted by the police and the army, and this is due to pressure from the Indura Beach & Golf Resort project," Lalin explained how the police and military destroyed the homes of families that have been living in these lands for more than 55 years, leaving community members homeless and landless. The eviction order came from the Justice Department of Tela. Prominent public servants took part in the process of eviction, and have admitted receiving funds from Indura Beach.

Recently a hearing was held at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), regarding the offences committed against the Garifuna community in the 80s, instigated by the rising of speculation in property.

The human and territorial rights of the inhabitants of Barra Vieja have been violated, and this eviction is part of a strategy to clear the coast from the Garifuna people, who have inhabited the area for more than two centuries.

OFRANEH demands respect for the rights to the ancestral lands of the Garifuna in Honduras, and the immediate return of usurped lands in Barra Vieja.

[Video on Garifuna Mobilisation against evictions](#)

Honduras: IACHR Condemns Murder of Justice Operators and publishes press release after onsite visit

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) condemns the murder in October 2014 of two prosecutors and a public defender in Honduras. One of the prosecutors, Marlene Banegas, was a coordinator of San Pedro Sula prosecutors and coordinator of the Prosecution Office for Crimes against Life. The other, Olga



Patricia Eufragio, served in the Prosecution Office of Environment.

During 2014, at least 20 judges have received death threats delivered by unidentified people, telephone calls, and other means. Reportedly, criminal judges who are carrying cases related to organised crime have been the main targets.

[More](#)

Between December 1-5, the IACHR visited the country for monitoring the state of human rights.

The IACHR verified the alarmingly high rates of violence in different forms: killings, disappearances, gender-based violence and responses to land conflicts. Among other factors, it highlighted the intervention of the armed forces in spheres that should be treated by civil bodies, which maintains the structural violence, impunity, corruption and organised crime.

The press release also raises concerns over the criminalisation and threats suffered by victims of abuse seeking justice and Human Right Defenders (HRDs). It mentions the handling of conflicts like the one in Bajo Aguán and San Pedro Sula, the dispossession of peasant, indigenous and afro-descendant communities (See Garifuna article above), and the exploitation experienced by women workers in the maquila.

[More](#)

New Amnesty report on violence against human rights defenders and other rights activists in Latin America and the Caribbean

Campaigners, lawyers, journalists, community leaders, trade unionists and human rights defenders, continue to suffer intimidation, harassment and violence across Latin America and the Caribbean according to a new Amnesty International report.

The report entitled, [**Defending Human Rights in the Americas: Necessary, Legitimate and Dangerous**](#) was launched on International Human Rights Defenders Day and provides an overview of the situation of human rights defenders in the Americas region. The report focuses primarily on over 200 cases of attacks and abuses which Amnesty International has been involved in challenging over the last two years.

[More](#)

ON THE EVE OF THE GENOCIDE TRIAL: REVIVAL OF HOPE FOR JUSTICE FOR GUATEMALA'S SURVIVORS.



Ninha Silva is graduated in Journalism and has a MA in International Relations and Democratic Politics. She was born in Guinea-Bissau, moved to Portugal when she was very young and now lives in London, where she is currently collaborating with CAWN.

There is growing impatience and anticipation in Guatemala as the re-scheduled date of the Ríos Montt trial approaches. Initially planned to resume in April 2014, the trial was then postponed to January 2015 due to an alleged backlog of cases that were viewed as a priority for Guatemala's judges.

Accused of being responsible for the bloodiest period of Guatemala's internal armed conflict (1969-1996), On the 10th May, 2013, General Ríos Montt, then aged 87, was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated during his 17 months rule and was sentenced to 80 years in prison. It is claimed that more than 200,000 people were killed, 50,000 disappeared, and hundreds of thousands more displaced, raped, tortured and starved under Ríos Montt's rule. According to the UN backed report by the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification, 83 percent of the victims

were indigenous Mayans¹.

José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, then General Ríos Montt's chief of military intelligence, was also put on trial, but was acquitted on the same day on the grounds that he was not in a position of commanding authority during this period (1982-1983).

National and global reaction to the historic conviction of a former head of state in a domestic court was one of amazement. However, not-surprisingly, given Guatemala's violent history and fragile democracy, the euphoria was short-lived. Ten days after the Court's verdict was pronounced, Ríos Montt's conviction was annulled by Guatemala's Constitutional Court, on the grounds that he had been left without legal defence from the 19th of April and thereby denied due process. The Court ruled that only statements provided before that date would be valid and the trial would have to be resumed from that day and all the closing arguments would need to be repeated.

