



DEFENDING CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

THE PROBLEM

In many countries across the globe, people in positions of power violate the fundamental rights of citizens through political repression, discrimination and violence. Poor and persecuted people who hold little power—particularly women, youth, indigenous groups, and religious, ethnic or sexual minorities—are frequently excluded from civic and political life. Civil war and armed conflict claim lives and displace millions of people from their homes each year. Corrupt or abusive governments often crack down on those who dare to speak up for their rights and for the rights of others—through threats, imprisonment, torture or even murder.

Although many countries have ratified an international covenant that safeguards basic human rights such as the rights to political participation, free speech and peaceful assembly, governments often stray from their pledges and some don't sign on at all. Left unchecked, corrupt and power-hungry leaders get away with shocking abuses.

As a result, the vulnerable become powerless, citizens live in constant fear, and those who are different—because of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation—are persecuted and pushed to the margins of society.



Members of Reconoci.do raising attention about the plight of Dominicans of Haitian descent affected by the citizenship ruling.
Photograph by Diomedes

WE BELIEVE EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO:

- Participate in the political process to shape decisions that affect their everyday lives
- Express views freely and obtain and share information without censorship or fear of retribution
- Assemble, organize and mobilize social change efforts peacefully
- Live free from violence

OUR SOLUTION

To counter these challenges, AJWS supports courageous advocates working in 11 countries who are empowering people to learn about their rights; speak out against corruption, violence and abuse; use the ballot box as a vehicle for change; and organize to advance human rights at the local, national and global levels. Our grantees are often at the center of transformational moments—elections, peace negotiations or largescale protests—when the rights of the most vulnerable are most at risk or when there are strategic opportunities to foster lasting impact.

- In regions rife with corruption or led by dictators, our grantees seek to make governments more just, transparent and accountable and ensure free and fair elections through which all citizens can make their voices heard.
- In countries emerging from conflict, they support peace negotiations and ensure that the root causes of the conflict are addressed, taking into account the needs of women, minorities and other citizens caught in the crossfire.
- In societies where discrimination, violence and other abuses go unpunished, they conduct advocacy, provide legal aid and pursue legislative reform, to ensure that authorities implement and enforce equitable laws and that the survivors of crimes and atrocities can pursue justice in courts.
- When those in power silence, exclude or impoverish the vulnerable, AJWS grantees organize and mobilize communities to demand equality and shape their own solutions to the problems they face.

AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

Our grantees are fighting on the frontlines to defend the rights of the most vulnerable in their midst:

- In the Dominican Republic, after the country's highest court stripped citizenship from hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent in 2013, **Reconoci.do** has helped protect the rights and safety of those made stateless by the ruling. It has blocked deportations, helped people restore their identity documents and mobilized thousands to express their discontent in the 2016 elections. Reconoci.do educated voters about key races and trained hundreds of Dominicans of Haitian descent to be "electoral observers" to ensure those eligible to vote weren't turned away.
- In Senegal's Casamance region, where over 30 years of conflict have claimed thousands of lives, displaced tens of thousands and devastated the local economy, a coalition called the **Women's Platform for Peace in Casamance (PFPC)** is striving to bring lasting peace. Uniting 210 local organizations and more than 40,000 women, PFPC led the government to identify peace as a national priority and is working to heal rifts between communities and pressure warring factions to lay down their arms.
- In Burma, where the military continues to attack and torture ethnic minorities despite moves in recent years toward a more democratic government, AJWS grantees are working to end persecution and forge a true democracy. Within the country and on the Thai border region, where many minority groups have fled, **Kachin Women's Association of Thailand (KWAT)** and **Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO)** are mobilizing women and youth to expose and document atrocities. KWAT has also trained hundreds of refugees and migrants on women's rights through educational programs and leadership training.



Ongoing conflict in Burma has displaced thousands of Kachin women like Lu Bu Marip (pictured above) from their homes and villages. AJWS grantee KWAT works with conflict-affected communities to raise awareness about women's rights. *Photograph by Jonathan Torgovnik*

- In Mexico, after the horrific "disappearance" of 43 college students who were protesting the government, **Tlachinollan** lobbied for and secured an independent investigation and is working with the United Nations and Mexican authorities to establish a law outlawing such abductions.

In 2016, AJWS invested \$4.7 million in 124 social change organizations in 11 countries to defend civil and political rights.

Burma • Cambodia • Cote D'Ivoire
Democratic Republic of Congo • Dominican Republic
Guatemala • Haiti • Honduras • Mexico
Senegal • Sri Lanka

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OUR MISSION

Inspired by the Jewish commitment to justice, **American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world. AJWS defends civil and political rights, advances sexual health and rights, promotes climate justice, and aids communities in the aftermath of disasters. We pursue lasting change by supporting grassroots and global human rights organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and by advocating for U.S. and international policies for justice and equality worldwide.



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