

# Forum 08 in Review

AWID's 11th International Forum on Women's Rights and Development

## The POWER of Movements

November 14–17, 2008 | Cape Town, South Africa











## about this publication

From November 14-17, 2008, close to 2000 women's rights activists from 144 countries came together in Cape Town, South Africa, to discuss The Power of Movements. This compilation examines Forum 2008's approach, impact, and achievements as well as areas for improvement to build an even stronger, bolder Forum 2012. It presents a snapshot of some of the discussions and activities that took place over the four days of the Forum. It includes transcripts from each of the daily plenaries, as well as excerpts and reports from some of the most popular breakout sessions. We've also included personal testimonials as well as other reflections and writings on the forum itself. And of course, as much as possible, we've tried to include photos and images that capture some of the tremendous energy, passionate debate, and principled solidarity that is a hallmark of AWID forums. We hope that this resource will contribute to sharing some of the big ideas that came out of the forum and, at the same time, remind you that you are not alone, that the power of women's movements is making a difference, all around the world. Please enjoy.

We hope to see you at Forum 2012 in Istanbul, Turkey!



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# Report on AWID's 2008 Forum, "The Power of Movements"

## 1. Introduction



For AWID, the opportunity to organize a major international forum on Women's Rights and Development links to the core of our mission by responding to the urgency to promote stronger and more coordinated engagement and action by women's rights advocates, organizations and movements to more effectively advance women's rights.

The selection of "The Power of Movements" as the theme for AWID's 11<sup>th</sup> International Forum on Women's Rights and Development in November 2008 responded to our belief that building collective power is key to advancing feminist agendas, as well as our experience that this process does not happen on its own - we need to make it happen. Diverse women's movements and women's organizing have played a key role in the achievements related to women's rights and gender equality worldwide. One part of the analysis that drove our selection of the Forum theme was that women's movements in many places and contexts around the world have been 'holding the line' in the last several years, making limited progress in some areas and feeling hard-pressed to adapt strategies to an increasingly adverse context. This suggests the need for women's rights activists to urgently rethink how we work together and who we work with.

For example, we see significant successes of indigenous women's movements in recent years, but in spaces with mainstream feminist activists, their advances are not commonly recognized as part of our common cause. Thus AWID's aim was to place a broad diversity of activists at the center of the Forum agenda so that participants would be pushed to look to the varied array of experiences and expressions of women's organizing, and through that recognize the broader possibilities for alliance-building. While a rich array of feminist and women's organizing processes and movements has emerged in the last decade, there have been limited spaces to discuss their implications or to think about what other processes we could create or learn from.

With this Forum, we purposefully aimed to turn the lens inward: on ourselves, our organizations, our strategies and our ways to go about building collective power. We

wanted to look at *how* we might organize and mobilize more effectively. We also wanted to firmly resist the increasing pressure on women's organizations to move away from movement building to project-oriented approaches that focus on delivering so-called 'concrete' or easily quantifiable outputs and services. We wanted to create a space for women to re-focus on strategies that build collective power to challenge the roots of gender discrimination and other forms of social exclusion and oppression. We recognized the risk in this approach: in the face of so many contextual challenges and setbacks, to focus on ourselves might seem a luxury we can scarce afford. However, we believe that it is precisely because of the challenging context that creating space for discussion and strategy development was and continues to be an urgent task, in order to strengthen our organizations and movements as a means to build collective power towards a more just world.

**The Forum was designed with the hope of advancing the following six outcomes:**

- i Greater understanding of what movement building is, why it's important, and what we can do to strengthen movement building processes
- ii Significant steps to overcome the fragmentation within women's movements, focusing in particular on issues of diversity and inclusion.
- iii Advancing conversations and thinking among diverse women's rights advocates on elements of a shared political agenda (that is, an agenda to transform power relations, broader than a particular issue or identity).
- iv Expanded strategic alliances with other social movements, connecting in particular with women's rights advocates within these movements.

- v Significant visibility and engagement of young women in key debates and strategies of women's movements, contributing to more effective multi-generational movement-building.
- vi The revitalization (meaning having participants leave with a renewed sense of commitment and energy, inspiration, as well as new allies, strategies, and ways of thinking and acting) of women's organizations and movements generally but also very particularly in Africa, the region where the Forum was held.

To craft the Forum agenda, AWID drew on the experience and insights of the 31 members of our International Planning Committee to help us select sessions and frame the plenaries. With their guidance, we aimed to ensure a diverse offering to match the diverse interests of participants. Session themes covered economic and social rights, education and culture, sustainable development, multigenerational organizing, overcoming fragmentation and alliance-building, constituency-building, organizational strengthening, sexual rights and reproductive rights, HIV and AIDS, communications and technology, violence against women, conflict and post-conflict/peace-building. We aimed to build the Forum as a feminist space, valuing the relevance of individual women's stories and experience as part of the broader collective process of constructing knowledge. Identity, body politics, sexuality were thus consistently critical themes that emerged and axes for talking about experiences with power and movement-building.

For the first time, AWID, led by our Building Feminist Movements and Organizations (BFEMO) strategic initiative, developed some core content as a foundation for Forum discussions. *Changing Their World – Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* proposed definitions of a movement, and particularly what constitutes a feminist movement, and analyzed core elements of movement strategies. *Changing Their World* was sent to all Forum registrants via email prior to the Forum and printed copies were made available in English, Spanish and French on-site.

The present document shares AWID's perspective on the Forum: what we believe was accomplished, what we learned, and how we will be taking these lessons forward in the planning of the next AWID Forum. We are drawing on internal debriefs, results of the post-Forum on-line evaluation survey (591 responses received – almost a 33% response rate), interviews and many informal conversations with Forum participants. We're in the process of conducting a 'year-after' evaluation of the Forum, which will help us further understand its impact. We'll also soon be receiving reports from the 25 Forum seed grant recipients and learning from their experiences. To recapture more of the substance of Forum debates, *The Forum 08 in Review* (also available at <http://www.awid.org/eng/Forum-08>) includes transcripts from the plenaries, excerpts from the most popular sessions, photographs and highlights from other key Forum spaces.

The circumstances under which the Forum took place were less than ideal for AWID with the absence, due to serious illness, of our Executive Director, Lydia Alpízar Durán for four months preceding and during the Forum. Yet the AWID staff, Board and members of the International Planning Committee worked together very effectively to organize a successful Forum.

After analyzing a range of information collected about the Forum and participant experiences, it is clear that the AWID Forum created an inclusive space for diverse expressions of women's organizing and also contributed to opening up or advancing several sensitive internal debates—on NGO-ization, competition, power dynamics within women's movements—that are critical for our organizations to address head-on. Also, the 2008 AWID Forum is remembered as a space that contributed to positioning multi-generational movement-building on the agenda of many women's organizations, their allies, and donors. Naturally, many questions remain, but feedback we have received affirms that the Forum made a useful contribution, expanding possibilities for alliances and collaborative action.

The opportunity to bring close to 2,000 diverse women's rights activists together is all too rare and the stakes are high for ensuring that a Forum is a good use of resources—both financial and human—on the part of organizers and participants. We are committed to continuing to strengthen the Forum, both substantively and methodologically, so that it can serve its valuable purpose well. Our sincere thanks and appreciation go out to all of those who participated in Forum 2008, to the donors that provided financial support, and to everyone who contributed to making it a great success. We are very much looking forward to applying the many lessons from that experience as we prepare the next AWID Forum—we hope to see you there!







## 2. In what did we succeed? Forum Achievements

### The Forum contributed to a greater understanding of what movement building is, why it's important, and what can be done to strengthen movement-building processes.

"New learning and expanded view of women's movements" was the single largest category of change identified by respondents to the evaluation survey – almost 50% – when answering the question: *How did the Forum change you?* In response to other survey questions, 93% stated that the Forum had given them an increased awareness of what their organizations can do differently to strengthen women's movements, and 90% also felt that they had gained greater clarity on the importance and challenges of movement-building. 91% agreed that "this Forum challenged me in useful ways" with a solid and creative program. One event that helped further understanding of the power of movements was the march against violence against women organized by South Africa's One in Nine Campaign on the second day of the Forum. Many bloggers, for instance, spoke about the profound effect of the march on simulating for its participants, both the power of movements as well as the power of overcoming fragmentation and working together across our different identities and locations.

*The main thing is that now I have some ideas about how I can mobilize the people in my own province and country...\**

*It made me become more critical about the strategies we use in our work, and [question] whether they contribute to movement building or are more elitist.*

**The Forum attracted a large and diverse array of participants.** This was an important achievement, considering AWID's commitment to attempting to reflect the diversity of women's movements within the Forum space. 82% of the respondents to our online survey stated that they were attending an AWID Forum for the first time, telling us that an entire new spectrum of activists utilized the AWID space, rather than the same veteran conference-goers. 67% of the respondents characterized themselves as women's rights activist/advocate, while 11% identified with "other independent women's movement". In addition to our Access Fund, providing travel grants for 216

session organizers and speakers, AWID mobilized resources for a special "movement-building fund" which awarded travel grants to 50 activists from sectors often significantly under-represented in international women's rights fora. Almost a quarter of Forum participants were young women from all the six continents; we reached the highest participation of women from the Middle East, Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa in an AWID Forum; and the number of women with disabilities and sessions by and on women with disabilities reached an all-time high.

The regional breakdown of registered participants was as follows:

Region	Participants
Sub-Saharan Africa (274 of which were from South Africa)	694
East and South East Asia	97
Central and Eastern Europe and NIS	73
Western Europe	168
Latin America and the Caribbean	160
Middle East	68
North Africa	28
North America (US & Canada)	261
Pacific	48
South Asia	102
Unspecified	193
<b>Total</b>	<b>1892</b>

*The forum gave me a view that I could not have gained elsewhere – the view of the range and richness of our diversity across many countries and across various sectors, not as one movement but as many movements, happening all at once, challenging patriarchy and capitalist exploitation in many voices and tongues and deploying repertoires of strategies, knowledge and experiences. It has inspired me in more ways than one, to have touched base with so many sisters from all over the world.*

\* All quotations are drawn from participant comments in the Forum evaluation. Because the evaluations were anonymous, we are not able to indicate the country of origin of the speaker.



**The Forum fostered new conversations and thinking among diverse women's rights advocates around elements of a shared political agenda.** As described above, one of our hopes with the Forum was for participants to find common cause with other activists, to find some level of shared purpose that could facilitate links of solidarity and collaboration across differences. Although this is a long term effort that must stretch well into the future, we saw some promising signs at the Forum with new initiatives taking shape and existing initiatives gaining increased attention. A group of South African women coalesced around creating a joint agenda for building a feminist campaign to monitor and demand accountability from the country's political system, parties, and elected representatives. They also aimed to explore the possibility of launching a women's political party as a counterforce. The final day of the Forum saw a flurry of statements and campaigns being launched on a wide array of issues from climate change to aid agendas, including a statement related to a feminist perspective on the current financial crisis and economic recession (which many participants noted was a significant absence in the Forum). Some of these statements and campaigns represent new agendas that emerged in the course of the Forum, while others had been developing well before, but gained exposure and support at the Forum. Women who came seeking solidarity for their struggles—from Atenco, Mexico to the Democratic Republic of Congo—used the opportunity to share their experiences with other activists and we heard from some about their unexpected surprise with finding common cause among such diverse women.

*We had never participated in such a big international event that was all about women's rights. We were very moved to see that so many women from all over the world were working and struggling for other women, that was new for us. We realized that if we make ourselves stronger as women, if we come together more and if we value our needs, we can make the social movements in which we participate stronger. In our town, there are many women that are fighting and that have had to be on the frontline in many moments of the resistance and defense of the land, but there are times that we don't value ourselves or each other, we don't recognize that our needs are important. That wears us out and it divides us. Seeing so many women together, so much solidarity among women, made us think that we can improve our situation, if we come together and struggle together.*

**The Forum contributed to the process of building strategic alliances.** Part of our intent with bringing together a diverse array of activists is the hope that some lasting connections can emerge from this exposure and initial opportunity for exchange—connections that can be mutually enriching and contribute to stronger movements. We know that the Forum provides many participants with a chance to meet others from places or sectors that they would not normally have an opportunity to engage with in person. Our survey results show that, indeed, participants forged a range of new relationships at the Forum: 92% of the 591 respondents stated that the Forum enabled them to connect "with people from groups or sectors I don't generally work with" (56% = strongly agree; 36% somewhat agree). And the exact same percentage i.e., 92% - agreed with the statement "I leave this Forum with new allies that I look forward to contacting soon." (59% = strongly agree; 33% = somewhat agree). Through several sessions we saw participants grappling with the power dynamics inhibiting stronger alliances among women's organizations and aiming to create new rules of engagement to overcome such obstacles. A critical area of alliance building that received a great deal of attention and participation was the donor world, and the challenges of reframing the relationship between women's organizations and donors to strengthen support for transformative movement building work and reduce the emphasis on short-term projects and "magic bullets". The Funders Forum was well attended and generated some heated exchanges as well as real debate and several related sessions saw lively discussions around donor policies and how these could be re-aligned to support movement-oriented approaches.

*At the Forum, many of the plenaries and sessions dealt with movement building, and how to build allies and collaborations that will help strengthen our movements. As I spoke with women from around the world and observed the sheer diversity of Forum participants, I thought of how many of the groups [my organization] works with in East Africa do not collaborate effectively, or are not necessarily inclusive of a diversity of people. Thus seeing so many different women working together inspired the idea of strengthening collaboration and inclusiveness amongst Indigenous women and their organizations in Nomadic areas of Kenya.*

*The AWID forum facilitated South African women's dialogue to discuss the imperative of uniting women's movements in SA. We take cognizance of other national women's initiatives and would actively promote dialogue with all women's structures in the country and build on work already done.*

**The Forum contributed to significant visibility and engagement of young women in key debates and strategies of women's movements, contributing to more effective multi-generational movement building.**

At the Forum, AWID's Young Feminist Activism (YFA) program sought to highlight the contributions of young women to women's movements, and to ensure that the discussion around movement building was inclusive of young women, their voices and perspectives, as well as to advance thinking on the role of intergenerational solidarity and multigenerational strategies in movement building. The 'YFA Forum Committee' - a group of 45 women of all ages worked together for several months prior to the Forum and then met face-to-face on site to strategize on how best to optimise young women's participation, foster multigenerational dialogue, and encourage intergenerational interaction, discussion and collaboration at the Forum. Pink scarves worn by Forum participants as tokens of support for intergenerational movement building turned into a powerful visual statement, that spurred discussions and debates about the meaning of the term 'multigenerational', its role in the development of strong and effective movements, and the practicalities of achieving balanced dialogue and solidarity across generations. Age-exclusive activities like the Young Women's Caucus created safe spaces for young women to discuss and critique women's organizations and movements and, together with our strategy of ensuring young women's representation in plenaries and sessions, supported the active contribution of young women to multigenerational spaces at the Forum. The Young Feminist Fund - an idea that had emerged from AWID's work with young feminists earlier in the year, found new traction and support at the Forum for mobilizing significant resources to support the next generation of movement builders. Over 22% of Forum delegates were under the age of 30. 91% of respondents to our online survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "...young women were visible and central players in advancing discussions around movement building" and 95% agreed that the Forum did a good job of providing space for the perspectives of women of different generations to be present and valued.