What was initially seen as a victory for Guatemalan women, Ixil victims and for human rights, was rapidly described by Amnesty International as "a disappointing deferral of justice for genocide victims and their relatives". More than more than 90 survivors gave their testimonies at the historic trial. Of these, approximately 12 were women who described their experiences of rape and sexual abuse against themselves and/or their relatives.. Several testimonies revealed the systematic targeting of vulnerable women and children by the army. According to some analyses, these inhumane attacks on women and children were used to collect information and as a way of exterminating the Mayan community and eliminating future threats of guerilla attacks.

Towards the end of the trial, the court declared that Ríos Montt's army did not distinguish between unarmed civilians and armed people and that violence against women was adopted as a "military objective" and part of a plan to destroy the Ixil ethnic group.

The court also noted that these acts of physical and sexual violence have left women with permanent psychological scars.

The Constitutional Court's decision to annul Ríos Montt's sentence and disregard a big part of the testimonial evidence provided during the trial raises serious concerns about Guatemala's political and judicial system.

Justice in reconstruction

A petition to investigate and prosecute the generals responsible for the abuses committed during Guatemala's 36-year internal conflict was filed in 2001 by the victims' representatives to the Guatemalan Public Ministry. However, only when Ríos Montt lost congressional immunity in 2012, was he indicted.

Behind Ríos Montt's trial and conviction was Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz who took up her role in the Public Ministry in 2010. Paz y Paz brought charges against Ríos Montt for genocide, forced disappearances, torture, crimes against humanity, and state terrorism. In January 2013, Ríos Montt and José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez were ordered to stand trial for their crimes and on the 19th of March proceedings started.

After Claudia Paz y Paz assumed her position, she took significant steps to prosecute the perpetrators of these grave crimes. Viewed by many, as the face of the 'new justice' in Central America, Paz y Paz was responsible for significant reforms in Guatemala's justice system, such as the creation of specialized "high-risk" courts and the designation of judges and prosecutorial units focused on



Photograph by Getty Images

¹ *Guatemala: Memory of Silence: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarifications*, Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), 1999. Available at: <https://hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CEHreport-english.pdf>

complex cases. She was also recognised for her role in the imprisonment of several of Guatemala's gang cells and drug traffickers and the conviction of military members for crimes committed during the country's internal conflict.

Not surprisingly, Guatemala's political elites, soon began to view her as a big threat and in no time she had acquired enemies. In the beginning of 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that Paz Y Paz would have to step down in May, seven months before the end of her mandate.

The overturn of Ríos Montt's trial did not take very long to also affect Judge Yassmin Barrios, President of the panel of three judges that tried Ríos Montt. Following a complaint made by a member of Ríos Montt's legal team, Yassmin Barrios was banned from practicing law for one year.

Since the annulment of Ríos Montt's trial, Guatemala's justice institutions have undergone radical restructuring. The changes include the selection of a new panel for the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals and the appointment of a new Attorney General. Apprehension has settled in Guatemala's judicial system and especially among the judiciary. Since the decision to restart the trial, more than 90 judges have refused to take part in it.

On the eve of the restart of the trial, serious doubts remain about Guatemala's willingness and capacity to protect the rights of the regime's victims and its willingness to adopt a proactive stance in the defence of human rights. The impartiality of the judicial system and the judicial nomination process are also in doubt.

Meanwhile, Ríos Montt, who will soon turn 88 years old and is reportedly frail and in deteriorating health, continues to assert his innocence and argues that he did not have command responsibility over the officers directly responsible for the violations, neither did he participate in the alleged acts.

As the prospect of the trial's completion and the incarceration of Ríos Montt grow increasingly faint, so also does the hope for justice to be delivered to thousands of victims and their families for crimes committed over thirty years ago.

