



# THE WPHF FUNDING WINDOW FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



**Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund**

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

December 2021

## Background

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) play critical roles during and after conflict, working across the human rights-peace and security-development nexus, at community, national and international levels, often at grave risks to their own lives. Despite their critical contributions, WHRDs face limited access to funding opportunities. While civil society organizations (CSOs) at global, regional, and national levels lead in the protection of human rights defenders, the scarcity of financial resources dedicated to their protection and participation often limits the ability of CSOs to effectively respond to the increasing needs of WHRDs, especially in complex conflict and crisis-affected contexts, which constitute the sites of multiple layers of intersecting needs and insecurities.

A recent open letter from the NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security, signed by 381 feminist organizations from 88 countries, called Member States and the UN to do more to protect and support WHRDs and to ensure safe spaces for their voices to be heard, noting that *“At present, few practical resources are available in urgent, life-threatening individual cases of defenders at risk, and the responsibility of providing protective measures falls largely on other civil society organizations. This represents a critical protection gap that both States and the UN must work with civil society to urgently address.”*<sup>[1]</sup>

Echoing their voices, in his 2021 annual report on Women Peace and Security, the UN Secretary General called Member States to take concerted action to make *“rapid and flexible funding available for the protection of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders in emergency individual cases.”*<sup>[2]</sup>

Against this backdrop, WPHF has established a new funding window dedicated to support the participation and protection of WHRDs working in and on crisis and conflict settings.

## Facts and Figures

- ▶ WHRDs are particularly at risk when they challenge systems linked to violence, such as political power structures, gendered power relations, and patriarchal notions of the role of women in the family and society.
- ▶ WHRDs are at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence and rape, and are targets of femicide, judicial persecution, sexual violence, attacks against their reputations, violence within the home and the organizations where they work, and arbitrary gender-based travel bans.
- ▶ In 2020, OHCHR verified **35 cases of killings of women human rights defenders**, journalists, and trade unionists in seven conflict-affected countries with data surpassing the reported numbers for 2019 and 2018.
- ▶ In the month leading up to the August 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the United Nations had already documented **a record number of women killed in the country** in 2020, including **civil society activists and journalists, and the targeting of academics, medical personnel, and women judges in the Supreme Court, amongst many others.**

[1] NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 2021 Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in advance of the annual Open Debate on Women Peace and Security, September 2021, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021-WPS-Civil-Society-Open-Letter-English-1-September.pdf>

[2] Report of the UN Secretary General on women and peace and security, 27 September 2021, paragraph 107. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S\\_2021\\_827\\_E.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S_2021_827_E.pdf)

## A New Funding Mechanism: The WPHF Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders

Building on existing mechanisms and lessons learned and working in close collaboration with its UN and INGO partners, WPHF approved in September 2021 the establishment of a new funding window to support the protection and participation of WHRDs working for inclusive peace and humanitarian action – **The WPHF Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders**. With seed funding from the governments of Norway and Germany, the new funding mechanism will launch in January 2022. Receiving requests on **a rolling basis**, the new WPHF window will provide flexible funding and logistical support to Women Human Rights Defenders, in particular women peace activists, **from crisis and conflict-affected areas**, operating at **community, national, regional and/or international levels**.

### What type of support will the WPHF Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders provide?

The WPHF Funding Window for WHRDs will offer two types of support:

- ▶ **A flexible funding safety net** to cover urgent costs, such as, short-term livelihood and protection expenses, including but not limited to equipment (*computers, printers, security cameras, security software*), internet, mental health care and legal services, flights and visa fees for evacuation from at-risk areas, as well as costs related to advocacy work and the promotion of women's rights in the realms of political, peacebuilding and humanitarian response.
- ▶ **Direct logistical support** for international/regional travel (flights, DSA and visas costs) for WHRDs working for peace and humanitarian action to undertake advocacy work (e.g. attend an event/meeting) to promote women's rights and protection in political decision-making, peacebuilding, and humanitarian response.

[3] OHCHR, Fact Sheet No.29, Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights, p 2.

## About Us

*The Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) mobilizes critical support for local and grassroots civil society organizations working on women, peace and security and humanitarian action. WPHF is a flexible and rapid financing mechanism supporting quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities. Since its launch in 2016, WPHF has funded over 480 civil society organizations in 26 countries working to support women to be a force for crisis response and lasting peace.*

## Who will the WPHF Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders support?

"Human rights defenders are identified above all by what they do, and it is through a description of their actions and of some of the contexts in which they work that the term can be best explained."<sup>3</sup> Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are commonly defined as **women**, or those who identify as women, who individually or in association/coalition with others, formally or informally, **act to promote or protect human rights** -including women's rights- **in a peaceful manner**, at local, national, regional, or international levels.

WPHF will define criteria for eligibility of WHRDs working in crisis and conflict affected settings, taking into account different contexts and noting that women peace activists who defend the rights of individuals and communities may not be affiliated to a particular human rights organization, nor describe themselves as WHRDs or peace activists.

Due to the urgent and growing needs of WHRDs worldwide, during its first implementation phase, the WPHF Funding Window for WHRDs will prioritize WHRDs' requests from **conflict and crisis affected countries** and in particular **Afghanistan**.