*I .... spoke with women who wanted "pink" [the color is quite a conversation starter] scarves and thus they shared their stories with me ... I heard stories I would most likely have never heard if I had not approached these women to talk [with the scarves of course]. The women I spoke with are in love with the women's movement and are committed to supporting and making spaces for new feminists to come into it. Thank you for sharing your stories.*

*(Intergenerational dialogue) is about building inter-identity dialogues, where both young and older women construct feminist knowledge, where there is feedback, respect and collective construction between generations. It is to perceive that identities and backgrounds enrich feminism ... that we need to overcome inequalities to transform the world ... together.*

**We expanded the use of ICTs within the Forum itself, thus expanding the Forum's reach and impact.**

Recognizing the weakness of many women's rights and feminist activists and movements in using communications technologies in their work, AWID was very pleased to partner with the Association of Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC-WNSP) to strengthen this dimension of the Forum. The pre-Forum Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX), was an opportunity for over 100 women participants to learn about audio and video tools, social networking, digital storytelling and much more. During the Forum, there was an active content creation community at the FTX Hub, which shared insights and experiences from the Forum in multiple languages. In addition, simultaneous podcasts of Forum plenaries, Feminist International Radio Endeavour's daily FIREPLACE broadcasts, and enabling of e-mail communication for participants helped to make the Forum accessible to a diverse range of women, organizations, and movements who couldn't physically be present. Beyond just using ICTs, FTX participants and the FTX Hub pushed Forum participants (and organizers) to think more about communications rights and feminist approaches to technology. In fact, 4 of the 25 seed grants awarded after the Forum build on FTX-related themes. While still a relatively underdeveloped theme in 2008, we look forward to expanding on this much further in the 2012 Forum.

*Who said women cannot be empowered to set up their own wireless networks? Who knew that a can of peaches, that women often use to make peach melba, could be turned into an antenna ready for transmission?*

*It was a pleasant surprise to see my digital story being shown at the main plenary of the AWID Forum. I then realised that digital story telling was an effective and powerful tool that can be used to tell the audience what we know, who we are and what we believe in - as an individual from a marginalised community and as a Movement.*



### Participants left the Forum with a renewed sense of commitment and energy, inspiration.

We know that high levels of stress and burnout have a hugely negative impact on women's movements. We hope that the Forum in some small way can help participants reconnect to what gives them energy and sustains them over the long haul. Forum blogs and the online survey results, as well as unsolicited compliments and conversations overheard leave us in no doubt – 96% of respondents to the evaluation survey agreed that "the Forum was inspiring and energizing". The wide array of artistic, cultural, and body-movement events offered at this Forum were aimed both at revitalizing participants as well as reminding us all of the power of breaking out of 'head space' in our analysis and strategizing. Similarly, several sessions sought to address and legitimize issues of self-care as necessary for the sustainability of women's movements.

*I am a fairly new person in the women's movement and for me to see so much energy and meeting so many strong and committed women was a moving experience. I really witnessed ... the 'power in the collective'. I am sure the experience will be with me for a long time and inspire me to be more active in the human rights and women's rights movement.*

*I think this forum gives a feeling to a woman that this is a place where you can raise any issue which hurts, affects, holds one from exploring. The energy of women and freedom was tremendous... I have decided that whether my daughters work in this field or not, they should attend one of the AWID forums...*





### 3. Where can we improve? Critical Lessons & Insights

With every Forum, AWID learns a great deal—both from evaluations and feedback from participants, conversations and interviews with key partners, as well as through internal staff reflections. Some of the critiques we can address directly, while others reflect difficult trade-offs that are always present in organizing such an event.

#### Engagement with local women's organizations:

In the lead-up to a Forum, AWID reaches out to local women's organizations to share information about the event and explore ways of using the Forum to advance local women's rights agendas. AWID ensures that some activists from the 'host' country are on the International Planning Committee, we include a number of sessions led by local groups in the Forum program, and we normally provide about 100 free registrations (for the Cape Town Forum this was doubled to 200) for representatives from local women's groups. In addition, we try to coordinate, when possible, with events targeting local press or public to promote visibility for women's rights issues that are part of the struggles of local women's movements. Following our experience in Cape Town—where some activists and organizations mobilized against the Forum, feeling that the process of session selection was not transparent and the registration fees too high—we came to see that an event of this magnitude requires much more pro-active outreach on the part of AWID, particularly to address the kind of miscommunication and misinformation that can generate unnecessary tensions. This means more proactive local ambassadors, more focused local communication efforts with women's movements, as well as regular open interaction with an array of relevant actors in the host country. We will continue to make a sizeable number of free registrations available for local participants, as well as review our approach to the role and visibility of organizations from the host country in the Forum program (while still maintaining the Forum as an international—not regional or country-focused—event).

**Responsiveness to Shifts in Context:** The financial crisis exploded about 6 weeks prior to the 2008 Forum. We expected that the crisis and its implications would filter into the plenaries (particularly the plenary on the external context) and some sessions, but we did not request that speakers specifically speak to the crisis (or look for new speakers who could). Although we heard from some participants that they felt the crisis was recognized and discussed sufficiently, the majority felt that the absence of more debate around the crisis was a significant weakness

and a lost opportunity to strategically use such a diverse space in a very particular political moment—for example to launch common actions, or give greater visibility to related joint statements. Although our capacity to make major changes in the Forum program at a late date is limited, AWID has taken from this experience the importance of further contingency planning so that we can be responsive and incorporate such contextual changes and their impacts on women's rights organizing in a meaningful way.

**Openness and Safety:** Forum registration is an open process (registrations are not vetted or reviewed) and in past Forums, we never had a situation where there were more interested registrants than the number that could be





accommodated. In the 2008 Forum we were both in a position where we had to turn away interested participants because we were over-capacity and we saw some participants in the space who did not embrace core feminist principles of respect for diversity and equality, engaging in 'hate' speech particularly in sessions around LGBTQ rights. The nature of participation by some men in attendance was also perceived as threatening, particularly in sessions on sexuality. This raised significant questions around the extent to which the AWID Forum can be a "safe" space at the time it remains an 'open' space, as well as whether or how we might screen Forum participants. What is clear from this experience is that by making the forum such an inclusive and diverse space, we need to be better prepared at AWID to manage the diversity in a way that it enriches us all and contributes to building a space where participants can raise their differences in respectful ways, protecting the integrity of all people present there. For future AWID Forums we will be strategizing with the International Planning Committee and other key actors on how to address these challenges.

### **More opportunities for in-depth debate, strategizing and substantive interaction among participants:**

Participants consistently seek opportunities for deeper engagement in the various Forum spaces and AWID faces difficult trade-offs between the diversity of voices and experiences and time for more in-depth analysis. We heard from some participants who expressed interest in plenaries offering more depth (with fewer speakers). We also heard frustration that some of the break-out sessions ended up as 'talking heads', with limited interaction, or that the limited time for sessions means there is just enough time to share information and no opportunity to really deepen analysis or probe and explore possible strategies. There was also feedback pushing us to not simply recap challenges or problems that most people are aware of but to go to the 'whys', the analysis, raise questions that can spark new ideas. The broad diversity of participants, and their varying levels of exposure and experience with the range of themes addressed at the Forum can also complicate in-depth debate or strategizing—some come wanting to learn about



something that is completely new to them, for example the experiences of women's organizing from different regions or on different issues, while others want to use the space to expand conversations or do more in-depth thinking and debating on issues they've been grappling with for many years. For the 2008 Forum we tried to strengthen accompaniment of session organizers and provided methodological guidelines and tips from past experience. In future AWID Forums, we will be exploring other formats that we hope might provide greater opportunities for depth and interaction as well as strategizing.

**More diversity among participants as well as speakers:** The politics of representation is acutely felt in an event such as the Forum, and we hear from participants when they feel that a particular voice was not adequately reflected in the agenda. AWID struggles to ensure diversity of speakers in plenaries and sessions, although we have limited control over the latter and with the former, we face space and time limitations. With the 2008 Forum we had hoped to attract as participants more women from other social movements and grassroots organizations who might not normally attend an international feminist event, but would have a great deal to contribute to the dialogue on "the power of movements". In practice, we were reminded that because such relationships are often tenuous, the time demands to facilitate this participation are extensive. As a result, participation of actors from other social movements was less than we had hoped. This is a lesson we will be factoring into the planning for our next forum.

Questions of diversity in representation are also linked with questions of accessibility—whether related to financial constraints, quality interpretation, or other dimensions. We recognize that the cost of Forum registration—while covering only a fraction of the total Forum expense—is significant and for some groups prohibitive. We have frequently debated pros and cons of sliding scales, or a much lower flat registration rate and will be returning to these questions for the next Forum. At the same time, we have also been very flexible with groups who approach us requesting a reduced rate. Although professional interpretation was provided in English-Arabic-French-Spanish (for plenaries and select sessions), we heard that there were issues with the quality of interpretation, frustration that not all sessions had interpretation and that the participation of Arabic, French and Spanish-speaking delegates was hindered by these limitations. We have also received requests to expand accessibility by providing sign language interpretation and making key materials available in Braille. We will continue to explore possibilities for expanding the accessibility of the Forum, recognizing that these possibilities also have significant financial implications. Finally, some Forum participants reported feeling that it was a difficult space for 'newcomers' to engage and feel comfortable with. This is also a recurring theme and although we expanded the Forum orientation program, we will continue to explore other possibilities for greater integration into the space.

### **Breadth and balance of the Forum program:**

We repeatedly hear from Forum participants that there is too much in the Forum program—too many different choices and parallel activities. However when the time comes for us to select fewer sessions for the agenda, AWID faces strong pressure from members and partners seeking a place in the agenda. We had initially aimed to have just 100 sessions for Forum 2008 but received such strong complaints that we maximized use of time and space to accommodate over 170. With close to 2,000 participants and limited space, having a variety of activities at the same time is the strategy AWID uses to ensure that there is 'something for everyone'. But we will also be exploring the value of unstructured space in the agenda, as well as looking at the strong interest in more creative, cultural events as part of the forum program.

The content of the sessions is a function of the proposals AWID receives. Although we aim to select session proposals covering an appropriate diversity of themes, and to organize special 'gap filler' sessions when we see a crucial theme not reflected among the sessions, the particular make-up of the program is reflective of difficult choices between high quality proposals and an array of issues in keeping with the scope set out by the forum call for proposals. A particular weakness noted in Forum 2008 was the limited offering of sessions (and plenary speakers) related to development, economics and trade issues—not just from the perspective of the financial and economic crisis, but also recognizing the crucial role of women's organizing on these issues and the links between livelihoods and movement-building strategies. In a sense, the Forum program reflects the sectors of women's movements that most actively engage with AWID and the Forum. This tells us that we need to invest significant effort and outreach to more organizations working on economic justice to ensure they have appropriate space within the Forum.

### **More effective multigenerational reflection and engagement:**

The visibility and participation of young women in the Forum was largely rated a great success, however this highlighted the absence of support mechanisms responding to the needs of women from other generations (like the veterans) in our movements. This raised an ongoing tension whereby advocacy to overcome the exclusion and isolation experienced by young women activists leaves women from other generations feeling excluded or unappreciated. This tension needs to be addressed directly in future strategies built around generations as an identity. While the message of multigenerational movement-building was received with enthusiasm, there is still clearly a need to move beyond the rhetoric and support further discussion about how to do this in practice. The popularity of the 'pink scarves' left us reflecting on how to move beyond an easy to adopt token of support to more substantive engagement with the challenges of working effectively across generations.



## 4. Looking Forward: The 2012 Forum



AWID will dedicate its next international Forum to contribute to the search for feminist alternatives for just, sustainable development, prompted by the current financial crisis and economic recession. Clearly, the neoliberal economic model is collapsing under its own weight, and the world is in search of an alternative. Unfortunately, past experience indicates that at such times, the alternatives tend to take two forms: a return to past formulas, revamped slightly but without fundamentally questioning the power dynamics at play; or, bold new designs that completely ignore the perspectives, role, and contribution of women to the economic life and wellbeing of their societies. Can we, as feminists, seize the moment and offer genuinely feminist alternatives? Can we help governments, multilateral institutions, and societies create a new economics where people, and especially women, really matter? Feminists everywhere—activists, economists, researchers—have a

unique opportunity to meaningfully contribute in the shaping of the world's economic future.

The rich experience, insights and lessons generated during the 2008 Forum have stimulated a bold and exciting vision for AWID's next Forum—one that positions the Forum not only as an event but as a broader process. Forum 2012 will have a revised structure and format that we hope will contribute to making it the most politically informed and substantive Forum yet, while also continuing to expand the diverse and inclusive nature of the space. An important difference will be the use of key "sub-themes" as an organizing structure for the Forum. We want the Forum to be a space for feminist popular economic education for those who want it, and for others, a space that indulges not just in analysis of the problem, but in advancing alternative approaches and gaining strategic and political support for these.





To prepare for and facilitate more substantive and strategic engagement of participants at the Forum, AWID is designing a comprehensive preparatory process that will include many of the aspects of our traditional Forum planning (such as the establishment of an International Planning Committee, a call for session proposals, and of course key program components like the plenaries) as well as:

- Alliance-building with groups doing work related to the Forum theme, to help us frame content around particular Forum "sub-themes" and identify other meetings or opportunities in the lead-up to the Forum where related conversations could be advances and so that the Forum builds on many of the debates in progress.
- Special outreach to allies in other social movements to broaden the analysis and experience informing the Forum's conceptualization, motivate their participation in the process, identify complementarities in our agendas and prepare key conceptual inputs for the Forum.
- Prepare select background papers as part of an intentional knowledge-building strategy leading up to the Forum, so that key analytical materials and strategic possibilities are available to participants before the event, allowing the Forum itself to become a space for debating these and building consensus around shared advocacy and action agendas in the post-Forum period.
- An economic education process: Economics and finance are themes often perceived by women's rights activists as either too complex or too distant to be part of their spheres of action (for the 2008 Forum, only 30 of the more than 1,000 session proposals received related to economic development themes.) AWID will work with allies to host specific training sessions on economics and development from a women's rights and feminist perspective, in key international venues (such as the CSW B+15 reviews for example), disseminating periodic materials and information in different languages through our e-lists and website, among others. This process will also be supported by specific skills-building sessions organized at the forum.
- A working group to take a closer look at how feminist pedagogy and methodologies can shape a more effective Forum, and contribute to improve the quality of the break-out sessions and other key program components.

The work of AWID's Influencing Development Actors and Practices (IDeA) initiative will play a strong role in shaping the next Forum. IDeA will lead the development of the pre-Forum economic education process and is already engaging partners on debates around development paradigms and feminist approaches, commissioning papers to understand the impact of the current crisis on women around the work, as well as sectoral papers related to the impact of the crisis in key sectors.