Update: The trial, set to start on January 5, has been suspended temporarily with allegations by the defense attorneys that the tribunal president, Judge Valdez, is a biased party because of her previous thesis on the legal prosecution of crimes of genocide, in which she accepts that there was genocide in Guatemala. [More](#)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FEMICIDE



Photography from [Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa](#)

Mexico: Mothers of Disappeared in Juarez Sign Agreement with Government

The group "Bring Our Daughters Home" have shut down their stand in front of Los Pinos after signing agreements with the Federal Government. The

group of mothers whose daughters disappeared in Juarez, in the state of Chihuahua, went on hunger strike from 23 September until 8 October to demand justice for their missing daughters. In a press release, the group listed a series of demands pertaining to individual cases, which included setting up a national database of disappeared persons, a genetic database, hiring Argentine experts to identify bodies of the missing, and assistance for the victims' families.

The mothers approached the federal authorities and finally reached an agreement on 9 October with the Special Prosecutor for Violent Crimes against Women and Human Trafficking (FEVIMTRA and the Under-secretary for Human Rights.

[More](#)



Photograph from [Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas María Elena Cuadra](#)

Nicaragua: Decree To Implement Law On Violence Against Women - A Setback For Women's Rights

In July 2014, President Daniel Ortega signed a Decree to implement [Law 779](#) without consultation with the National Assembly or the women's movement. The Decree has introduced amendments that concern feminists, including reinstating a clause regarding mediation between a woman and her attacker and reformulation of how femicide is understood.

Nicaraguan women's rights have experienced a series of setbacks since October 19, 2006, when [abortion](#) was criminalized under all circumstances. Since then, Ortega has been moving closer to the Catholic hierarchy, and implementing various reforms in a dictatorial fashion.

[More](#)

Central American Mothers of Disappeared Migrants go in their 10th Caravan in Mexico and call for unity of movements

This year, in the [10th Caravan](#), the group is travelling through ten Mexican states. The Caravan began November 20 in Tenosique, Tabasco, on the border with Guatemala, headed north to Guadalajara, then through Mexico City and south to Oaxaca City. The Caravan concluded on December 6, after visiting the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca and San Cristobal and Tapachula, Chiapas. The southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas are especially important because many of the Caravan members last heard from their loved ones from southern Mexico.

Marta Sanchez, coordinator of the [Mesoamerican Migrant Movement \(MMM\)](#), said in her opening remarks, "All of our struggles should be one unified struggle, because all of these problems have the same roots. Out with the bad government!", mentioning the disappearance of

the students from Ayotzinapa, the struggle of the Section 22 teachers union and the recent murder of a teenage girl.

Sanchez estimates that there are 70,000 to 150,000 disappeared migrants in Mexico, yet the government has no database or official national mechanism to search for them. Echoing the cries of "Because they were taken away alive, we want them back alive!" resonating across Mexico with the case of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa, the mothers chanted in downtown Oaxaca, "Because they came here alive, we want them back alive!"



[More](#)

IACHR Roundtable: "Gender-based Violence and Reparations – A Hemispheric Overview after Twenty Years of the Adoption of the Convention Belém do Pará"

The key-note speech was given by Rashida Majoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, who spoke about the key challenges in dealing with violence against women, including the development of clear legal standards and tackling the structural roots of violence. She stressed that a lot still remains to be done at the level of the state in order to protect women from violence. Other speakers The Chair and Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the IACHR, Tracy Robinson, traced the historical achievement of the Convention of Belém do Pará, in a context of generalised and endemic gender-based violence. Carmen Moreno and Luz Piedad Caicedo were also present at the roundtable.

[Listen to the conference](#)

An assessment of health sector guidelines and services for treatment of sexual violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua

Whilst all Central American countries are signatories to human rights agreements that oblige states to ensure access to comprehensive health services for victims of sexual violence, there is limited information as to whether these agreements have been translated into policy and practice. A research report published in [Reproductive Health Matters](#) critically examines health sector guidelines for the treatment of sexual violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and reports on an assessment of

services in 34 private- and public-sector facilities in the four countries.



[Read paper](#)

SPECIAL: 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The [16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence](#) is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. Beginning on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) and concluding on International Human Rights Day (December 10), the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign emphasizes that gender-based violence is a human rights violation. The theme, "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women!" underlines diverse challenges and contributors to gender-based violence and the effects of militarism, economic and social rights violations, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, health, and political rights on our intersectional identities and experiences.

