



WPHF FUNDING WINDOW FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

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 risk to their own lives. Yet too often the work of human rights defenders goes uncredited and unacknowledged.¹

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and 23 years on from the first UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security (1325), WHRDs from and working in conflict and crisis affected contexts continue to face limited access to funding opportunities. While civil society organizations 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 their ability to respond adequately to the increasing needs of WHRDs. These funding requirements are especially pressing in emergency contexts, where WHRDs face multiple layers of intersecting needs and insecurities.

In his 2022 annual report on Women, Peace and Security, the UN Secretary-General described the protection of WHRDs as “*a collective moral responsibility*”² and urged the international community to strengthen its support for WHRDs, peacebuilders, and members of civil society. Notably, he calls on Member States to, “*provide an enabling environment for women human rights defenders, provide both material and political support to their work and their organizations, and prevent and respond to specific threats or reprisals against them.*”³

The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is a global partnership mobilizing critical financing for women's rights organizations and peacebuilders and supports quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities. In January 2022, WPHF officially

launched its Window for WHRDs on the 18 January 2022 on the margins of the first ever UN Security Council open debate, on the protection and participation of WHRDs and peacebuilders.

Facts and Figures

- ▶ Across the globe, women human rights defenders have increasingly been targeted in recent years with attacks intended to silence their advocacy and prevent them from participating in public life.
- ▶ Women are much more likely than men to be targeted with sexual and gender-based violence and to be subjected to verbal abuse, surveillance, and online violence. While all activists are targeted with defamation, smear campaigns and online and offline hate speech, the attacks against women human rights defenders typically target their personal behavior, their moral conduct, or their sex lives. Those who attack women's rights activists are often emboldened by discriminatory laws
- ▶ In 2021, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 29 cases of killings of women human rights defenders, journalists, and trade unionists in eight conflict-affected countries. This, however, is widely believed to be a huge undercount.⁴
- ▶ Data surveyed by UN Women indicates that about one third of women who briefed the UN Security Council between Jan 2021 and May 2022 faced reprisals.⁵
- ▶ In its 2022 annual global analysis, Front Line Defenders, an NGO partner of WPHF WHRD Window, recorded the targeted killings of 401 HRDs for their human rights work, of whom 17% identified as women, including transwomen.⁶

[1] UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders (2023) *Success Through Perseverance and Solidarity: 25 Years of Achievement by Human Rights Defenders*, 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council, <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F52%2F29&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

[2] UN Secretary-General (2022) *General on Women and Peace and Security, S/2022/740*, para 104 (b), <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/N2261486.pdf>

[3] *ibid*, paragraph 105 (a) [4] *Ibid*. [5] *Ibid*.

[6] Front Line Defenders (2022), *Global Analysis 2022*, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-2022>

The WPHF Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders

Receiving requests on a rolling basis in six languages, WPHF WHRD Window offers two types of support:

- ▶ **Safety Net** (in partnership with NGO partners) emergency protection grant up to USD 10,000 for WHRDs at risk due to their activism. This covers costs including short-term relocation, psychological or legal support, and protection expenses (e.g., computers, security cameras, security software).
- ▶ **Advocacy Support** (arranged at by WPHF WHRD Unit) to cover logistical expenses for participation in a meeting, event, or decision-making process at the national, regional or international level, which contributes to advancing human rights and peace. WHRDs can apply individually or as a delegation. Support includes flights, ground transportation, visa fees, accommodation, translation, daily subsistence allowance for five working days, and accessibility for WHRDs living with a disability).

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

- ▶ **Gender:** must be women, or identify as women
- ▶ **Age:** 18 years old and above
- ▶ **Country:** from/working in conflict and crisis affected contexts
- ▶ **Activism:** 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 the local, national, regional, or international level.

SAFETY NET:

Threats and Risks:

Demonstrates current or past serious security risks, for her and/ or her dependents, because of her activism

and/or

Demonstrates that risks are or have been such that her ability to sustain her participation in defending human rights and peace is threatened.

ADVOCACY SUPPORT

Future Advocacy Work:

Provides information on the logistical support needed to attend an advocacy initiative that will advance her work around human rights or peace.

Event, meeting or decision-making process will occur in the next six months.

Application must be made at least six weeks in advance.

WHRD Window Impact

Since its operationalization in September 2022, WPHF WHRD Window has supported **220 WHRDs** from 22 countries, plus 553 of their dependents.

34.2% of WHRDs supported are young women, between 18 and 29 years old.

Advocacy Support has provided the opportunity for participants to share their valuable insights and recommendations at forums to which they may not have otherwise been able to access. Some of these have briefed high-level international forums. For instance, a WHRD who briefed the UN Human Rights Council in June 2022 helped persuade this body to adopt a resolution that keeps the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan as a priority item on its agenda. As important, in September 2022, a Congolese delegation promoting women's rights at the local level were supported to attend a national-level workshop on inclusive humanitarian response, leading to the inclusion of three gender-specific recommendations in the workshop's outcome note.

Safety Net funds have primarily been used to support livelihoods, relocation and mental health support. A smaller proportion of WHRDs have been supported with security and protection equipment, travel, and legal assistance. While the requests have been varied, the Window has demonstrated it is flexible enough to meet these multifarious needs. Responding to the urgent funding gap, this has helped protect and support these women to continue their activism in the most challenging and threatening contexts around the world.

Overall, in the first months of operations, the sheer volume of applications has underscored the need for this type of support. The diversity of personal identity and thematic work profiles among participants demonstrates that the Window is proving accessible to a range of intersectional audiences. Feedback from anonymous post-support surveys among Advocacy Support participants furthermore highlights the value of this new mechanism.

Visit WPHF WHRD Window website:
<https://wphfund.org/whrds/>

About WPHF

The United Nations 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 930 local women's organizations working to support women to be a force for crisis response and lasting peace in 41 countries. In addition, WPHF has supported the participation and the protection of over 200 women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders in 22 countries.

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