In addition to the refinements being made to the Forum preparatory process and program, AWID is making a significant change in the Forum timing. Traditionally, Forums take place every three years, towards the end of the year. Under a normal schedule, the next Forum would have been in October 2011. However, we have decided to change the date of the Forum, responding to a long-standing timing conflict with the periodic Feminist Encuentro, a vital regional meeting of Latin American and Caribbean feminists which is celebrating its 30th anniversary in late 2011. We believe this date change carries significant advantages for the Forum—giving us more time for the preparations, but also by shifting the Forum to the northern spring of 2012, we hope that participant schedules will be less packed than they invariably are at the close of a year.

At this time, Forum 2012 is about two years away. There is much to be done to fulfill our vision of what this space, and the process leading up to it, can accomplish. It is again a privilege and an honour to organize such an event. We look forward to your engagement in the process and hope to see you in Turkey in 2012!



# Plenary Sessions

Each day of the forum was anchored by plenary sessions, with big ideas to stimulate, inspire and provoke. This section presents edited transcripts from each of the four plenaries. Some of the content has been edited for clarity and for length.

Full session transcripts are available in the Forum08 section of the AWID website at [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org).

## PLENARY 1

# Women Organizing and Transforming the World

## “Rage and refusal are not enough”

Presentation by Geetanjali Misra, India



Good morning everybody. I am Geeta Misra. I'm the president of AWID and the executive director of CREA. It's my pleasure to welcome all of you to the 11th AWID forum in Cape Town: The Power of Movements.

I want to start with a word. A word that was born in South Africa, where we are gathered today to talk about the power of movements. A word that evokes one of the most monumental struggles in the world – the struggle against apartheid, or the system of racial segregation that was in place in South Africa for almost 50 years.

The word I want to open this AWID plenary with is “Amandla” – a Xhosa and Zulu word that means “power” and when accompanied with “Awethu” (“Amandla Awethu”) means power to us, or “power to the people.” These are words that had the power to shift power, like other words that come to mind.

“Azaadi” – the Hindi word for freedom – is another such word. It was the rallying cry for India's struggle for independence from the British, and is now part of the women's movement in India, where I come from. Of course, words do not bring about social change by themselves. But, as the British playwright Tom Stoppard once said, “Words are sacred. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little.”

I'd like to evoke the power of movements that have nudged the world a little by sharing some of the popular slogans we associate with them. These slogans are not just words. They represent the claims of people fighting for social justice on various fronts:

- Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!
- Make love not war
- The personal is political
- Women's rights are human rights
- Women unite. Take back the night.
- My body, my choice!
- Pleasure me safely
- Love is a human right
- Silence = Death
- We're here. We're queer. Get used to it.
- Good girls go to heaven. Bad girls go everywhere.
- Don't talk to me of sewing machines. Talk to me of workers' rights.
- Yes We Can!
- Another world is possible

As these slogans tell us, social movements are rooted in fighting a diversity of oppressions and injustices. Social movements can be local, national, regional or transnational. They can spark off anywhere, and they can be seeded anywhere: on the streets, in shanty towns like the South African shack dwellers movement; in university coffee houses like the student movement against the Vietnam War; in workplaces like the Solidarity movement in Poland; in areas where people are being displaced by so-called “development” projects like the Narmada dam in India; or on the internet through sites like [moveon.org](http://moveon.org) which channeled global resistance and outrage against

the war on Iraq. They can take place where there is democracy, in situations of occupation like Palestine, and in countries where we assume there is no space to create a struggle. Women in Iran, for instance, started building a movement in the early 1980s when Khomeini's regime had dismantled nearly all the rights that women had secured between 1900 and 1979. All they had left was the right to vote, but even in this small crack, they organized themselves. Disabled women in New Zealand and India have organized to make sign language an official language in those countries.

## While a single act of resistance can spark a movement, it is not itself a movement. Movements are about collective claims

In the public imagination, social movements are often associated with simple acts of resistance: women hugging trees in northern India instead of allowing them to be cut as part of the environmental Chipko movement; a black woman, Rosa Parks, travelling in the whites-only section of a bus as part of the American civil rights struggles; students going on hunger strikes in China to protest the murder of a sympathetic general secretary; anti-nuclear activists mounting vigil at radioactive sites like Chernobyl; protesters against HIV chaining themselves to fences so that they can't be dragged away. While these acts of resistance become the public face of movements, the movements they are part of run much deeper. In this sense, movements are like icebergs: a bit of it visible on top, the rest of it held together as an invisible mass.

There are many ways to think about, understand and conceptualize social movements: as a vehicle for ordinary people's participation in public politics, as a process by which ordinary people make collective claims on others, or as politics by other means – often the only means open to relatively powerless groups. When the African-American author Alice Walker says, "I have a rage in me to defy the stars," she is talking the language and concepts of social movements.

But rage and refusal are not enough. The heart is not enough. The head must also be allied. This is the second thing that all movements have: a political analysis of oppression. When a Dalit or low-caste woman says she can't love someone outside her own caste not because of "purity" issues, but because she is not free to make her own sexual choices, she understands her political condition. When a lesbian woman says she can't introduce her lover to her mother because of the stranglehold of heteronormativity,

she understands her political condition.

The good thing about political conditions is that they can change. All social movements are about overcoming asymmetries of power, about shifting power from the powerful to the powerless. But when social movements aim to shift power, they do so with the goal of equity in mind. The aim of making women powerful is not to make men powerless, but to ensure that women also have power. The power to make our own decisions. The power to ensure that political, social and economic resources and opportunities flow to us. The power to set agendas.

But it is not enough for us to shift power outside of our movements. We need to ensure that power is shared within our movements today, so that our movements do not become monoliths presiding over hierarchies of oppression. Whose struggles do our movements represent? Do they represent all our collective struggles, or those of the more powerful amongst us?

Which brings me to the last two things that all movements share: a belief in the power of many, not one. A belief in *we* and not just *I*. While a single act of resistance can spark a movement, it is not itself a movement. Movements are about collective claims. But whose collective claims are we talking about? Whose people's movements? Can we think of a women's movement without women? A labour movement without workers? An LGBT movement without lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered women? A student movement without students? A Dalit movement without Dalits? No.

Many of us enter movements through the organizations we work in. As feminist activist Srilatha Batliwala reminds us, organizations are sites from which movements are built and supported. But organizations, even though they are part of movements, are not in themselves movements. Movements operate at a scale that no single organization can operate at. Since so many of us belong to NGOs, here is a question for each of us: How do we locate ourselves? Do we see ourselves as part of an organization? Or do we see ourselves as part of a movement? Or as part of both?

This is an important question because it relates to what we see as our final goal. Are we working on sexual harassment – or domestic violence or access to land and water or whatever we do – as an end in itself? Or is it both an end in itself and a means to transform power relations between men and women? Is it enough for us to put water resources near a low-income community and increase access to water – or do we also question who is responsible for collecting that water? Is it enough for us to ensure that land is redistributed to a landless family – or do we stop and wonder why that land cannot be placed in a woman's name? Is it enough for us to ensure that a woman has a job – or do we ask ourselves why she can't decide how to spend the money she earns?

All of us work to change things, but the question is really this: how far do we push change? Up to what level? Many of our organizations provide services, valuable services, to our constituents. But do we see these services



as ends in themselves? Or do we see them both as ends and as means to actualize rights? In our own NGOs, do we see ourselves as doing the work of movements, getting to the roots to create radical, fundamental change? Or do we see ourselves tinkering with the symptoms without pushing through to the roots?

An emerging challenge to movements is “philanthro-capitalism” – the belief that business principles can be applied to the search for social transformation. Philanthrocapitalist donors have money and are prepared to put it into social change – but they are impatient for solutions, data and results, and they believe that change can happen like that. Instantly! In a jiffy!

Everything we know tells us that what creates lasting change is the slow, lasting power of movements, but creating this change takes generations. My grandmother

got married when she was 16 and never worked for a living. My mother got married when she was 24 and worked for a living until she got married. Marriage is not on my agenda, and I can’t imagine a situation where my livelihood depends not on my own two hands, but on someone else’s.

A century ago, who would have thought that women would vote, something we take for granted in some places today? That’s the power of movements. Or even that we’d take for granted that women are human? That’s the power of movements. Half a century ago, when slavery had ended but segregation was in place, who would have thought that the next president of the United States of America would be an African-American man? That’s the power of movements.

## “All of you, the participants, are the heart of the forum”

Presentation by Lydia Alpízar Durán, Mexico/Costa Rica (BY VIDEO LINK)



Welcome! Bienvenue! ¡Bienvenidas y Bienvenidos! to the 11th AWID International Forum on Women’s Rights and Development: The Power of Movements! On behalf of the International Planning Committee, AWID’s board and staff, I want to welcome you and let you know how excited we are at opening the forum today.

On the next four days, we hope to build together a space where we can all, in a candid and friendly manner, discuss critical issues for the advancement of our women’s rights agendas. Through plenaries, breakout sessions, dance, music, debates, workshops and much more, we will have the opportunity to learn from one another, to challenge one another and, most especially, to dream together about how to continue building collective avenues for action not only between us, but also with other social movements.

It is not a secret for anyone here that women’s movements have contributed to some of history’s most significant transformations, particularly during the last four decades. It is not a secret either that none of the changes that we have achieved to advance the women’s rights agenda could have been accomplished without women organizing, mobilizing and pressing for these changes.

These diverse forms of collective action, which we have used through time, have been effective so far. But a historic moment has come, and the context has shifted significantly in such a way that many of our strategies no longer seem to work, or don’t seem to have the same impact any more. In many parts of the world, and at different levels, there seems to be a stagnation in our organizing. Likewise, some of the successful strategies we’ve used in the past – particularly those around mobilization and

grassroots organizing – seem to have been replaced by other activities and expressions. It is perhaps time to look back and see which of these earlier strategies should be reincorporated back into our political organizing.

We should also look sideways and learn from the diverse forms of collective action that are being used within emerging women’s movements that are full of vitality and wisdom. We must continue to dream big and be creative in finding new ways to work together on truly inclusive movements. We need to develop new forms of collective action that can help us advance women’s rights in a significant way in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## We must continue to dream big and be creative in finding new ways to work together on truly inclusive movements

It is clear that there are many challenges within our context, but there are also a lot of opportunities in a world where change is a constant. Among the challenges we face are the current economical and financial crisis, the rise of the military, the strong and rising presence of religious fundamentalisms, the increasing inequality that results in thousands of people living in poverty, the food

crisis, the prevalence of war, and climate change, to name just a few.

In order to face these challenges and advance our agendas, however, we first have to address a different set of challenges: those that are internal to our organizations and movements. Some of these challenges are fragmentation and overspecialization, resource competition, lack of funding, discrimination among ourselves, unsustainable ways of practicing our activism that are detrimental to activists' health and stress levels, the difficulty of building spaces that are truly inclusive, and the lack of mechanisms to help us overcome our differences and solve conflicts.

This forum is an opportunity to go beyond rhetoric when it comes to these challenges, and to be open to listening and being challenged on our diverse standpoints and opinions. We need to go beyond the very frequent conversations that we have over coffee (or tea) or in meeting corridors about these issues. We need to give priority to the challenges around women's movement building so that we can effectively advance women's rights in this current juncture. Together, we need to find new or renewed movement building strategies that are viable and concrete and that, first and foremost, increase the impact and ability to transform the world we live in.

If there is anything I love about the forum it's that it is a collective initiative. AWID facilitates the organizing process, but the majority of the content and program is jointly defined with dozens of diverse organizations from different parts of the world working at different levels. The forum is itself an exercise in what is possible when we

work together, and how we can benefit from contributions coming from diverse women's movements.

All of you, the participants, are the heart of the forum. The success of this forum wouldn't be possible without your active participation and your commitment to create a space where we can all grow at different levels and increase the effectiveness of our struggles to advance women's rights around the world. This time around, we have an unprecedented number of registrants, around 2,100. This means that we have had to do some contortions to be able to accommodate hundreds of "extra" registrant participants. This is why we are asking for your cooperation, patience and tolerance to ensure that the majority of participants have a significant experience, with enough space to grow, contribute and be inspired.

Before summing up I'd like to recognize Cindy Clark, who temporarily took over the executive direction of AWID last June and along with that responsibility, the challenging task of leading the team during the last months of forum organizing. It is also important to recognize the work and support that we have received from the International Planning Committee and the board. I'd also like to recognize our brilliant forum manager, Caroline Sin, who is the magician behind the logistics and other key aspects to ensure the forum's success. And of course, I'd like to give special recognition to my colleagues who are part of the AWID team, all of whom have worked tirelessly, with a huge commitment, to make of this forum a reality.

I wish you all an excellent forum and I'm very much looking forward to talking with many of you about your experiences and learnings at the forum. Many thanks!



## "What are we trying to accomplish? Who is here today?" Presentation by Cindy Clark, USA

Geeta and Lydia have spoken to why "The Power of Movements" is such an important conversation for us to be having at this particular moment in time. I want to tell you a little bit more about what you can expect from the days ahead.

What are we trying to accomplish? Under the guidance of our International Planning Committee, made up of 31 women from 21 different countries, we have tried to shape this forum around [a number of different] goals.

[First, we want] to contribute to a greater shared understanding of how we can strengthen our movements. Why is this important? As Geeta and Lydia have said, it's because we believe that movements – that the collective, organized power of women and their allies – are crucial for realizing women's rights. We also know that feminist and women's movements are tremendously diverse, and that there is much to learn from those varied experiences as

well as from the experiences of other social movements.

We also want to come away with some ideas for how we might overcome some of the fragmentation within women's movements, pushing ourselves to re-think how we link across sectors, issues and identities. We hope to identify elements of a shared political agenda, to find common ground in our vision of the changes we're trying to achieve in the world. Can this vision, this broad political agenda, be a common platform from which we build solidarity across the many issues on which we work?

We also want to generate insights into effective ways of working multi-generationally, that value contributions of activists of all ages and ensure visibility and engagement of young women. [And finally], we want to come away with a renewed sense of energy and inspiration – and on that point, there's not much more to say other than look around you ... The energy in this room is amazing and inspiring.

So how do we hope to achieve these goals? As Lydia said, this is really a collective process, and the results will depend on each of us. Ultimately, the insights, the knowledge that is constructed here, are only possible thanks to what every one of us brings and offers into the space.

We will have a rich diversity of voices in the plenaries as well as in the sessions, as you've no doubt seen in the program book. The plenaries aim to provoke and stimulate, to spark ideas. Today we'll hear some critiques, and insights, of movement experiences that will push us all to think about our own organizing. Tomorrow's plenary will reflect on some of the internal challenges and dynamics in our movements that need to shift. Sunday will be a conversation around the strategies women are using to organize even in very adverse contexts. Finally, we'll come together to close the forum with some reflections in the plenary on what we've heard and learned, and what that tells us about the future of movements.

