

# Center for Women's Global Leadership



*“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.”*

Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms [“The Declaration on human rights defenders”] (Article 1).

On the occasion of November 29<sup>th</sup>, Women Human Rights Defenders day, and as a part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign, the Center for Women's Global Leadership honors the hundreds of thousands of women activists around the world who persistently and courageously defend human rights, peace and social justice. Women from all parts of the globe engage in defense of human rights on a daily basis. Because of their advocacy, they face retribution and are sometimes punished—by government officials, religious authorities, police, and often by family and community members.

Whether they focus on women's human rights or other rights issues, women defenders are subjected to arbitrary imprisonment, torture, forced disappearances, death threats, violations of privacy, sexual violence, name calling and other threats to their credibility, closures of their organizations and a host of other violations because of their activism and claims to exercise rights. Many women defenders have lost their lives because of their advocacy.

In 2007, women activists around the globe face continued restrictions on their advocacy and many forms of violations, such as:

- *In Pakistan, under the current state of emergency, many women activists and lawyers have been arrested; prominent women's rights activists such as UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir were placed under house arrest or threatened with arrest, as was UN Special Representative on human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, who was abroad when the warrant was issued.*
- *In Mexico, Lydia Cacho, a journalist and head of a women's organization, faced an assassination attempt in May, after having endured a previous arrest and sustained persecution by government authorities because of her work exposing gender based violence.*
- *In South Africa, a number of Black lesbians known to be feminist activists were killed in a spate of “hate crimes.”*

- *In Iran, over 30 women demonstrating peacefully were arrested as they protested state pressure against women human rights defenders.*
- *In the United States, sexual and reproductive rights advocates face physical assault and their organizations and continue to forfeit government financial support if they refuse to sign the federal “anti-prostitution pledge.”*
- *In Poland, defenders working for sexual and reproductive rights, and especially the right to safe abortion, continue to face persistent threats, harassment and questioning from law enforcement officials.*
- *And only last week in Nicaragua, nine prominent women activists were charged with fabricated crimes by the government in collusion with right wing groups in an effort to intimidate feminists who have advocated for women’s rights related to abortion and against incest and other forms of sexual violence.*

CWGL stands in solidarity with these and other women defenders and with all activists who have defended women’s rights during 2007.

For more information about women human rights defenders and the International Campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders, or to download the WHRD guidebook, *Claiming Rights, Claiming Justice*, see <http://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org>.