Below, a selection of articles and publications related to these 16 days of action. Official hashtag: #16Days

1. [The Handmaid's Tale of El Salvador](#)

Poverty, misogyny, and Christian fundamentalism in El Salvador lie behind the prison sentences of up to forty years handed down to seventeen women who were arrested for the crime of abortion, but sentenced for murder

2. [Mexico -The challenges for women defenders working on business and human rights](#)

Women defenders and those working on business and human rights represent two groups facing particular risks yet, in Mexico, the State's response is falling short, says Alejandra Ancheita.

The inadequate response of the Mexican government to the hundreds of cases of attacks and intimidation has become evident in various spaces. In the recent Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations, the Mexican State received 24 recommendations on the situation of human rights defenders and journalists in the country, whilst the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, in the Interior Ministry, has received 130 applications for protection.

The fact that women human rights defenders face specific threats has been well established. However, existing protection mechanisms have not yet adjusted to incorporate this reality into their functioning, thus leaving women defenders vulnerable to gender-specific threats and aggressions

Read this in [English](#) or [Spanish](#)

3. [An Integrated Approach To Security And Protection For WHRDs](#)

This year's theme for the 16 Days of Activism underscores the systemic nature of gender-based

violence, including high levels of violence that women and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face as a result of militarism, including violence perpetrated by state actors and sexual violence during and after conflict.

WHRDs face particular risks because of who they are (women), and because of the work they do (defending human rights). They are exposed to gender-based violence and gender-specific risks, including gendered verbal abuse, sexual abuse and rape. In addition to sexual violence, there are many other attacks that are linked to the use of gender and sexual stereotypes to harm WHRDs' reputation and delegitimize their work. [More](#)

Our Right to Safety – A holistic approach to protection is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)



4. Violence against women – A pervasive human rights violation calls for a binding standard of accountability at the international level

“The absence of a legally binding agreement at the international level represents one of the obstacles to the promotion and protection of women’s rights and gender equality”, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo, reiterated.

More than half-way through the international campaign against violence against women and in anticipation of Human Rights Day on 10 December, Ms. Manjoo reminded the international community that violence against women continues to be a widespread and pervasive human rights violation, and called for the adoption of different norms and measures to fight it around the world. [More](#)

REPRODUCTIVE AND ABORTION RIGHTS



Twelve Countries call on El Salvador to stop criminalizing Abortion

Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK all submitted statements urging El Salvador to lift its complete ban on abortions. This demand stems from an assessment, undertaken as part of a Universal Periodic Review required by the United Nations to monitor member state compliance with human rights commitments.

“The chorus of countries worldwide calling for El Salvador to end its unjust abortion ban is growing

ever larger and louder,” [said Nancy Northup, President of the Center for Reproductive Rights \(CRR\)](#). “The Salvadoran government cannot ignore the calls any longer, and must not be allowed to evade accountability for the human rights abuses that countless women continue to suffer. Access to safe and legal reproductive health care, including abortion, is a fundamental right, not a crime.”

[More](#)

FIDH states that the prohibition on abortion constitutes violence against women

Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile and Dominican Republic are among the only countries in the world where abortion is prohibited in all circumstances. However, abortion rights are also severely restricted in many other countries. For example, the laws in Ireland, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Bangladesh, only allow abortion if the woman’s life is in danger. In Malta, abortion is illegal except in cases of rape or foetal abnormality. In Poland, abortion has been prohibited since 1997 except in cases of rape, incest, foetal malformation or danger to the woman’s life. [A similar reform was](#)

[recently avoided in Spain](#) as a result of massive protests by defenders of women's rights.

"These are violent, even deadly laws. Not only do they control women's bodies but they force women to seek clandestine, unsafe abortions, with serious risks for the woman's health, sometimes putting her life in danger. For girls, carrying a pregnancy to term can cause lasting damage to their bodies, as well as compromising their futures," said Karim Lahidji, President of FIDH.

[More](#)

HIV-positive women in Central America are being pressured to undergo sterilisation

The Thomson Reuters Foundation reports that HIV-positive women in Central America are being pressured to undergo sterilisation by prejudiced health workers and misled about the risk of the virus being transmitted to their unborn children. According to a survey of 285 women living with HIV in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and

Nicaragua, it found that 23 percent of them had faced pressure from doctors and nurses to be sterilised.

The rate ranged from 20 percent in Nicaragua to 28 percent in Mexico. The consistency of the rate over a large geographical area pointed to a "systematic pattern" of pressure and coercion, said Harvard School of Public Health research fellow Tamil Kendall.