## We hope to identify elements of a shared political agenda, to find common ground in our vision of the changes we're trying to achieve in the world

The sessions will expose us to a dizzying array of experiences and ideas – the most common complaint that we get about the forum is that there's just too much going on. But at the same time, there is overwhelming interest and so much to share. We received over 1,000 proposals this year for only about 160 session spaces. On this point, I strongly encourage you to attend at least one session that would appear to have little to do with your routine work, whether it's on a different issue, or from a different region. I have often heard from participants that those are the sessions that they find most valuable.

So who is here today? Who are we sharing these conversations with? This is the largest AWID forum in our history, with a total of almost 2,200 people registered. We're still seeing who's shown up to get the final numbers, but right now I can tell you that of those registered:

- Forty-three percent are from Sub-Saharan Africa, including 11 percent from South Africa
- We have about 10 percent each from North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe
- Six percent are from South Asia and another six percent from East and Southeast Asia
- Six percent are from the Middle East and North Africa

## Creating a Caribbean Sisterhood

On attending the AWID forum I was able to connect with a group of Caribbean women who I will be working with from now on. I've always felt alone at forums on my issues as our Caribbean issues are separate. But at the forum, they always seem to be tied with Latin America, which is not effective. This time, AWID had a Caribbean space where we were able to engage, thus creating a Caribbean sisterhood which we will be able to develop more.

The AWID forum has made it possible for me to view life from a wider perspective. I have seen and heard of the other issues of my sisters and better understands a few struggles that I didn't know of previously. I have grown, matured and will be transforming all I have learned in my work as an activist. Thanks to AWID I was able to re-unite with others I met prior to the forum and reconnect with self. And thanks to the "power of body movements" session, I was able to reconnect with me, thus making it possible for others to connect with me. I came to AWID an angry, bitter, sad individual and left a more calm, hopeful, positive and opened person.

- Women's Rights Activist from the Caribbean

## The forum gave me a view that I could not have gained elsewhere

"The forum gave me a view that I could not have gained elsewhere – the view of the range and richness of our diversity across many countries and across various sectors, not as one movement but as many movements, happening all at once, challenging patriarchy and capitalist exploitation in many voices and tongues and deploying repertoires of strategies, knowledge and experiences. It has inspired me in more ways than one, to have touched base with so many sisters from all over the world."

- Women's Rights Activist from Southeast Asia



- Five percent are from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
- Three percent are from the Pacific

We also have 144 different countries represented, which is also a record for us. And 20 percent of the women registered are under the age of 30.

While we celebrate these amazing numbers and the fact that so many of us have come together, we also know that not everyone who wanted to be here could be here

with us. Some who had planned to travel were unable to come, whether for health problems, family issues, or unexpected visa problems.

Finally I just want to recognize and appreciate the investment that each of you has made in coming here. You have left homes and loved ones, you have taken many days away from your work and routine. I know you'll have piles of emails when you go home. Let us not then take this moment, this coming together, lightly. There are far too few opportunities such as this.



## “We can inspire most profoundly through hope rather than fear” Presentation by L. Muthoni Wanyeki, Kenya

Welcome everyone. I was asked to situate this forum and its theme, The Power of Movements, in an African context and to say why movements have been and continue to be important to us, and what impact they've had on the continent.

Despite recent setbacks, it is fitting that the AWID forum is in South Africa because of the role that women played within the anti-apartheid struggle. Geeta talked earlier about slogans, and I think we all remember that slogan, “When you strike a woman, you strike a rock.” There are many lessons from the anti-apartheid struggle as well as from all that has happened since. Many of us didn't think apartheid would end in our lifetime. But apartheid did end, and it ended because of the power of movements, both here in Africa and elsewhere.

Why the focus on movements right now? I think many of us have been inspired – despite the many frustrations – by our engagement with the World Social Forum process over the last couple of years. I think it has provided a space both within the World Social Forum itself as well as in debates that happened afterwards nationally, [where we] vocalized our own critique of the way in which women's organizing and mobilization has evolved. But although this focus on movements seems to be new, or seems to have gained more energy over the past couple of years, it really isn't new.

I want to focus today on some African stories to talk about the successes – which also all raise their own challenges – of women's organizing and mobilization. I would like to talk about women's organizing and mobilizations in four different phases.

First, of course, was the phase of the anti-colonial liberation movements from the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. There were many examples, all across the continent, of African women leading in traditional religious or spiritual resistance to colonialism. I think here for example of the prophetess, Me Katilili wa Menza of the Giriama in Kenya,

who led her people in an uprising against the British colonialists. Then there were the African women allied with the political associations. I think of Mary Wanjiru, a woman who upon the arrest of Harry Thuku of the Gikuyu Central Association, said if the men could not lead in protesting his arrest, she would. She was one of the first women shot down in the protest against that arrest. And of course there were African women who worked with and in the armed struggles. There was a field marshal, Muthoni, of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, the Mau Mau.

Women played many different roles in the armed struggle – not just feeding the fighters as it's often presented – at great personal cost. My own organization supports many of the female detainees of that struggle in their search for reparations.

The second phase was post independence, from the 1960's through to the 1980's. We saw national women's organizations often allied with, or explicitly linked to, ruling political parties. We saw the growth of immense numbers of community-based women's groups all across the country. Many focused on income generation and women's livelihoods. We saw African women in academia and the arts begin to question women's place within nationalist struggles, and to begin to express their own identity as African women, which was often at odds with cultural interpretations and nationalist readings of our history. We saw the beginning of Pan-African feminist engagement with the rise of pan-African feminist organizations – the first one being in the 1970's, the Association of African Women in Research and Development. We saw also, during this period, great engagement globally.

Of course, we all know Africa hosted the third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. I think it's important to point out that this conference took place just three years after our coup d'état. There was very little organizing at the time, but Kenyan women came together across all kinds of divides.

The third phase was what we refer to in Africa as the second liberation, the movements for political pluralism all across the continent in the 90's. In this phase we saw the rise of autonomous women's organizations moving from service delivery to advocacy on all kinds of fronts. We saw women play very leading roles within the democracy, governance and human right movements, as well as within the emergent opposition political parties. I think here of Wangari Maathai, who we all know, and her struggle to preserve public space at great personal cost. I think of the mothers of political prisoners (whose work led to the creation of the organization, Release Political Prisoners) who protested using traditional forms of protest in a very difficult political time. We also saw, in this period, the move from income generation and micro-credit strategies, to a focus on national political economy and the beginnings of attempts to work on gender budgeting and on questions of structural adjustment, and later on post-structural adjustment poverty reduction processes and development financing, including questions of debt, investment and trade.

Which brings us to the present, supposedly post-second liberation period in the new millennium, but deciding in fact that the second liberation has still not been achieved. Yes, we have seen the rise now of new organizations within the women's movement – organizations addressing questions of gender identity and sexual orientation, which is extremely difficult to do and deathly in some contexts. They are finding solidarity within the broader women's movement in Africa – which is new – on the basis of questions of equality as well as the struggle for reproductive rights. The question is, what did we get from this immense panorama of organizing and mobilization?

I want to focus on two really critical gains for us. First is the question of legal guarantees and protection at the regional level. [In the aftermath of] the movements for political pluralism there has [emerged] a new impetus for regional integration. The new African Union's Constitutive Act, the protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which is a legally binding human rights treaty, and the Solemn Declaration, are all extremely important regional tools for all of us to use, to advance the struggle for equality on the ground. [The second is the increase in women's] political participation. We have seen of course the first female president in Africa, in Liberia, and over 50 percent political representation [of women] in Rwanda. I'm just going to repeat that: over 50 percent political participation of women in Rwanda. And about 30 percent in [other] countries including South Africa and Uganda, thanks to tools such as affirmative action and proportional representation systems.

But, we are at this meeting knowing that these gains in terms of just numbers are exceptions rather than the rule. We are here knowing that these gains have yet to translate to [meaningful change] on the ground. We are seeing persistent, protracted conflict in areas where we thought peace agreements had been concluded: the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Darfur in the Sudan, Northern Uganda. In all of these conflicts, the forms of sexual violence wreaked on women are extreme, horrifying and seemingly unceasing. We are also seeing real crises in democracy.

I come from Kenya and I won't reiterate what happened in Kenya earlier this year, but Kenya was not unprecedented. Zimbabwe still has to be resolved and there is a democratic crisis, I would say, even here [in South Africa], even though it's a crisis of a different kind. We've seen economic growth averaging about seven percent across the continent. But inequality within countries on income grounds, on regional grounds – which are always experienced either in terms of ethnicity or religion – and on gender grounds are now so clearly a question of security and stability that equality is finally on the public policy agenda. And we know that inequality will worsen given the seismic global shifts we have seen in this year – from food, to fuel, to the economic system.

**Our struggle is not just about more women, not just about the lowest common denominator. It is about maintaining a vision to move forward and galvanize around**

I want to conclude by pointing out what this means for all of us. I think more than ever it means that our struggle is not just about more women, not just about the lowest common denominator. It is about maintaining a vision to move forward and galvanize around. Geeta spoke earlier about the need for a political agenda that is based on an analysis, a rigorous analysis of oppression. And I think the lesson from – forgive me – Barack Obama's campaign, about which much has already been said and much more will be said, [is that] our vision must not alienate or consistently be based only on our victimization. We can enable and we can inspire most profoundly through hope rather than fear – and by giving a sense that all of us are able to contribute and be part of a different future.

So yes, we have to acknowledge and analyze rigorously our oppression, but we also have to put forward the best of our strategies [so that we can] move towards a new day. I would just conclude by saying, I think the democratic and economic crisis that we are in provides an opening, an opportunity, and the question is whether we are ready to seize that opportunity through the movements to which we all belong.





## “Disability issues are women’s issues”

Presentation by Mijoo Kim, South Korea

My name is Mijoo Kim. I am a woman with disabilities in an electric wheelchair, as you can see. It is a great honour to speak to you on behalf of women with disabilities all around the world. I appreciate that AWID [has given] attention to the issue of the women with disabilities. They also have helped and encouraged women with disabilities to participate in this forum. Thanks so much.

### I am not asking women’s movements to incorporate women with disabilities. I am on this plenary to remind you that we are already here

I would like to say that disability issues are women’s issues, and that the movement of women with disabilities is the women’s movement. I [want to begin by] asking you a couple of frank questions. What does disability mean to you? Does it mean something strange and unfamiliar, pitiful and poor? Who are the women with disabilities? Are they just people with disabilities to you, or [are they] women living in the same world as you live in, as women?

The United Nations estimates the [percentage of the] population with disabilities to be 10 percent of the 6.5 billion people throughout the world. [That means] there are approximately 325 million women living with disabilities in the world. However, despite these significant numbers, policies accommodating requirements and desires of women with disabilities are almost non-existent. Responding to this bleak reality, the UN refers to us as “hidden sisters.” Issues of women with disabilities are nowhere included in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and as a result, women with disabilities have not been active recipients of the benefits generated by related policies in each country.

Why have women with disabilities been invisible in the women’s movement? This is a question that I have [been asking] during the past 15 years with my work in Korea and internationally. Are disability issues related only to women with disabilities? No! I can say definitely no. Disability issues are women’s issues, because family members with disabilities are a women’s issue. If a

member of your family has disabilities, the role of caregiver [to that family member] is usually assigned to women.

In some countries, people wonder whether a [woman] who gave birth to a child with disabilities has some defect. In many cases these women face physical and mental violence [within] their families. The concerns of these women have not been taken up anywhere in disability or women’s movements. I think of my mother, who has born a heavy burden for 42 years – her child, me, who got poliomyelitis when I was 11 months old. My mother’s whole life has been [devoted to] my life. She has lived as a woman with disabilities, like me.

Secondly, 80 percent of women with disabilities have acquired disabilities [because of] disease, accident and environmental factors. Disabilities are no longer an issue only for persons [who currently have] disabilities. Many countries suffer from malnutrition, famine and war or conflict situations, [circumstances that often lead to people becoming] disabled. These circumstances mostly affect women or children.

[Third], jobs related to care-giving are for “second-class citizens” and generally assigned to women. Most of the people working in the social service industry, caring for the aged and people with disabilities, are women. They are asked to work hard for low pay. In developed countries, jobs related to people with disabilities are often done by immigrant women who have few other options, and who, as a result, [are vulnerable to] unfair treatment or sexual harassment.

Why haven’t women’s movements recognized these issues as part of their agendas, when they are so closely tied to women’s rights? It is because women have assumed that disability issues belong to someone different from them. Why aren’t women with disabilities accepted as women? It is because many activists see only the disability and not the woman.

Women with disabilities have been rendered invisible not only in women’s issues but in disability issues too. Women with disabilities are more likely to be discriminated against than men with disabilities. There is also gender discrimination within the disability community. [Many disability rights activists do not] expect women to be leaders [in the disability rights community].

Sexuality – or asexuality – is also [a] big issue [for us]. It is widely documented that women with disabilities are typically seen as asexual. The body of a woman with disabilities is not considered a sexual body. Before we married, my husband’s friends asked if he was really willing to give up sex for the rest of his life. It never

occurred to them that I am a sexy woman. (Applause and whistles.) Thank-you!

It is not enough to describe the gender inequality [experienced by] women with disabilities as simply a problem within the disability community. The disability intersects with gender inequality and produces severe forms of discrimination against women with disabilities. But it's not [as linear as] adding a "disability" factor onto a "gender" factor. Rather, it's a totally different, harder-to-fight discrimination that only women with disabilities experience. We have to understand the particular circumstances of women with disabilities [in order to] build alliances.

Let me talk about women's shelters for example. In the case of a woman with a hearing impairment, she can't even get a counselor, and her case can't be registered without a sign language interpreter. In the case of a woman with a severe disability, she can't even get into a shelter if there are steps or if the bathroom isn't accessible for her. Do you really think this is still a "women's shelter?" The idea is not to make separate shelters, but to ensure that we all know how to build spaces that are inclusive of all women, including women with disabilities. Yet even among women with disabilities, there are questions about whether we should seek alliances among women without disabilities.

## Moving from helplessness to hope...

During the 16 Days of Activism it is with great sadness, fear and outrage that we remember the atrocities of violence against women. In South Africa we remember Gugu Dlamini, who was stoned to death for disclosing her HIV-positive status in KwaMashu in 1998.

We send our messages of solidarity to "Khwezi" who was confronted with chants such as "burn the bitch" outside the rape trial in 2006, and has since been forced to live in exile in fear for her life. With devastation, we remember our sister Sizakele Sigasa, who was found dead last year with six bullet holes in her head and collarbone, her hands tied with her underpants and her ankles tied with her shoelaces. She was violently tortured and probably raped before being killed with her friend Salome Masooa in Soweto.

Across our borders we reach out to Alual Koch and her sisters, who fought in Sudan's civil war from the age of 13. We hail the bravery of nine-year-old Arwa in Yemen — sold and married against her will — and we stand together with Zimbabwean women arrested and beaten for opposing a regime.

