



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.

HOW WE MAKE CHANGE

To counter these challenges, AJWS supports courageous social change organizations building movements fighting for democracy and human rights. These activists are empowering people to learn about their rights; speak out



In Senegal, AJWS grantee Association des Juristes Sénégalaises has played a key role in ensuring women's political participation: from helping a gender parity law pass in Senegal's government, to training women—like Adama Mbengue, pictured here—run for and win political office. *Photo by Maroussia Mbaye*

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

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 the **Casamance region of Senegal**, a 40-year civil conflict between a rebel group, the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MDFC), and Senegalese government forces has claimed thousands of lives and displaced more than 60,000 people. But thanks to the mediation of **COSCPAC**, a peacebuilding coalition that AJWS supports, in 2023 the MDFC turned in their weapons and agreed to come to the peace table. This historic relinquishing of arms marks a key step toward peace talks, which could result in lasting peace in Casamance.
- In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, AJWS funds **Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA)**, a movement of young activists strengthening their country's fragile democracy. In the lead up to DRC's high-stakes presidential election in late 2023, LUCHA is mobilizing a massive voter campaign. Its 10,000 members will work to ensure that the vote will be credible, free and safe by registering voters in rural areas, educating people about their local candidates and monitoring voting sites for any signs of violence, fraud or voter intimidation. Because so few people in the DRC have internet access, LUCHA's campaign must be conducted in person — activists will be dispatched to rural areas across the country to engage people in markets and village squares.
- In **Mexico**, AJWS partner María Herrera Magdaleno received due recognition when she was named one of TIME magazine's "100 Most Influential People of 2023."



María's shirt bears the images of her four sons—Jesús Salvador, Raúl, Luis Armando and Gustavo—whose disappearance prompted her to ignite a movement. *Photo by Christine Han*

A mother and an activist, María transformed grief into action for thousands of families. Four of her children have been missing for more than a decade, casualties of violence in Mexico that has led to the "disappearance" of over 110,000 people. The government's failure to find them led María to her own search. She founded the collective **Familiares en Búsqueda ("Families in Search")** and today runs a network with nearly 200 collectives of bereaved relatives. AJWS is proud to have been María's first funder and continues to support her ongoing quest for justice.

In 2023, AJWS invested in 164 social change organizations in 13 countries that work 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.

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