"It's really unthinkable that women living with HIV are being pressured and forced into sterilisation when treatment almost eliminates the possibility of the mother-to-child transmission... and also provides options for safer conception and pregnancy," said Kendall, who presented the research at an international conference on AIDS in Melbourne on Wednesday

[More](#)

WOMEN AND THE MEDIA



Meet the fearless women activists of Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala

Women like Alma Gomez, a former guerilla fighter now campaigning for justice for victims of femicide in northern Mexico; Daysi Flores, who took to the streets in defence of democracy after the 2009 coup in Honduras; and Guatemalan Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who works to defend the rights of indigenous communities still treated like second-class citizens in Guatemala.

These women are on the frontline of the struggle against the crisis of violence faced by women in

Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala.

In this new series of short documentaries, 'Women Crossing the Line: Defensoras in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala', we meet women activists from the region who have stood bravely to demand an end to violence and greater rights.

[Watch the first of these documentaries here](#)

Campaign "Women in migration: transforming the world" is now in social networks

[Translated by CAWN](#)

["Women in migration: transforming the world"](#) is an initiative that seeks to make visible the issue of migration from a gender perspective. The empowerment of migrant women, their demand for rights and their role as political subjects are issues that require wider attention in the media and social networks.

This initiative gives voice to migrant women themselves, their organisations and/or initiatives, to support other women and migrants in their fight for the respect of their human rights.

"Women in migration: transforming the world" is present on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter \(@Mujeresmigran\)](#). Users of social networks are

encouraged to join this initiative. You can share photos, documents or express your support of the initiative using the hashtags [#MujeresenlaMigración](#) and [#MisderechosNOTienenFRONTERAS](#).

and

ART FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVISM

Louise Morris is a freelance broadcast journalist who works for CAWN and the Latin American Bureau producing media content and interviewing activists. She is also a fundraiser for Sound Women and has recently graduated from a Masters in Global Media and Postnational Communication at the School of Oriental and African Studies

[@LouBDN](#)



The women's movement has been historically critical of mass media, blaming it for reinforcing discrimination against women in society and promoting gender stereotypes.

This series of articles aims to highlight how alternative media can be used to provide a space for women's voices, rights and empowerment in Central America while recognising the limits to accessing media and participating in producing media content that many women still face.

The Art of Resistance: Creative Expression as Alternative Media in Central America

Producing Art is perhaps one of the oldest forms of alternative media. Art's symbolic ability to challenge the status quo and easily communicate political ideologies to a mass audience has made it a powerful medium for activism, while its emotive qualities can foster solidarity. Furthermore, the creative process itself can also generate a therapeutic release.

While this series has previously examined the benefits and drawbacks of using modern technology for women's activism and development initiatives (radio, mobile telephony and ICTs), this final article goes back to the roots of alternative media production - artistic expression. Art is taken to encompass music, graffiti and performance as well as more traditional artistic production. Unlike technology, art can be accessed and produced by almost anyone, making it a more universal and relatable medium. For many people without formal education, art is a less intimidating, more instinctive form of alternative media through which to communicate and challenge dominant norms. Women, in particular have embraced art's emotive powers as a communication tool to question sexist attitudes.

However, some difficulties of using art for communication can arise, most notably when the projects are not generated locally. Lack of involvement of local groups and the mediation of outsiders risks insensitivity to differing contexts and perspectives resulting in the reproduction of dominant power relations and lack of representation of minority interests. Furthermore, some activist artists, driven by financial necessity, have become co-opted by businesses or state powers, leading them to depoliticise their art. An example of this can be seen through a number of the graffiti collectives in Oaxaca Mexico that were formed in support of the peoples' uprising triggered by the 2006 teacher's protest. Many of these collectives have been offered paid mural work but have had their subjects dictated to them by the conservative State Governor of Oaxaca.

This article provides a cursory introduction to some examples of grassroots art that have been used as an alternative media, form of communication, and site of protest.