It's with a sense of despair that we remember women around the world whose violations fall beneath the headlines. The millions of women who have been denied an education and are now illiterate and without the power to make decisions about their own health and wellbeing, the grandmothers and carers of an increasing number of children being orphaned by HIV/Aids and the mothers who watch their children die for no reason other than the lack of basic healthcare and public sanitation. It is not only during these 16 days, but continually, that women face these gross injustices.

A couple of weeks ago we gathered alongside 2,200 other women's rights activists from around the world and shared our concerns and what feminists are doing around the world.

The Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) holds an international forum every three years and for the first time it was being held here in South Africa. Colourful, passionate, analytical and emotive sessions took place over the four days with activists from 144 countries.

On the second day South Africa's One in Nine campaign hosted a march of women's rights activists from South Africa and across the globe.

The march drove forward as a purple sea of campaigners through the streets of Cape Town with a powerful sense of unity.

Out of this we emerged with a sense of solidarity and hope in our struggle. Whatever the violations, whether political, sexual, economic or religious, we were united. We reclaimed the workers' slogan: an injury to one is an injury to all.

With a sense of collective power, we began to think about the enormous power in movements across South Africa in local, provincial and national struggles.

We drew up a statement that encompassed the resolve among us. We reconnected with the desire to harness our collective energy across South Africa and to reunite to support each other in the face of attacks on our political, economic and social rights.

- By Pregs Govender, Gertrude Fester,  
Prudence Mabele and Promise Mthembu  
Reprinted from *The Mail and Guardian*, 8 Dec 2008

I believe we have to grow our movements. We will strengthen them through empathy, by listening to one another, learning about each other and better understanding our situations. Look at this 11<sup>th</sup> AWID forum. There is a desk to support participants with disabilities. There is the support of volunteers and personal assistants, accessible transportation. Women with disabilities are organizing sessions and speaking on panels. [But] there is still more to be done to even further improve the next AWID forum.

I am not asking women's movements to incorporate women with disabilities. I am on this plenary to remind you that we are already here: we are already part of women's movements. Women's movements have to look inside, at our own diversity, and listen to minority women's voices. The international movement of women with disabilities is strong and rapidly growing.

In 2006, the UN General Assembly approved the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD), which has a stand-alone article – [article] six – on women with disabilities. This convention establishes the principle of equality between women and men and includes strong language against violence against women and girls with disabilities. Countries that ratify this convention will be expected to then act to implement it. This year, 2008, is the first year that this convention will go into effect. It opens a new horizon for us, and I want to share this important news with all of you, with the women at this forum.

From this moment, I will try to find our voice in women's issues, and I very much hope you will remember issues of women with disabilities in your workshops. We can build a broader and stronger women's movement together. I hope when you go back to your home, your organizations and countries that you will remember that the issues of women with disabilities are core to women's movements.



## “This is the room that can change the world”

Presentation by Nadine M., Lebanon

OK. I had to stand up because I'm really excited and I can't keep sitting in the chair. I've been super excited for this forum for about a year now. You should see the view from here – this view is incredible.

I do most of my work in Lebanon and in Arab countries, but I only have 10 minutes, so I'm not actually going to talk about what we do, how we strategize, and the politics around that, because it's very important for me to speak to you about what I think are the criteria for a movement to become and call itself feminist. There is one word that I think is absolutely crucial, and that word is “cunt.”

The word has been used against us so harshly and so disgustingly that we find ourselves terrified of that term. We don't like it. We don't like to talk about sexuality. We don't like to talk about ourselves as sexual beings because our vaginas have been made to seem, even to us, like they are dirty [and] should be hidden [from] classy, nice forums like this. But I believe very strongly that cunt is absolutely, absolutely necessary to the feminist movement. And I'll explain why.

The “C” is for creativity. It's for reinventing the feminist wheel over and over again. There is no one way of organizing, and there is no one structure to follow. Many times when we organize in NGOs or in networks, we follow and we replicate the same exact patriarchal systems that we fight against. We bring them into our movements, and we become so obsessed with paperwork and structures and formalities that we forget that we can think very creatively about things.

I'm sure that most of you came here because you want to network, because you want to meet other organizations, because you have a pitch to make to the funders, because you want to learn about other things happening. [You want] to get as many pamphlets as you can and go back home. But I am asking you today to [take] a very creative approach to this forum, and to make it really personal. Because personal connections change our lives.

You know, my life is not going to change if I get to know one of your projects or programs, or if you tell me “Hi, I'm from this organization” and start telling me about everything you do. [But] my life will change if I meet you as a woman, and you meet me as a woman, and we share this bond and this experience, and we ask about each other personally. We ask about feminism that is personal to us. That's what I think is the coolest thing about this forum, that we can talk on a personal level. I know there are 2,000 participants, but we need to make these personal connections. Because there's nothing professional about feminism – I don't like the word professional. And I don't like how we deal with it very formally as if it's this distant concept.

So, creativity is in talking to ourselves, and listening to ourselves, and also in comforting each other. Because all my friends who came here and I are very tired – raise your hand if you're very tired as well. See, we're all extremely tired and exhausted, and this is the place where suddenly all of that makes sense right? We come here and we



watch these videos and we listen to these speeches and we think OK, now I remember why I did this in the first place. Now I remember why I'm so tired. This is the place for us to talk together, and to congratulate each other, and to get to know each other as human beings, as women.

Now the "U" is for "unity" – and unity is very important. I heard someone speak last week who said that none of us is free until all of us are free. And I thought that was such a perfect quotation – that none of us is free until all of us are free. If you look at the forum program now, you will see this overwhelming diversity [in terms of] the topics and the issues that are covered. We've got incredible forces against us – you all know this. We've got institutions and the governments and the media. Everything is playing against us. All these systems, visible and invisible, are against us. And the only people we've got [to address these forces] are the people sitting right here in this room. If you look around you, these are the people who will support you, who will help you, who will fund you, who will give you the resources that you need. This is the room that can change the world.

You see I believe in feminism. I'm in love with the word feminism. I believe in feminism like some people believe in god. I believe that [feminism] is fluid enough to be reinvented and reconstructed and debated and discussed until four in the morning. New things can be constantly brought into it, and new things can be kicked out of it. But the great thing about feminism is [that] we can play with that fluidity. And the great thing about movements is [that] a movement doesn't really belong anywhere. It's everywhere at the same time – like god! It's nowhere specific, but it's everywhere. And the great thing is that nobody, not even the most powerful person in the whole world, can kick you out of the movement. Which is great! Nobody can come and say, "I denounce you, you are kicked out of the movement." We create the movement ourselves – it's not an NGO, it's not a program, it's not a coalition, it's not a network.

But at the same time I also believe very strongly that there are some rules of feminism that you can't mess with, you know, like Sarah Palin claiming she's a feminist. There are some issues about feminism that you cannot mess with, and one of these issues is that there cannot exist a feminist movement without the lesbians. There cannot exist a feminist movement without transgendered people either. Otherwise, it would be called a homophobic movement. Otherwise, it is not a movement that caters to all women – it [is a movement that] chooses the women it caters too. And we all know that you can't break that rule about feminism. Feminism cuts across all issues, all classes, all races, all gender identities and sexual orientations. That is a basic rule of feminism.

Only last week I was at a conference for the International Gay and Lesbian Association. I was trying to convince the LGBT people that feminism is important to them. You know, they don't like feminism very much. I was trying to convince them we have to incorporate feminism

into the LGBT movement. And then, a week later, I come here and try to talk to you feminists and tell you that we need to include the LGBT movement in our struggle.

I'm really happy about what Muthoni said about the context in Africa. I'm really happy that the gays and lesbians of Africa are getting the support from the women's movement. I would like to urge all the women's organizations everywhere around the world, in Asia and Africa, especially in the Middle East, to take on lesbian issues as their own women's issues. Because all the struggles are connected. All the struggles [around] sexuality are the same. The same oppressions against our bodies. And it is against these oppressions that we have to fight.

Now, we've done the "C" and the "U." The "N" is about numbers. Numbers are very important. This is not a slow and elitist revolution. This is a revolution where we need millions and millions of people. We need to bring them on. What the Obama campaign has taught us [is that] regardless of the politics, when we have enough numbers, when we deal with all the different layers of oppressions, we can get everyone together. People we never thought we could [bring together] can come together [and] can join this movement.

Finally, the "T" is for time and continuity. Here I'd like to talk a bit about multigenerational dialogues. A lot of the time, we come to these places as young feminists and we meet these icons, these great leaders who we've read about and googled. We read your books and we've had your posters in our rooms as we grew up. And then we come here, and we meet you.

**I acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of giants, of amazing women. But sometimes, sometimes those giants can be really annoying**

You know, I acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of giants, of amazing women. But sometimes, sometimes those giants can be really annoying. And sometimes, sometimes the giants don't want you to stand on their shoulders. But the thing that we have to understand is that young women are absolutely critical to this movement, and we are not just going to open the space for them. They are going to come and they are going to claim the space, especially at the forum. Yesterday we had a Young Feminist Activist day where we had multigenerational women come together. They've got this really cool concept, which is those pink scarves that people are wearing. If you believe in multigenerational organizing you need to get yourself a scarf – there are hundreds of them. I didn't wear

mine because it's too pink!

There are also lots of activities and murals and caucuses, and I would encourage you, if you're a young woman, to join. But also if you're from an older generation. And I would encourage you to talk to each other and to go to the panels that are not directly related to you. So if you're a straight woman, if you've never met a lesbian, there are hundreds of wonderful lesbians here. Meet them, get to know them a little bit, and ask them about their lives. If

you're a young woman, go to a woman who has been around for 20 or 30 years and ask her how she is, and ask her how she's doing. Ask her why she came into feminism in the first place. These are the personal conversations we need to create – this is what's important in this forum.

If we do that I'm sure we'll leave here richer, more empowered, feeling energized. We can go back home and actually have the change that we need, to do the things we want to do. Thank you very much.



## “We indigenous women have come here with renewed hope to share our experiences with you”

Presentation by Monica Aleman, Nicaragua

It is an honour to be here. I am here as a result of the roads you have travelled. Sisters, leaders of the world, I welcome you today and pay tribute to the road walked by our women ancestors. I welcome you today in honour of the struggles we have lived. I welcome you today with deep emotion and a spirit for change.

I will begin by acknowledging the presence of my indigenous sisters from all parts of the world who are here today, of my Afro-descendant sisters, and of my Nicaraguan, Latin American and Caribbean sisters. Today we honour the memory of thousands of young, old and wise indigenous women from the American continent who are actors and promoters of profound structural reform. [They are working] to change the relations of power in our countries so that all of us – indigenous, Afro-descendant, mixed blood – can enjoy the rights for which our ancestors struggled.

There are thousands of experiences of indigenous women who sacrificed their dignity and their lives so that today we can be here with you

On behalf of indigenous women, I would like to acknowledge our sister Lydia [Alpízar] who is a visionary for promoting, as the central objective of this AWID meeting, the visibility and potentiality of women's struggles around the world, and for promoting dialogue among women from diverse movements, women who have

founded their work on ancestral struggles.

We indigenous women have come here with renewed hope to share our experiences with you. We are the products of the struggle of Domitila Chungara, an indigenous woman who, together with other miner sisters and brothers in Bolivia, began in 1963 to create the foundation for a profound transformation of the Bolivian state. They articulated the class, ethnic and gender struggle of the 20th century, which today is materialized in the women's movement [called] Bartolina Sisas, in Evo Morales, and in the new constitution with the challenge to transform the relations of power in a Latin American country.

We are the result of the struggles of Dolores Cacuango, an indigenous woman from Ecuador. She was wise, a teacher, and a loyal defender of the struggle to end the discrimination that her people suffered. She was an advocate of the first programs of bilingual and inter-cultural education. These programs [were among the first to] consider culture and identity as intercultural foundations for the promotion of relations of respect and co-existence among different cultures.

We are here to follow the steps of our older sisters, Rigoberta Menchu Tum from Guatemala, Mirna Cunningham from Nicaragua, Tarcila Rivera Zea from Peru, Commander Ramona from Mexico, and Nina Pacari from Ecuador, among many others. They taught us that, as women, we are bearers of the rights achieved by the struggles of all women. However, we cannot enjoy such rights if the collective rights of our peoples are not recognized. As indigenous women we can only enjoy our rights fully if the rights of all indigenous peoples are also recognized.

The struggle for our rights has been fundamental. There are thousands of experiences of indigenous women who sacrificed their dignity and their lives so that today we can be here with you. In my Miskita community, in the autonomous region of the North Atlantic in Nicaragua, I

remember some of these women. Vivi Dilia is one of them. She knows about medicine. She has been the midwife for almost all of the women in my town. She knows of plants. She learns from dreams, and she speaks with the spirits who today guide the vision of my people. When she was 14 years old she had to leave her community, which at the time was affected by hunger and a lack of food, because the collective territories were being occupied by a transnational banana company dedicated to monoculture. But Vivi has [since] regained her dignity. She lives proud of her wisdom because we achieved multiethnic autonomy with the revolution in the 1980s.

Today, however, women in Nicaragua, like in many other countries in our continent, confront regression and threats in the exercise of our rights. The rights of women, like the rights of indigenous peoples, continue to be the product of political negotiation. We cannot allow the political persecution and harassment that feminists and other social leaders in Nicaragua are experiencing, [perpetrated] by a government that self identifies as “leftist.” Violence and repression against women who struggle for and defend human rights are forms of control that governments utilize in many countries to block our way and negate our rights.

As indigenous women, we also come here to share our capacity for intergenerational dialogue. As young indigenous women we want to follow the teachings of Doña Virgilia, a spiritual leader of the Mayan people in Guatemala who used to say that indigenous women need to deal with topics such as sexual and reproductive health, gender, and social justice. She used to say that we need to be transparent and share the fact that in many of our communities there are diverse sexual options, respecting the mission that all human beings have according to their respective *nahual*. The same used to be said by Amaranta, a Mexican Zapotec woman active in the struggle against HIV.

We have come here representing the International Forum of Indigenous Women, which articulates the indigenous women’s movement of North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. We have come here conscious of the economic challenge we confront today, knowing, however, that the women of the world have come a long way. Feminists and women who struggle for our rights opened the path on which we walk. Many of you have been our teachers. Today we tell you, however, that we can boost our struggle if we find ways to work collectively to move the movement forward.

We are here to take a step forward in the continuing construction of a feminist movement that is diverse and that has principles like solidarity, interculturality, diversity, and that has an intergenerational character. Sisters, the challenge is on the table, and change is in our hands. Thank you.

