



# AJWS RESPONDS: U.S. GOVERNMENT SLASHES HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Since President Trump returned to the White House in 2025, his administration has launched attacks on human rights and social justice movements that have affected millions of people around the world, including hundreds of AJWS partner organizations and the vulnerable communities they serve. While the administration's direct actions—cutting funding to aid organizations and dismantling USAID—have threatened millions of lives, their impact has proliferated, emboldening authoritarian leaders to act with impunity and encouraging persecution and violence against marginalized people and those who defend them. AJWS's response has been swift and strategic, holding the line to help prevent erosion of the human rights ecosystem in which we operate in the Global South.

## A GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING CRISIS

In 2025, the Trump administration dismantled USAID, the world's largest bilateral aid organization, which funded everything from emergency food assistance, medical clinics, and disaster relief to activist movements fighting for democracy. USAID's destruction occurred as other governments and many private foundations cut funding.

The effect of these global cuts is staggering; the *Lancet Global Health* reports that these cuts, if sustained, could result in 9.4 million deaths—including nearly 2.5 million among children 5 and younger—due to preventable causes like malaria and maternal health issues by 2030\*. AJWS partners have felt these losses profoundly. **In 2025, one in five AJWS partners lost 30% or more of their funding; 31 of these partners lost more than 50%.**

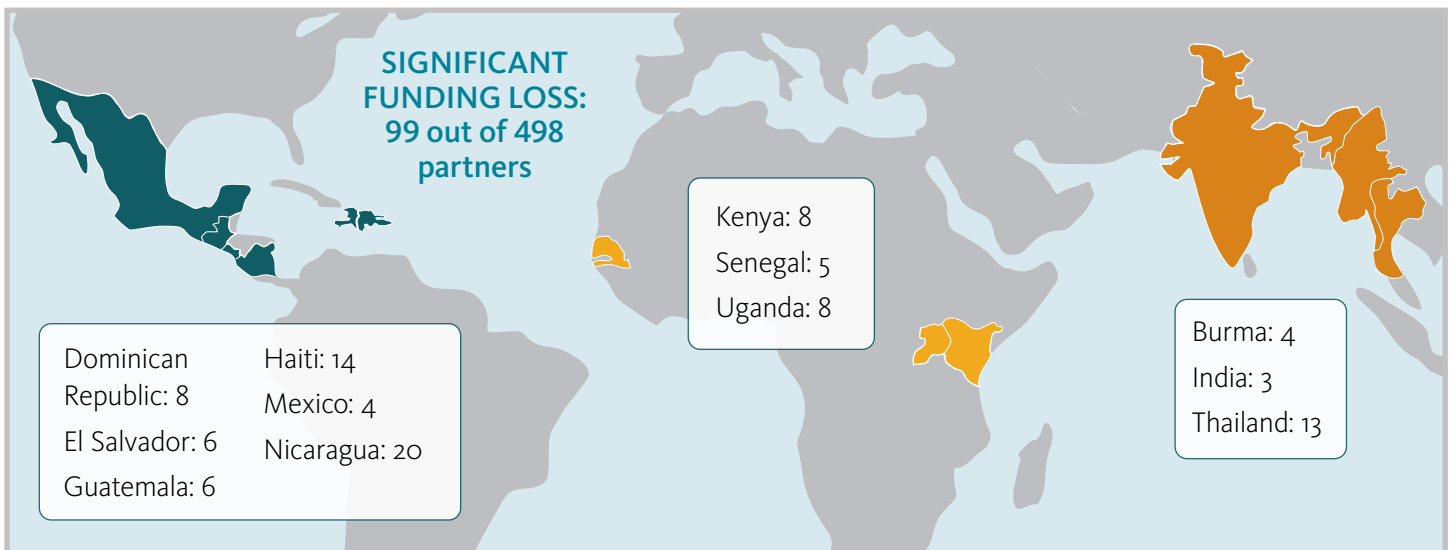
What's more, in January 2026, the Trump administration expanded the Global Gag rule. The policy previously gutted global public health funding in the name of anti-abortion crusading, prohibiting organizations from receiving U.S.

\*[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(26\)00008-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(26)00008-2/fulltext)

foreign aid if they also provide abortion-related services. The expansion restricts funding to all organizations, governments or grassroots groups offering any gender-affirming care or services related to diversity, equity and inclusion. The breadth and scale of this expansion is disastrous, with life-threatening dimensions.

## INCREASING THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY

Authoritarian leaders and their governments across the globe appear to be emboldened by President Trump's example, ramping up their crackdown on human rights activists. In this worsening climate, activists in every country where AJWS works are facing escalating safety and security threats with new and draconian legislation that codifies hatred and discrimination. **Surveys conducted by AJWS's local human rights experts found that almost two in five AJWS partner organizations—a total of 191—cite an increase in threats to their safety and security,** including unlawful arrests and imprisonment with no due process, death threats, harassment, and surveillance. In extreme cases, AJWS partners have even been forced into exile.



AJWS staff reporting on partners that lost funding between January and October 2025.

## HOW AJWS IS RESPONDING

AJWS made a strategic pivot in the face of these unprecedented challenges to provide our partners with much needed support. Our targeted response includes:

- **Flexible funding:** Between May 2025 and February 2026, AJWS allocated almost \$1.1 million to grantees affected by these sudden cuts—emergency grants made on top of our planned grantmaking to help them survive. We're proud to say that no partner organizations closed their doors in 2025 directly because of funding.
- **Responsive accompaniment:** Partners' need for intensive accompaniment has increased. AJWS's human rights experts working in each country where we fund organizations are deepening their partnership with these grantees—helping them foster creative thinking and collaboration, write proposals for funding, and develop relationships with additional donors.
- **Safety and security training:** AJWS is prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of our grantees more than ever before. We're coordinating security trainings, including digital security, for partners around the world, and enriching mental health support to address the growing strain and trauma of persecution and violence that these human rights defenders face. AJWS's on-the-ground human rights expertise has never mattered more.



*In southern Senegal, COSPAC, a coalition of grassroots organizations working to end a regional armed conflict, lost significant funding in 2025. Photo by Maroussia Mbaye.*

Human rights defenders, marginalized communities and those across the world who support them are tackling tremendous hurdles amid an uncertain future. While AJWS cannot make up for U.S. government cuts, we can invest in the strongest and most important social movement actors who will have an outsized and long-term presence. AJWS was made for times like these, and our accompaniment work and grantmaking are more important than ever. Resources from AJWS are providing flexible and reliable safety nets to grantees who must make difficult and strategic choices.

**AJWS partners are longtime leaders in social movements; their aspirations have already outlasted repressive governments and will continue to do so.**

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