Performance Art

While traditional media, due to its familiarity perhaps, can fail to command attention or evoke empathy, performance art usually provokes interest and curiosity, especially when performed in public spaces. Passers-by pause and reflect, trying to work out what the actions or symbols being displayed in front of their eyes really mean. A visual representation of injustice aids comprehension, and the unusual tactics employed in performance art can linger long in the mind. Thus, performance art is frequently incorporated into street protests as a visual language to bolster social struggles. In May 2013 Guatemala's Constitutional Court overturned the trial against Ríos Montt who was accused of genocide and crimes

against humanity. This was in spite of the testimonies provided by a number of indigenous Ixil women, who bravely described how they were sexually abused during Montt's reign. Protests erupted with performances of Lady Justice - represented by an indigenous woman wearing white and balancing scales - being beaten to the ground by Montt and Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores-mask wearing figures. Six years earlier artist Regina José Galindo, dipped her feet in human blood and walked the streets of Guatemala City, in an act of protest against Montt's dictatorship. The title "*Who can erase the footprints?*" pointedly critiqued the suppression of public memory by the country's government and its refusal to prosecute those responsible for the massacres and sexual abuse.



Lady Justice Being Beaten - Courtesy of [A Feminist Analysis](#)

Graffiti

Graffiti is another form of artistic alternative media that sometimes accompanies and enhances street protests. Scrawled slogans on public walls bear witness to the chants and causes of the protest, while symbolic representations emotively translate political messages that can be understood by all, whether literate or not. Art can complement social movements by creating an alternative culture around them, promoting solidarity between members and legitimacy for their actions. One longstanding example of street art can be seen adorning the walls of the city of Juárez - pink crosses cluster and spread over the urban landscape - a stark reminder of the shocking number of femicides in the area. The crosses, painted by the mothers of the disappeared and murdered women, serve both to commemorate their curtailed lives and as a call to action to city officials who have failed to solve the murders.

In Suchitoto, El Salvador, a picturesque colonial town, houses have been branded with stencils declaring "In this house we want a life free from violence against women". The private desires of the household are made public by being emblazoned across the wall, suggesting that this form of violence is often concealed behind closed doors yet needs to be publically addressed. The stencil of El Salvador's national bird, the *guardabarranco*, indicates that this should be the case for all houses in the country and imbues the statement with patriotic pride.

Graffiti is also used in many murals. For example, in San José, Costa Rica, this stylishly colourful mural (see below) in San Jose, reads "Mi cuerpo, Mi decisión (*My body, My decision*)", drawing attention to the lack of reproductive rights and sexual freedom for women. The quirky depiction of the women as Russian dolls emphasises women's global solidarity and connection, while teasingly reminding passers-by that inside every woman could be another woman, who will continue to demand the recognition of her rights.





Photography by Louise Morris

Music

Music is for many people part of daily life and is commonly associated with collective acts - rituals, family celebrations, and socialising, thereby enhancing its ability to promote collective action. In song lyrics - examples of injustice can be personalised through a character's life-story and societal norms can be questioned in an accessible and memorable way, with songs acting as communication channels in themselves. Music performance during demonstrations heightens the physical experience of gathering together in protest, with group singing enhancing the feelings of unity against opposition even further. The demonstrators' political thoughts are fused together as "In singing you take on a deeper level of commitment to an idea than if you only hear it spoken of" (Reed 2005: 28).

Four significant female musicians who have harnessed music's powers to persuade, inform and build solidarity for the women's rights movement are Guatemalan Rebeca Lane, Nicaraguan Katia Cardenal, Mexican Lila Downs, and Honduran Karla Lara. Young rap-artist Lane has taken on the commonly misogynistic genre of Hip-Hop and subverted it to her own purposes, rapping about respecting women's rights and has inspired a wave of other urban musicians to follow in her path. Lane states:

"Female rap artists in Central America, and parts of Latin America, are not part of mainstream music because we make use of the only musical genre that provides a critique of patriarchy and we don't sexualise our bodies to express ourselves and get attention. This is a very important achievement for us. We don't want to be bodies on display for consumption, we are women fighting and thus rejecting normative beauty standards is also part of our way of fighting".

Katia Cardenal, a famous second-generation *trova* artist, has pioneered an all-female annual music festival in Nicaragua with the aim of empowering women in the audience, inspiring them to play themselves so as to challenge the male-dominated music industry. Karla Lara has long been a representative of the women's movement, performing at many protests with songs which resonate deeply with the hardships and struggles faced by members of her female audiences. She is a member of the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras and of Artists in Resistance. In Mexico, Lila Downs has used her musical fame to champion causes such as accessible education for indigenous schoolgirls in Oaxaca and one of her songs, "*Dignificada*" (Dignified), has become a call to arms for Mexican feminists and is often sung at protest events. These and other musicians often perform on stage or in the streets for free and allow their songs to be sung during demonstrations, thereby making their art widely accessible and inclusive.