## Food for thought

“I’m not sure yet what exactly the forum will yield, but the perspective I gained at the forum about women’s situations around the world, their resources and different ways of thinking – gave me some food for thought. To see our work in Israel/Palestine in a global perspective is not something I have a chance to do every day. Because national discourse is terribly eminent in our environment, it was also a rare chance to succeed in re-conceptualizing our work in the context of women’s movements around the world. These two axes – women’s rights and conflict-related issues – cross in our work, but then again, the socio-political context we work in is extremely restrictive. Being away, surrounded by feminist activists from all over the globe and talking about what we do and listening to others, enabled me to have several rare moments of “change in framing.” I think it is extremely valuable and no doubt it will bear consequences in the ways I and my friends and colleagues talk and think. On top of that, I gained some new perspectives on our situation and the way we conceive human rights and women’s rights work. It was mind-boggling to realize to what extent, operating in a semi-liberal context where human rights in constantly manipulated by the state, that we sometimes – maybe too hastily – direct our critique at human rights and fail to distinguish between the larger human rights project and the ways it is being manipulated.”


*- Women’s Rights Activist from the Middle East/  
North Africa*

## I moved myself mentally and attitudinally

“As I listened to the vibrancy and determination, most notably from the young women and the African women, I moved myself mentally and attitudinally. I was moved even more firmly towards the understanding that it is the collaboration of allies, partners and equals that will achieve change. I learned (again I fear) that I don’t have to do everything. And I learned that many of my sisters still need to be challenged, because disabled women will be there as part of every other group, but marginalized even among the marginalized. My strongest change is a to recognize the effort necessary to make those women, us, visible.”

*- Researcher*





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Some moments  
history comes to us and says:  
What do you truly want?

We tremble.  
Often we run.  
From the terrifying possibility  
that we could choose  
movement.  
That we could begin  
exactly where we are  
in all our screwed-up  
imperfection.

Some days we stand  
before our world  
and the question  
vibrates the air around us:  
What do you choose?

This day?  
This moment?  
This  
heartstopping  
glorious  
adventure?

There's strong like patriarchy  
strong like institutions  
strong like two-billion dollars a day  
military occupations  
spiked with genocide  
anchored in neoliberal greed  
buttressed by terror  
designed to deliver  
200-volt shocks  
on contact.

Then there's the strength  
of what flows.  
Tears, grief, memory.  
Blood, energy, breath.  
Collective action.

The strength of what moves us  
opens our throats  
ignites our hips  
unleashes our voices  
puts the move back into movement  
yanks the motion out of emotion.

Movement  
strong as a river,  
current of joyful resilience  
wave and curl  
crash and swirl  
patterns that constantly change.

Movers who channel each day  
the courage of divers  
to plunge again  
into this churning water.

Thankful  
for what yields results  
curious  
about what does not.  
Building lung capacity  
to finally embrace  
the wholeness of our struggles  
exactly as they are.

Some moments, life asks of us:  
What do you hope?





# WHAT MOVES US

Written for the forum and performed by Shailja Patel, Kenya/USA. Reprinted with permission.

There's hope like a battleground  
hope that's all soundbites  
hope that rehashes a thousand manifestos.  
What we intend, believe, imagine  
what we propose and plan and dream  
what we say, expect, pretend,  
how we think  
things should look.

Then there's the truth on the ground.

What we show up for  
each day  
with our fearful, angry,  
tired, clumsy selves.  
With our complex, precious,  
wounded, brilliant selves.

And we grapple with the chasms  
of all that's gone before.  
Negotiate the heartbreak  
of decades of betrayal.  
We push ourselves to replace  
"but" with "and", "no" with "yes",  
steel ourselves to listen  
to those who enrage us the most.

We stretch our brains and wills  
until we feel it,  
to real hard analysis  
until we get it  
unpack systems, structures, models  
'til we know  
what works and what does not.  
What truly moves us.

Some days history asks of us:  
What are you making?  
We draw the map.

Something that expands  
the definition of beauty.  
Something that loves by remembering.  
Something like mehndi that flows into  
a fist.  
Something like justice that frolics  
through our dreams.  
Something like skin that tells its  
own story.

Some years, life comes to us and says:  
What do you know?  
Why we kept at it, for forty, fifty years.  
Why we have never regretted it.

That this movement  
Still moves us  
In our guts, our hips, our hearts

That this laughter  
this trust  
this earned and tried and tested respect  
is a house we have built,  
brick by brick  
and it will hold.

Some mornings life wakes us up  
sets our hearts beating  
sets our nerves thrumming  
warns us  
we're about to leap  
into our iciest fear  
our largest growth  
our most piercing joy.  
Some mornings,  
We take a huge breath, say  
Yes  
to it all.

Some evenings, life wraps us round  
in the softness of twilight,  
asks:  
What are you waiting for?

Truth. Justice. Reparation. Healing.  
In our lifetimes. In our lifetimes. In  
Our  
Lifetimes.

Each day, love comes to us and says:  
What will you show up for?  
What, in the end, is the truth of  
your heart?  
We answer with our bodies.

We show up  
for the struggle.  
We show up  
for each other.  
We show up  
just as we are.  
Precious, flawed  
limited, magnificent  
Human.

We show up  
for power.  
We choose  
movement.  
We love  
by showing up.



### “Being critical is the most important part of being loyal” Introduction by Jessica Horn, Sierra Leone

Good morning everybody! Welcome to the 2nd day of the AWID forum, and to what I hope will be a really provocative and interesting plenary. My name is Jessica Horn. I’m a member of the African Feminist Forum and I’m also on the IPC of the AWID forum. I welcome all of you.

I think very often in our activism, we focus on what I’d call the politics of the outcomes. We focus a lot on envisioning the world we want to see and thinking about the world outside. But the truth of the matter is that patriarchy has been around for generations. It’s going to take generations to overthrow. Our victories are often few and far between, or over the long term. Sometimes you may not even see the victory that you are looking for in your own lifetime. Or you might see a victory that you’ve won being reversed. So, in this plenary, what we’re trying to do is to focus attention to what I’d call the politics of the process – which is the question of how do we wage the struggle for women’s rights and women’s freedom?

I think, globally, we’re starting to realize that the work of women’s rights is really taking a toll on women’s rights activists themselves. It’s only now, in the past five years, that we’ve really had big campaigns that are looking at issues like the safety and security of women’s human rights defenders, the well-being of activists. It’s interesting, because the feminist mantra is that the personal is political. And yet very often in our political practice, we actually fail to reengage and encounter the personal.

What we’re going to be doing here today, through a range of different perspectives on a range of different issues around feminist activism and movements, is to look through and engage some of those questions of the politics of process. I heard someone once say that being critical is the most important part of being loyal. What we’re hoping to do today is engage in a form of critique that is actually an act of love and an act of loyalty.





## “We need to look beyond our own generation”

Presentation by Sanushka Mudaliar, Australia/East Asia



Before diving into the issues, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on who's here in the room. The forum participants gathered around you – here to talk about how to strengthen our collective power – include every generation of activist in the women's movement. Younger or older, we are all here because we understand the importance of this conversation, and we are ready to make it happen.

Many of you are familiar with and supportive of the push to recognize the unique contributions that different generations of activists bring to our movement. Today I want to focus on what lies beyond recognizing our intergenerational differences. Our next challenge is to create the effective cross-generational relationships that are the building blocks of a strong movement. A multi-generational movement is critical to the fight for women's rights not simply because there has to be somebody to continue the work that has been started, but because a powerful movement – one that is able to respond to the changing nature of the threats to women's rights – needs to draw on a varied array of methods and strategies for organizing. It needs to capitalize on the different ideas and perspectives of all its activists.

I'm sure no one would disagree with that. But it seems like many people in the movement, younger and older, aren't quite sure about what that looks like in practice. To get there we have to stop looking at each other based on what age we are. We need to be more careful about the casual generalizations we make about the role of certain people in the movement based on what age they are. I won't repeat all the age-related myths we throw around here, but let's just say that not all young activists are energetic and creative, and older activists aren't all power hungry divas.

The danger of these myths is that they discourage us from sharing power between generations, and they lead to ghettos of activism involving different generations that are not connected. My background as an activist is mainly in working with young feminists in youth movements. When I joined AWID in 2006, I had no idea what to expect. I hardly said anything to anyone my first year because I was so overwhelmed by the way that everywhere I went in my work, everybody seemed to know certain people, and organizations and networks. Everyone was welcoming each other as old friends, and I felt like I was sitting on the sidelines.

When we have achieved intergenerational solidarity, we won't come to the discussion labeled as the older activist or the youth representative. We'll be there as allies ready to give, listen or act based on our own abilities. Of course we're always going to identify most closely with our own age group, and we don't have to agree with each other all the time. Sometimes we need our own spaces to just be with our peers, and sometimes we need to claim spaces from others. But overall, we need to come together and push together as a movement.

## Not all young activists are energetic and creative, and older activists aren't all power hungry divas

So what do we have to do to achieve intergenerational solidarity? It's a big mouthful! Firstly we need to view it as a collective responsibility and part of all of our every day work. This isn't just the job of the youth program or young women. Working across age groups doesn't require specific expertise either. Intergenerational solidarity basically just means ensuring a diversity of voices in the room and then listening to and validating each other's perspectives in all that we do.

Secondly we have to turn our different generational perspectives into stronger, more effective strategies rather than divisive tensions. The different priorities and agendas of each generation are shaped by the political, social and cultural context of their times. As a movement we are very conscious of the way this changing context affects our work. The natural consequence of that is that women of different ages will experience issues differently and therefore prioritize the agenda for action differently. But we allow this to become a point of confrontation.

For example, in a range of spaces from the Ugandan Feminist Forum to the regional meeting for the Middle East and North Africa, it's clear that younger feminists place a heavy emphasis on the bodily and sexual issues that underpin women's rights struggles, and are

advocating an agenda that goes far beyond traditional sexual and reproductive health and rights models. This gives us a choice. It can either lead to personal and political tensions, or become an opportunity to advance our thinking together.

This is related to a third point, which is that we need to look beyond our own generation and start sharing our knowledge in a more inclusive way. Why is it that the most common way we seek out new voices is by inviting people in rather than by reaching out? In my work I see organizations trying to engage with young women, not by learning about the work that those young women are doing, but by inviting them to come and join pre-planned activities.

For example young women garment workers in Cambodia, one of whom is here in this room, are doing amazing work, mobilizing and working with young women to increase community awareness of worker's rights across the country. They are using methods like a decentralized information network that passes information between villages. They also put together a girl band that travels around to rural villages where there isn't much entertainment, singing songs and staging karaoke parties.

Although they are invited to join meetings with local and international NGOs, they say that they feel intimidated by formal meeting spaces. [They also explain] that they are very limited by cultural values that expect younger women to listen and learn only. In response to this, some older labour rights activists, internationally and locally, have reached out to these young women by going to visit them at their drop in centres, participating in their activities, and brainstorming ideas with them before larger meetings.

Sharing knowledge across generations also means getting better at understanding and learning from past experiences. Our movements have incredibly rich histories and in many cases [these histories] are stored only in the minds of those who lived them. We need to come up with new and dynamic ways of sharing this knowledge that recognizes that this process is not a one-way transfer of information from older to younger. Women of all generations are involved in making our history. Whether you are experienced should be defined not by your age but based on what you have done. ARROW in Malaysia has responded to this by promoting a talented 26-year-old to the position of senior manager. Acknowledging age and power dynamics, the executive director commits a portion of her time each week to working directly with the younger manager to think through ideas and talk through strategies.

It's time we stop equating age with experience. The executive director of AWID, Lydia Alpizar, started as an activist when she was 17 years old. She often says that although she is very young, she is a veteran. Not all young people are newcomers. Which leaves the question, what are we doing for newcomers to our movement who aren't young? How are we supporting them? How are we ensuring that they too can become strong activists in our movement?

Finally, working effectively across generations requires us to think about how we use power and what forms of leadership we recognize. Building a multigenerational movement requires us to put in place skills and power-sharing processes. Some organizations are approaching this by appointing both a younger and older person to manage each program instead of an older person who is supported by a junior assistant. The two staff members have authority to manage the program together and divide roles and responsibilities between them. This not only brings in new ideas it ensures that leaders listen and respond.

I'm sure that the overwhelming interest in the AWID forum this year is because we can see the advancing threats to women's human rights, and we know that we need to go beyond our organizational methods and think through ways to really nurture our feminist social movements. A failure to meet the challenge of bridging the age divide is a weakness we just can't afford. This isn't just about getting in the room together. It's about a real search for ways to rally knowledge and perspectives together.

The 11th AWID forum in Cape Town (November 2008) was the third forum in which I have participated. Over the course of these last six years, the AWID forum has become a part of my own personal and professional development, a place where I can look forward to having my ideas and work challenged, and be renewed by the energy and passion of so many incredible individuals working towards a just world.

At each forum I have left with increased awareness around specific issues. In Guadalajara, issues around age diversity within the feminist movement, and funding for women's rights were highlighted. In Bangkok, sexual rights and challenging religious fundamentalism seemed to be at the forefront of discussions I heard. In Cape Town, I walked away with a greater awareness of issues related to women with disabilities, innovative uses of technology for advocacy, and the role of men in women's empowerment. I was struck by Mijoo Kim's reference to our "hidden sisters" – women whose challenges related to disabilities – who are silenced in our own movement.

## “We paid a lot of attention to principles of inclusion and diversity” Presentation by Ayesha Imam, Nigeria



The objectives of the African Feminist Forum are to develop an autonomous space for African feminists to analyze our own realities, to develop our own priorities and strategies, to speak for ourselves, to build and strengthen solidarity amongst us, and to address the sustainability and growth of the feminist movement both in institutions and in individuals. No more burn out please.

We've had now two Feminist Forums (we're quite young): the African Feminist Forum in Accra in 2006, and in Kampala in 2008. And although it's young it's had three babies already: the Ghana Feminist Forum, the Uganda Feminist Forum and the Nigerian Feminist Forum.

How did we start?

Though we're young, we had a very long gestation period, including a quite painful miscarriage in which there were bitter arguments about what constitutes feminism

and/or African feminism, and/or if there is more than one feminism. And which included during that process [instances of] back-biting, appeals to regionalism and nationalism, accusations of the same, intolerance, personal attacks, and so on.

Some of the survivors of that very painful process felt that it raised the question of how not to let our own language and values about democracy, inclusion and transparency be used against us to undermine the critical work we want to do, while at the same time upholding those values. We felt the way to do that was to develop clear principles – as Nadine said yesterday – the ground rules of what we felt should [constitute] African feminism. And so we developed the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists.

We call it the Charter for African Feminists not because

## I leave the forum refueled and inspired to seek equitable partnerships

One of my lasting impressions of this forum is of the session on women's empowerment and the role of men. Bursting with the presence and buzz of interested attendees, the session had to be moved to a makeshift room, where panelists stood on chairs to project their voices over the large crowd. The engaging speakers talked about the importance of looking at gender relations, of deconstructing power and analyzing the structures that create inequity, and of "female masculinities." Male panelists spoke about why gender justice matters to them and provided thought-provoking reasons and strategies for engaging men in gender justice.

