



# ADVANCING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS



Monika Samaddar leads youth training in Kolkata with Talash Society for Inner Strength, Peace and Equality—an AJWS grantee that empowers young people to challenge gender-based violence and early marriage through a curriculum rooted in mindfulness, martial arts and non-violent communication. Photograph by Ranita Roy.

## THE CHALLENGES

Across the globe, women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people face discrimination and alarming rates of violence. Patriarchal values fuel discriminatory laws and practices that prevent these populations from enjoying the freedom to make their own decisions about their health, education, professions and futures.

The statistics are staggering: An estimated one in three women will experience sexual violence or some other form of abuse in her lifetime. Every year, about 12 million girls get married before age 18—many by force. And in nearly 70 countries, being gay is a criminal offense, often punishable by prison and, in some cases, death.

### WE'RE BUILDING A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO:

- Pursue equal opportunities in society without limitations based on gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation
- Make their own decisions about their body and live free from violence
- Access healthcare that enhances their sexual and reproductive rights

AJWS works on these issues because we believe no one should be forced to live in fear or denied the ability to make their own decisions about their lives and bodies. These basic rights are essential to enable all human beings to live as equals, love whom they love, and be protected under the law.

## HOW WE MAKE CHANGE

AJWS supports social change organizations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean working to advance sexual health and rights, promote gender equality, and combat discrimination, violence and hate crimes. The activists we support work to build powerful, inclusive social movements that aim to shift how their families and society value their full humanity. They pursue sustainable change, from mobilizing girls in India fighting back against child marriage and gender-based violence, to organizing a national movement in Kenya to overturn the country's egregious anti-homosexuality law.

We believe that activists within these communities understand their needs and challenges best—that's why AJWS follows their lead in developing strategies to grow strong social movements that recognize bodily autonomy for all.

## OUR IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

The activists, organizations and movements we support are making progress in their communities and around the globe:

- For more than a decade, fearless Thai LGBTQI+ activists have challenged deeply entrenched social norms and demanded recognition in every corner of the country. With support from AJWS since 2010, grassroots organizations such as the **Isaan Gender Diversity Network (IGDN)** have transformed communities, training young people to break stigma and build visibility even in conservative rural regions. Their relentless advocacy, combined with decades of coalition-building, culminated in 2024 when Thailand became the first Southeast Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage. This victory was thanks in large part to the most widely supported legislative campaign in the nation's history. Yet even as marriage equality becomes more widespread, these leaders continue to push for full legal protections and genuine acceptance for all LGBTQI+ people in Thailand.



The IGDN team proudly out in the streets of Khon Kaen, where the organization is based. *Photo by Luke Duggelby.*

In 2025, AJWS invested in **153 social change organizations** around the world to promote sexual health and rights.

- In September 2018 in India, the country's Supreme Court made history by striking down Section 377 of the Constitution, which made consensual sex between same-sex adults illegal. **Solidarity and Action Against HIV Infection in India (SAATHI)** and other AJWS grantees helped lead this charge for equality in India. And in 2021, SAATHI was instrumental in influencing a prominent judge to issue a watershed order on behalf of the Madras High Court, demanding sweeping changes to eliminate illegal discrimination against members of the LGBTQI+ community.
- For years in Senegal, the crime of rape was dismissed as the equivalent of a misdemeanor—and convictions were rare. But AJWS grantee **Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (AJS)** refused to let the past dictate the future. In January 2020, this group of women lawyers led a massive movement to change the legal code. AJS worked closely with members of parliament and applied public pressure to criminalize rape definitively—and they won. Now, rape convictions carry a minimum of a 10-year sentence—a serious punishment befitting the horrendous crime.

Updated December 2025

### American Jewish World Service

45 West 36<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10018

📞 212.792.2900  
800.889.7146  
✉ [ajws@ajws.org](mailto:ajws@ajws.org)

🌐 [ajws.org](http://ajws.org)  
📘 [/americanjewishworldservice](https://www.facebook.com/americanjewishworldservice)  
🐦 [@ajws-humanrights.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/ajws-humanrights.bsky.social)  
📷 [/americanjewishworldservice](https://www.instagram.com/americanjewishworldservice)