Conclusion

As Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci stated "*culture is the site of resistance*". In our contemporary hyper-sensory culture, art has become recognised as an innovative and attention-grabbing way through which to

critique misogyny and promote women's rights. All the forms of art discussed here: performance art, graffiti and music, are deliberately public expressions of art, which are used as a means of breaking out of the boundaries of museums and the hierarchies embodied by these and other traditional spaces. While open to different interpretations, all these art forms serve to provoke discussion and debate on issues deemed as taboo, in many Central American countries, such as abortion, domestic abuse, and incest. The women's movement in Central America has long recognised this potential and different creative expressions have successfully been used to complement and further its political agenda. Art offers a vast creative arena where alternative ideas can be communicated and dominant attitudes contested, and in this way is a powerful form of alternative media.

WOMEN'S STRUGGLES



The 30-month blockade and the woman who refuses to die: The movement to resist a mining project in Guatemala

Ten years ago, the Canadian company Radius Gold bought most of the land in La Puya with the intent of building a gold mine, just 350 meters from the closest village. Since then, the project has given rise to many uprisings within local communities who blame the government for supporting the project at the expense of residents' well-being.

On March 2, 2012, a group of people from neighbouring communities blocked the road that leads to the site, preventing trucks and mining equipment from entering La Puya. The site has remained blocked ever since, as activists and volunteers rotated shifts of 24 hours to prevent anything and anyone from accessing the area. A sign at the entrance of the site reads "Community in Resistance."

Yolanda Oquelí was the first woman to join the movement in 2011. "Back then, I was the only woman out of a group of six or eight men. But I knew that if I had the chance to talk to other women living in the area they would have understood how dangerous the mining project was for their communities and for their children."

[More](#)

Guatemala: Video of conference "Genocide and Sexual Violence: the search for justice", with Claudia Paz y Paz

Claudia Paz y Paz is well known for her work in keeping the Guatemalan memory and combating impunity for crimes against humanity committed during the internal armed conflict. Guatemala was the scene of decades of horror: a quarter of a million victims killed and disappeared, and over one hundred thousand women victims of sexual violence.

Her work has also focused on current crimes. Her role in the radical transformation of the model of prosecution, implemented when she was in the Public Ministry, is considered exemplary for its effectiveness in the guarantees of the judicial process: impunity was reduced from 93% to 70% thanks to an increase of 215% in sentencing criminals. In the case of femicide, convictions had an increase of 847% between 2011 and 2013.



This follows a premise that nobody should be above the law: not former military, drug traffickers, nor former heads of state considered untouchable, as was the case of the dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, accused of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The conference was coordinated by the Association of Women of Guatemala, within the

cycle "Women Against Impunity".

[Watch video \(Spanish only\)](#)

Young Indigenous activists in global advocacy spaces

Interview with Dalí Angel, young indigenous woman activist from the Zapoteca nation in

Oaxaca (Mexico) and Latin America Focal Point for the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, about the Caucus' involvement in advocacy spaces and some of the challenges they face.

[Read interview](#)

CAWN'S PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

This section features partners and other organisations working closely with CAWN



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MATTERS

[RHM](#) is a twice-yearly peer reviewed international journal which has developed a whole new way of thinking about sexuality and reproduction. It is working to build an environment in which sexual and reproductive health and rights are promoted and implemented through law, policy, programmes and services

RHM also organises international workshops to explore new, controversial and neglected issues, and publishes papers, supplements and reports

from those meetings.

GUATEMALA SOLIDARITY NETWORK

[GSN](#) is a network of individuals based in the UK who work in solidarity with Guatemalan organisations and communities striving for human rights, social and economic justice and the empowerment and participation of indigenous peoples and all marginalised groups.

One of their areas of work is in accompaniment, through the International Accompaniment Program in Guatemala, which aims to support organisations and individuals who are intimidated and threatened with reprisal due to the nature of their work.



If you believe in CAWN's work, please help us! These are hard times for small and brave organisations, and every donated pound will be wisely and efficiently used. [Click here](#) to make your donation now. Thank you for your support.

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