This forum's theme on movement building was personally interesting to me as I watched how such diverse participants interacted with one another. Though participants attend out of common interest in gender equity, the diversity of language, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, gender, sexuality, religion (to name a few) abounded. A recurring theme of inclusive and exclusive space emerged throughout the conference. I wonder if, in some ways, my personal tracking of the last three forums also reflects the evolution

of inclusiveness within AWID's base and role in movement-building? Might men and others who do not fit squarely within the women's movement be the next frontier of AWID's inclusivity challenge? This last question is personally significant to me, as someone whose work began in a feminist organization, and now does gender work from inside an international development organization.

I came to this year's forum to listen for better ways in which my current organizational home can be a stronger ally to the movement. This hope was met with real enthusiasm and criticism from others – a probable product of a continuing interest in partnering and a bumpy history of doing it well. I leave the forum refueled and inspired to seek equitable partnerships that leverage respective comparative advantages through transparent and honest dialogue, and with the courage to acknowledge times when we may do better by providing acts of recognition rather than partnering.

- By Theresa Hwang, USA



we think the values are peculiar to Africa but because it was developed by and for us. [One of the principles is] that feminism is publicly self-defined. We wanted to reject the fear of stigma, and analyze the concept for its use for us in defending and reconstructing women's rights in Africa. We're always going to be called names, so the politics in how we name ourselves is important.

Some of the survivors of that very painful process felt that it raised the question of how not to let our own language and values about democracy, inclusion and transparency be used against us to undermine the critical work we want to do, while at the same time upholding those values

Secondly, we felt that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported to Africa from the West. So we reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa, which we are pursuing with the African Feminist Ancestors Project, which we launched yesterday.

Third, we felt that it's important to recognize the interlocking systems of exclusion, marginalization and oppression: patriarchy, class, race, ethnicity, religion, global imperialism, heterosexism ... there are many, and they work together. We have to address them all.

Fourth, [we affirmed] the principle of freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues, including reproductive and sexual rights – particularly the right of women to choose whether or not she wants to have an abortion, and the right to choose one's sexual identity and orientation.

In addition to those broad theoretical principles, we thought it was also necessary to address principles of how we can work, live and bring into practice the raw divisions that we have. So we talked about ways of using power and authority responsibly – for example, not having matriarchal attitudes [towards] younger women, or to domestic workers, or to any women or men over whom one has power. We talked about accountability to women, to the movement, and to institutions as well as to donors.

We talked about the space to support, mentor, nurture and critically engage with each other, including being open to receive criticism.

We decided that we would use those as principles for inclusion. We made the decision that women who accept the principles of the Charter, and who, to the best of our knowledge, walk the talk in their daily lives – professional, institutional and private – were the people who should be included in an African Feminist Forum in their individual capacities. The Nigerian Feminist Forum adopted those same principles.

So, in those two forums (the Nigerian and the African Feminist Forums), the organizing groups, the working groups, went through a process of having to verify and get to know better women who were nominated as participants, [in order to reach a] consensus by the group that yes, we really believe that this person does walk the talk and accepts the principles. By the way, I should mention that the Charter was circulated with a letter of invitation so that people knew what they were committing themselves to before they came to the meetings.

Nonetheless, we found that both the African Feminist Forum and the Nigerian Feminist Forum still had to deal with people who were, at best, uneasy about sexuality issues. In the Nigerian Feminist Forum, this surfaced after a performance by participants of the Vagina Monologues. Some [participants were] hostile, especially around issues of sexual orientation. That was also the case in Ghana and Uganda, perhaps even more so, because in Ghana and Uganda, they decided that they would use the forums to deliberately reach out to women who are not necessarily identifying as feminists, in order to try to create more feminist activists.

So how did we deal with these issues?

First of all, we surfaced the tensions, and we tried to make it clear that homophobia and principles of non-inclusion were not acceptable. We tried to talk about ways of directly addressing contradictions between feminist principles and other beliefs and values within ourselves. We clarified principles of solidarity, and we ensured that people who were present who were lesbian or sex workers or transgendered or had disabilities could speak for themselves, with the support of other feminists at the meeting.

I have to say, at the end of the Ugandan Feminist Forum and the Ghanaian Feminist Forum, they were able to adopt the Charter – which was great. But the challenge remains: how do we use the Charter practically for ensuring accountability to its principles? What's our responsibility to our sisters, who we feel are not living up to their stated principles? How do we address the situation when we hear of somebody who has perhaps not been treating people well? And obviously we still need to do more about addressing homophobia within ourselves.

We also paid a lot of attention to principles of inclusion and diversity, given that we didn't have enough money to invite everybody who was in fact a feminist by our criteria.

So we developed an interlocking set of criteria for invitations to the African Feminist Forums and the Nigerian Feminist Forum, which included diversity of sexual orientations, experience and expertise of that person as a resource person, regional and country representation. [We also] affirmed emergency situations like Zimbabwe, where they particularly need space given what's happening. And we conceived of multi-generationality as being more than young and old.

How did we deal with [multi-generationality]? Well, [we paid] for the travel and care of young children, which is a general [benefit] but most useful for younger women, apart from those like me who started child bearing after 40. In the Nigerian Feminist Forum we took care to ensure balanced representation among participants. We had four age cohorts which were almost exactly evenly balanced: under 30s, 30-39, 40-49 and over 50s. After informal consultations, we took the advice of younger women and decided not to have special young women panels, but to ensure that all generations of women were represented on every panel and in every workshop. [We] also provided space for a young women's caucus, amongst other caucuses.

We also had discussions about what mentorship means, and its relationship to age – not necessarily [related] – and the expectations and responsibilities of mentors and mentees. In addition we had multi-generational dinners which facilitated conversation: small groups sitting at one dinner table with the conversation facilitated by women of two different generations. At the Nigerian Feminist Forum we had also a session organized by age cohort on what do we want our feminist movement to look like in five years, and how will we get there? We actually found in that case that there was absolute consensus among the four generations.

**We reckon that feminists are not only those who work with women on women's rights, so we had a mix of professions and modes of engagement**

We also committed also to the principles of regional and linguistic diversity. We have over a thousand indigenous languages in Africa as well as four ex-colonial languages. We had to limit it to French/English translation of documents and simultaneous interpretation, but we know that's a problem. We're committed to inclusion of women with disabilities, and I'd just like to mention here that the Protocol to the African Charter and Human and

People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which was drafted by African feminists, has specific provisions on the rights of women with disabilities.

We also paid attention to diversity of occupations and modes of engagement with feminism. We reckon that feminists are not only those who work with women on women's rights, so we had a mix of professions and modes of engagement: artists, academics, members of parliament, NGO activists, independents, non-affiliated people, self-employed.

And so, we moved from the African Feminist Forum in 2006 with 16 countries represented, no women with disabilities, no LGBTI persons, no sex workers – to 2008 where we had 26 countries represented, many more Francophone and North African participants, the stronger presence of lesbian women, some women with disabilities, some sex workers, and a stronger presence of women living with AIDS. The challenge now that we are recognizing and working on is how to include those feminists who are not schooled, and who don't speak in the ex-colonial languages.

I think it is fair to say that, overwhelmingly, there is agreement that the African Feminist Forum and the national forums have produced more clarity and more feminists, and [have] helped to strengthen our strategy and tactics to make feminist political, social, and economic change. We had dancing, poetry, singing; we had a great debate; we had a trial where we critiqued the deficiency of the AFM through a mock trial in which the AFM was prosecuted for criminal neglect.

Importantly, the Feminist Forums haven't been single, stand-alone events. They've sparked initiatives that have carried on afterwards.

There have been protests to protect LGBTI defenders and people in Uganda and Nigeria. There have been interventions in different other fora. In Nigeria, the listserve of feminist fora has resulted in a network of feminists forming a nucleus of campaigns as allies to fight against the indecent dressing bill, for the domestic violence bill. In Uganda there's a network of feminist executive directors who meet monthly to provide critical support and analysis to each other. And in many countries there has been a taking stock of our engagements, a reaching out. There's been [a level of] support [for] each other across the continent, which is much stronger than ever before.

However, I must say that crucial to the growth of all the Feminist Forums has been our way of organizing, which is to have a working group of individual feminists who work with strong and independent feminist organizations. And I want to recognize those organizations publicly here: the African Women's Development Fund, the Ghanaian Network for Women's Rights, Akina Mama wa Africa, Alliances for Africa, Baobab for Women's Human Rights, and all members of the working groups of the African Feminist Forum and the Ugandan, Ghanaian and Nigerian Feminist Forums and the soon to be Kenyan Feminist Forum and Senegalese Feminist Forum.



## “The fight for reform has given much power to women’s organizations” Presentation by Rabéa Naciri, Morocco

I want to thank AWID for providing me with an opportunity to reflect on this time in our country’s history, and share with you all some information on this “post-reform” period we now find ourselves in as a women’s movement.

I want to first provide you with a bit of background on the Moroccan context. We are in now what we like to call the “democratic transition” which started a couple of years ago. And although we are not sure how long it will last or where we are heading, we thought it would be important to share this reflection with you. The fight for reform has given much power to women’s organizations that are part of larger women’s movements, in the post-reform context. It has given them strength because for the first time, they are seen by both the public and the political elite as a force that can contribute to the implementation of a social agenda.

### Dialogue on women’s rights has become a bit of a fashionable thing – and of course this is associated with many threats

One of the main consequences of this reform, and of the democratic transition period, is that there has been a multiplication of feminist associations in Morocco, which is very positive (I will return to the challenges and issues of this). The first feminist organizations that were part of the first wave of feminism only existed in the large cities in Morocco. Today the feminist movement has diversified and covers most of the regions in Morocco, which is a very positive outcome. But it’s also linked to some threats and some challenges.

This dynamic reform process was very difficult and lengthy. Thousands of women marched in the streets, and we had some struggles with the Islamist movement and conservative forces. One of the consequences of these struggles was a diversification in the funds that were made available. Within just a few months, we saw funders from all over the world, all seeking to work on projects within the framework of the reform of the family code. But these funds arrive with a very specific agenda, which was one of the main impacts.

A second impact is that the reform brought with it an end to some taboos. We saw the emergence of “state feminism,” which means that the Moroccan government is now speaking about women’s movements, gender mainstreaming, and gender budgeting. The Moroccan government is talking a lot about women’s rights, which in my mind is also a threat – I will get back to this.

Another impact of the democratic transition in Morocco was the arrival or emergence of a phenomenon that almost does not exist in other Arab countries: partnership between the state and civil society. This was a very positive outcome for Morocco, that civil society organisations are now working with the government of Morocco.

All this means that dialogue on women’s rights has become a bit of a fashionable thing – and of course this is associated with many threats that are weighing on feminist movements. There has also been an appropriation of the discourse, as the movement has become “respectable” – and this of course implies that we are facing new challenges today.

Allow me to share a bit of reflection with you. Twenty years ago, I remember a conversation I had with a friend in the movement. A decision-maker spat on us because we were asking for equality of women within the family unit. Such a thing today would be unthinkable. I do not say that I am regretting that we are no longer spat on, but I am pointing out a huge shift in culture that has taken place. Things have evolved so much today that belonging to a feminist organization has become something that is commonplace and is very well perceived. This in turn has created some opportunistic challenges. For one, being a leader of a feminist movement today can open up certain doors. To give you an example, let us take the media and media coverage. The press and media in Morocco are very curious about what is going on in the women’s movement and our needs. Feminist leaders can be on television. We can appear in newspapers.

There is also another issue that has arisen since the reform of the code: career development. The influx of funds in Morocco – the public-private partnerships between the donors, the state and civil society – have created a number of new career development opportunities tied to the government’s need for experts. We call this the “triangular partnership” between women’s movements, government, and the donors. Because of this triangular partnership there are now opportunities for career development for women’s rights activists inside government that did not exist before. The government needs expertise



that it does not have, and they are calling upon feminist managers for that expertise. I'm not saying that this is a mass phenomenon, but I am saying that this is one of the threats that we are facing today.

Another risk is that international organizations are poaching feminist leaders and managers who have the know-how and experience that is needed by these international organizations. This is happening in part because Morocco is a relatively young country with respect to democracy and women's rights, so there is a real lack of expertise and know-how.

All these stakes, all these challenges, are creating a context in which feminist organizations are being solicited to work on a multiplicity of projects and on the government's agenda. This has created a new power struggle – a competition for resources, for power – and all this of course leads to a lack of time. Since the reform in 2004, we have not stopped running from one activity to the next, nor have we had the time or space to debate among ourselves the implications of this reform. Many organisations are now at the service of the donors or governments, implementing projects instead of it being the other way around. We are in a process that is putting us in jeopardy and forcing us toward NGO-ization. This process has been characterized by a severe shortage of time as well as competition between different organizations for good leadership.

This lack of time I've been speaking of makes it so that spaces for exchange, debate and critical reflection on this post-reform period are missing. What does this imply for a women's movement that has won such a major battle? We have not had the time nor the opportunity since 2004 for discussion. When we speak of inter-generational debates and dialogue, how can we possibly expect organizations that are suffering from this severe shortage of time to have older leaders to train and work with young feminists? We need to make time and space to share the collective memory of the first-wave feminist organisations that I call the "big sister memory."

To conclude I will share an experience with you. Two years ago, we tried to set up what we called "sit-downs" for the Moroccan women's movement. We did so because we needed to create a space for debate, over and above the official projects and the specific strategies – free spaces without any stakes, without any power struggles. Spaces that are totally outside of the political agenda and the association's strategies and projects.

We initiated this process two years ago – but of course we are facing many challenges, which is normal I think since the movement has now opened up and is extremely diversified, with associations from different regions of Morocco. That means that the debate of course is somewhat complicated. But I trust in the future. We've had problems recruiting young activists, but maybe it's because we, the older generation, are blocking their path. I think that our hope lies in the young feminist organizations that are springing up in small cities and regions in Morocco.

## I felt so much energy and power

"I have never left a meeting feeling so much energized and revamped. This is my second women's international meeting, and as I work with women's movements at the grassroots level, I felt so much energy and power. It is very difficult to empower women if I myself am not empowered. The forum changed me positively, and I have seen the great importance of organizing."

- Women's Rights Activist from Sub-Saharan Africa

## I really thought things couldn't get better

Wow! After an amazing day one at AWID I really thought things couldn't get better....I was wrong. After the plenary on day two I was left with an interesting feeling ... a feeling that as a man who is a proud feminist there was no need for me to find an excuse for being here amongst nearly 2,000 of the most amazing women's rights activists from all over the globe. The fact that I believe with 100 percent of my being in the principles that form the basis of feminism is reason enough.

Former ANC MP Pregs Govender is officially my sheroe after empowering the delegates to take part in a "recognition session" that was nothing more than an internal earthquake that reflected the power of ourselves that translates into the power of movements.

As I leave the Convention Centre to join the One In Nine Campaign march through Cape Town CBD, the power of movements and the women AND men that stand proudly in solidarity with women who speak out is in the air. Viva The Struggle For Women's Rights - Wathint Abafazi Wanthint Mbokodo, You Strike A Woman You Strike A Rock!!!

