



DEFENDING CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

THE CHALLENGES

In many countries across the globe, democracy is under attack and authoritarianism is on the rise. Corrupt and abusive leaders violate the fundamental rights of citizens through political repression, and increasingly 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. Marginalized populations—particularly women, youth, Indigenous groups, and religious, ethnic or sexual minorities—are frequently excluded from civic and political life.

Although many countries have ratified United Nations treaties and covenants that safeguard basic human rights such as the rights to political participation, free speech and peaceful assembly, some stray from their pledges and others haven't signed on at all. Left unchecked, corrupt and power-hungry leaders get away with shocking abuses—consolidating their power, dismantling democratic institutions and persecuting minority populations, pushing them further 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.



Edith Hernández Torres spent a decade looking for her brother Israel—one of over 80,000 people who have been “disappeared” over the past 15 years in Mexico. With help from AJWS grantee Regresando a Casa Morelos, she was finally able to find his remains and achieve a measure of closure. *Photo by Regina López*

WE'RE BUILDING A WORLD WHERE ALL CITIZENS CAN:

- 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, discrimination and oppression based on who they are or what they believe

HOW WE MAKE CHANGE

To counter these challenges, in 2022 AJWS supported 177 courageous social change organizations building movements fighting for democracy and human rights. These activists 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 minority communities 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.

OUR IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

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

- In **Senegal's Casamance region**, where 40 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.
- At the height of the COVID pandemic, the government of the **Dominican Republic** rolled out a vaccination campaign that cruelly left out vast swaths of the country's population, including migrant workers and black Dominicans of Haitian descent. But AJWS grantee **OBMICA** fought back against this blatant discrimination by launching a national movement for vaccine rights and meeting with officials throughout the government. OBMICA's work paid off: Vice President Raquel Peña de Antuña's administration committed to supporting universal access to vaccines, and assembling mobile vaccination centers to reach remote communities across the island.



Felipe Fortines of AJWS grantee Reconoci.do—which has partnered with OBMICA in their ambitious vaccine campaign—wearing a newly-printed t-shirt advocating for all people to receive their shot. Photo by OBMICA

- In **Mexico**, over the last 15 years, more than 80,000 people have been officially recognized as “disappeared”—abducted and likely murdered—as an increased wave of violence continues to flow from the so-called “war on drugs.” Due to the Mexican government's historic failure to recover and identify the bodies of the disappeared, bereaved families have taken matters into their own hands—forming organizations like AJWS grantees **Regresando a Casa Morelos**, **Caravana Internacional** and **Sabuesos Guerreras**—to search for their loved ones. Despite tremendous challenges, these brave groups are continuing their quests to find the missing and help families achieve closure with dignity and support.

In 2022, AJWS invested \$4.7 million in 177 social change organizations in 13 countries to defend civil and political rights.

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

Two countries have been omitted to protect the security of our partners in a region of political upheaval.

Updated November 2022

American Jewish World Service
45 West 36th Street
New York, NY 10018

📞 212.792.2900
800.889.7146
✉ ajws@ajws.org

🌐 ajws.org
f /americanjewishworldservice
t /ajws
📷 /americanjewishworldservice

