



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. Oppressed 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.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has ignited an increased rise in authoritarianism, bigotry and violence. Authoritarian regimes are abusing their power—muzzling the press, backing legislation that threatens human rights, and undermining the rights of citizens under the guise of preventing infection.



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

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 13 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 large-scale 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 Uganda**, after 23 homeless LGBTQI+ youth were violently imprisoned and falsely charged with spreading COVID-19, AJWS grantee **Human Rights and Awareness Promotion Forum (HRAPF)** mobilized emergency legal support. For nearly two months, HRAPF fought relentlessly as the youth were held without bail and violently harassed. In May of 2020, the charges were dropped and the young people were finally freed—and awarded significant financial restitution.
- **In the Dominican Republic**, after the country's highest court stripped citizenship from hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent, **Reconoci.do** has helped protect the rights and safety of those made stateless by the ruling. It has blocked deportations,



Decades of fighting in Senegal's Casamance region have created rifts between communities. AJWS grantee COPI is bringing women together to plant in "peace gardens" so they can begin to trust one another again—and earn a living in the process. *Photograph by Jonathan Torgovnik*

helped people restore their identity documents and mobilized thousands to express their discontent in the 2016 elections. Today, Reconoci.do continues to fight discrimination and seek full equality for all Dominicans.

- **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**, ethnic minorities have long been persecuted and denied basic rights despite moves in recent years toward a more democratic government. In 2017, the military began a brutal, genocidal campaign against the Rohingya people, murdering men, women and children, burning villages and driving hundreds of thousands to flee to refugee camps in Bangladesh. Today, AJWS supports grantees in Burma who are promoting fundamental civil and political rights, particularly for these ethnic and religious minorities, as well as for women and youth.

In 2020, AJWS invested \$4.4 million in 161 social change organizations in 13 countries to defend civil and political rights.

Bangladesh • Burma • Cambodia
Democratic Republic of Congo • Dominican Republic
Guatemala • Haiti • India • Mexico • Nicaragua
Senegal • Sri Lanka • Thailand

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ABOUT AJWS

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is the leading Jewish organization working to fight poverty and pursue justice in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. By supporting hundreds of social change organizations in 18 countries, we respond to the most pressing issues of our time—from disasters, genocide and hunger, to the persecution of women and minorities worldwide. With Jewish values and a global reach, AJWS is making a difference in millions of lives and bringing a more just and equitable world closer for all.



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