- Tian Johnson, South Africa

[www.ngopulse.org/blogs/sheroes-awid-2008](http://www.ngopulse.org/blogs/sheroes-awid-2008)



## “We embarked on this proces to strengthen our sense of being part of a movement”

Presentation by Morena Herrera Argueta, El Salvador

Good morning. What I’m about to share with you all today is a reflection that not so long ago I shared with Lydia. I’m going to try to summarize a process we undertook in El Salvador aimed at strengthening the women’s movement. My focus will be on the problems and tensions that came out of that process, given that today’s plenary focuses more on the processes than on outputs or successes.

But first, I want to give some background to help us locate the context in which this process took place. In 1992, peace agreements were signed, ending twelve years of civil war in El Salvador. Before this, very few organizations defined themselves as feminist, because feminism was considered a bad word. The word “feminist” had the connotation of being influenced by bourgeoisie ideologies or by American imperialism. At that time, women’s organizations were mainly concerned with human rights, conflict resolution and some specific demands related to women’s rights.

With the political transition after the war (not necessarily to democracy) there were a lot of expectations. We thought the transition was going to be a good opportunity for women. Women’s organizations developed a national platform for the first post-war elections. Additionally, after Beijing’s influence, we thought we were going to achieve political changes to improve women’s condition and quality of life. We grew as a movement, both in terms of numbers of participants and organizations. But very soon these expectations started to crumble as we faced resistance from the government and the political elite – even when that political elite consisted of some of our former struggle comrades.

Something else that contributed to the crumbling of our expectations was the rise of fundamentalist groups linked to the Catholic Church. El Salvador was the first country in Latin America to approve a national holiday in tribute to “the unborn child.” Between 1997 and 1999, all non-punishable forms of abortion (there were three in total) were penalized, and the constitution was reformed to make it almost impossible to change this law.

As women’s movements and as feminist movements we faced the same issues as our counterparts in other Latin American countries. Some feminist organizations consolidated themselves as NGOs, others practically disappeared, and the rest adopted thematic specialization on issues like violence against women, health, anti-sexist education, etc. Consequently, the gap between feminist NGOs and local and sector-focused women’s organizations grew even wider. These local organizations started to be

considered by feminist NGOs as beneficiaries who were only useful when they needed to mobilize masses of people to the streets.

I should also mention that in spite of the increasing gap, we were able to maintain a feminist NGO association that was created 10 years ago, based in the capital city. The Prudencia Ayala Association is frequently referred to as the women’s movement representative by public agencies and funders. In reality, only feminist NGOs based in the capital and a few independent feminists are part of this association.

It is within this framework that we decided to look inside and embark on a self-critical process to help us strengthen our analytical capacity and strategize as a movement. In other words, we embarked on this process to strengthen our sense of being part of a movement.

## We reflected on our own self-censorship in confronting penalization of abortion, and we looked at how we marginalized the issue of sexuality

I’m going to summarize what we did then. First we identified five sectors of feminist struggle and analyzed the conception, the practices and the strategies that we’d used during the last ten years in these sectors. Each feminist organization that participated in the process did so with the commitment of considering not only what they had done, but also what everyone had done in that sector. The five sectors that we looked at were: the struggle against violence against women, the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights, labour rights in terms of free trade agreements with the United States which is very important in Central America (not because it is a benefit for us of course), support for women in terms of income-generation, and the strategies of empowering rural women. This initial process allowed us to recognize what different groups had done and also pointed to areas where we needed to do more work.

Another process, undertaken simultaneously, was to

gather all of the publications and research and proposals that had been formulated from women's organizations and on women's organizations during the same decade. We organized everything into a bibliography, with about 450 indices. We analyzed and classified them in different categories, using similar categories from another index that we used 11 years ago. This allowed us to see in which sectors the movement had continued to create more knowledge, and in which sectors the process was paralyzed or had not continued to progress, either because of a lack of systematic studying or because of changes in funding trends.

This process also allowed us to see the low levels of knowledge within our movement and within our organizations about the work we and others were doing. For instance, we found that in one organization, one department could produce a document, and other departments in the same organization had no idea of the existence of that document. We also found out that we often don't even read what we produce. Research reports and publications are usually the last activity on the implementation process of a project. In the final weeks of the project, we publish a report with our findings and then we present it, archive it or disseminate it. Publications and research reports have rarely been used to look inside our movement and reflect about our practices.

We did two more things during that process that lasted about 14 months. We undertook a self-criticism that allowed us to identify and name current problems in the movement. We also began to have more confidence in our reflections and started to think about strategies that could go beyond just carrying out actions together. We were able to recover and put back on the table some critical issues such as patriarchy and our critical view of the de-politicization of gender. We reflected on our own self-censorship in confronting penalization of abortion, and we looked at how we marginalized the issue of sexuality, disregarding its importance at explaining the oppression of women and as a tool to help us achieve our individual and collective liberties. It is on the basis of this self-criticism that we have begun a new dialogue.

I'd like to share with you the last part of this process. (Pointing to a slide) This map shows women's organizations working at the local level. We analyzed and mapped this information and created an index with the 262 municipalities of the country. We also put together a directory of local grassroots women's organizations. Simultaneously, we also registered the reach of the work of feminist NGOs that are based in the capital and we have marked them on this map. As you can see on the map the municipalities that are marked are the ones where the feminist NGOs work. The areas that are white indicate there is no presence of these feminists NGOs. As you can see when we super-impose the second map on the first one, these two maps do not coincide.

This has allowed us to see the truth about the myth in El Salvador, which is that everything that exists with

regards to organizations and demands of women for their rights is a result of the feminist NGOs' action. This is a first step so that as feminists, we can recognize that we actually *do* need other women's organizations that don't define themselves as feminist. We also need to revise our relationships and the power dynamics within our movements, to address this issue. We have begun this dialogue, but it's just in an initial stage.

Yesterday someone said in the plenary, I believe it was a sister from Kenya, that we want a movement that is more than the sum of its parts. I want to add something that a Spanish writer mentions in her novel. She says "the totality is only greater than the sum of the parts if the parts are recognized among themselves." In other words, feminists and other expressions of women's organizing that are not defined as feminist need to acknowledge and recognize each other to strengthen the power of our movements.







## “How can one talk about sisterhood and solidarity when we cannot openly address our own differences?”

Presentation by Lynnsay Rongokea, Cook Islands

**“Stand like the Kahikatea,  
Stand against the storm,  
Together, united,  
We will survive”**

The Kahikatea tree has a shallow root system beneath the ground. The roots form an intertwining mesh that provides the support to the tree to grow to great heights.

[These roots symbolize] the intertwining of all women within the women’s movements, feminist movements, that are the heart of my talk today – a coming together of all of us to provide the support for this movement to allow this tree – this source of power, strength and life – to grow to great heights.

(Singing) Kia orana, Kotou katoatoa. Warm greetings from the Pacific to you all!

I am from the Cook Islands, which is, for those of you who don’t know, a small group of islands in the middle of the South Pacific. As an indigenous woman from the Pacific, I would like to acknowledge the peoples of the first nations of this land, and I thank the AWID organizers for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences with you and also for your attention. I must say that as a Pacific Islander, a woman, I feel honored and privileged for this opportunity to be one of the three percent representing the Pacific. The verse that I’ve just shared with you was a song by a New Zealand/Aotearoa Maori artist, musician and composer, and I thought that it would be appropriate for my discussion today.

About my network: the APWLD (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development) network spans 23 countries with approximately 150 members spread throughout Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The organization is dynamic and, like the cycle of life, ever changing. It’s multi-generational, [with] a diverse membership with different political, socio-economic [and] cultural backgrounds, [and different] experiences, ideologies, life paths, and educational opportunities. Now, the challenge for us as leaders of our organizations, is how do we bring all these people and that [diversity] together? It’s not easy.

I came into an organization that was in financial crisis and fragmented. And you know, the comment that I got was, “What is a white woman doing coming in here and talking about Asia-Pacific issues?” My nose is too pointy; I’m the wrong colour. But I am a Cook Islander, and my Pacific Island sisters have asked me to stand up and share a lot of the commonalities that we have.

Every organization comes into a crisis at different

stages. There are tensions; there are unresolved disputes. How do we address them if they are deeply engrained? [These tensions] have resulted in divisions within our organizations and within our movements. Some may never be resolved, but we must still work towards finding workable solutions.

Our movement is based on personalities, our relationships with other women, our commonalities and our differences. Hierarchies are built around personalities. We work within hierarchal structures to ensure accountability, transparency and efficiency. But these structures can also be counter-productive and create a power imbalance. We need to address the hierarchy of personalities, these small cliques within our organization who make the decisions. How many times have we heard, “we’ve got 150 members in our network but only five members responded to an issue.” Is that reflective to the whole 150 voices? Can we really say we’re representing the voices of the organization? Who made the decision? Who did we consult? Why is it the same people who are attending all the meetings? It’s always the same faces. We want to see new faces. We want to hear new voices.

**We have seen how women have internalized sexist values, judging other women in patriarchal ways. I’ve attended meetings in the Pacific where women nudge each other, roll their eyes. There she goes again...**

We have seen how women have internalized sexist values, judging other women in patriarchal ways. I’ve attended meetings in the Pacific where women nudge each other, roll their eyes. There she goes again. And in Asia I’ve experienced the invisible walls of exclusion and silence where women are not saying what they mean. Remember the words of Desmond Tutu: “If we recognize our own self worth we will respect the worth of others and

have reverence of life.”

We are facing new challenges and opportunities today with increasing militarization, fundamentalisms, globalization, the current financial crisis and the lack of accountability in character of so many people who are in power or control. There is a more pressing need today for transparency, sharing of ideas and goals, and an organizational mentality that produces change when it is needed, and accountability when it is warranted.

Despite disagreements, we must continually attempt to find common ground to work together towards change and an acceptance of multiple views and ideas. We need to be more inclusive, by opening up spaces for new voices, mentors, and partners, and by empowering those we speak for, including the younger generation, to speak for themselves. It is important for the gatekeepers of knowledge to share with younger women and the less experienced in the movement.

We are living through challenging times, and although there have been many achievements, violence against women remains a harsh reality in our families, our communities and in our nation. We now have a definition of violence that includes psychological abuse. In many of our countries we've got laws, policies and regulations. They are all being reviewed to regulate and try

to address the issue. However, within our movement, we have been silent on the psychological violence and conflict that goes on within our organizations, between and among women, creating stress and affecting our mental health and wellbeing.

One of the questions asked was, “How do we address diversity in the women’s movement”? [Perhaps] we should ask [instead], “How do we account for our own negative treatment of each other?” We say or we think in private, “Women, can be real bitches, condescending and arrogant.” Women hurt and humiliate one another and gossip. Good gossip is okay, but it’s the malicious and mischievous rumours that are spread that I am talking about. Women fear other women.

I’ve stood in front of my own board and members and told them that there were rumours abounding about me, as well as about the performance of our governance bodies, and it was an issue that needed to be addressed. How can one talk about sisterhood and solidarity when we cannot openly address our own differences? We talk about the promotion and protection of women’s human rights and yet we cannot stand up and protect the woman we sit next to and work with. We need to be more open and honest. Rather than talk outside of meetings, [we need to] bring it into the open, into the appropriate venues and

## Matutus, goats and feminism

[I attended] the 11th women’s forum hosted by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). It’s the first time that the event has been hosted in Africa ... and I have to tell you, the energy of the place was amazing. It was really inspiring to hear from and to meet so many women who are all working to achieve gender equality, whether this be in a feminist context or not.

I was very excited to meet women who are working in queer rights in Africa. I hadn’t seen any LGBTI organizations in Kenya, though I know they must exist. Such organizations are frequently driven underground for fear of persecution, as in many countries homosexuality is illegal and the stigma against it is still strong. I was awed by the women who were working in countries that are so hostile to their presence, yet they persevere because they believe so strongly in equal rights for all people. They are not ashamed to fight for the right to love who they want, the right to be treated with dignity and respect, the right not to be beaten or killed simply for looking or dressing the “wrong” way, or for holding or (god forbid) kissing their partner in public.

I think attending this conference has been very helpful to me in terms of realizing that in the future

I would really like to work in an explicitly feminist and queer-positive environment; these things are important to me, and I would like to see them acknowledged in a work context. Although I remain passionate about indigenous rights and would like to continue to be involved in this field to a degree, I think there are other areas of work, particularly in women’s rights, which draw my attention more strongly. I would love to expand my horizons a bit in the coming years.

Although I love the energy and diversity that large conferences bring, the number of pressing issues that this kind of gathering brings to light is terrifying! There’s just so much to address. It gets to be too much when you see just how much work there is to do. But it’s comforting to know that although the world can be a huge and frightening place, at least there are others who are there to stand beside you, to pull you up when you fall and take up the chant when you grow hoarse, and to assure you that no, you’re not crazy for giving a damn.

*- Reprinted and excerpted from KD’s blog (Kenya) [www.liminalworld.blogspot.com/2008/11/power-of-movements.html](http://www.liminalworld.blogspot.com/2008/11/power-of-movements.html)*

spaces. We should stand and speak for those who are not present to speak for themselves. I thought that one of the fundamentals principles of feminism was to defend your sisters.

Ko au, ko au, ko au - me, myself and I. As agents of social change, our starting point should be ourselves, and understanding the political, social and cultural environment in which we work and behave. We cannot change another person's personality or behaviour, but we can adapt our responses. Our attitude is so much more important. Here is a quote that expresses that attitude: "Treat others not the way you expect to be treated, but the way they want to be treated."

I've recognized, when I'm confronted with a difficult decision, that I don't walk alone. [I have] my daughters, my family, and my friends and colleagues who I can trust and depend upon. I know that they are non-judgmental. They will provide support and guide me through the difficult times. I have overcome many obstacles and difficulties by listening and communicating. I know that I can make a difference, and I *have* made a difference. We talk about changes, to laws, policies and practices. The challenge is attitudinal change.

We all have to sit back on an ongoing basis and try

and be more objective about situations that we are faced with. We all walk different paths in life and bring our different backgrounds and experiences to the table. One can never truly know what the other is thinking. We are all a product of different times, different cultures, different familial situations and different relationships. Opening our minds and trying to see the other side, no matter what we think, should always be the first step we take together when considering issues. We are all part of the intertwining mesh that provides the support for a tree to grow to great heights. Our role in that [support] depends on our own approach and our contributions to each situation.

Another well known saying from the Pacific is: "E a'a te mea nui o te ao? E tangata, e tangata, e tangata e." Which means, "What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people."

We are all walking the same journey together. We are supporting the same tree to grow. It is time that we turn to each other in the same spirit as we turn to those we have come together to speak for, and offer the same support and strength to our sisters walking our path. I thank you for your support and teachings, and I look forward to the discussions.



## "One of patriarchy's most powerful tools is to alienate us from ourselves" Presentation by Pregs Govender, South Africa

I'm deeply honoured to be here together with so many women that I've learnt so much from, and from whom I'll continue to learn so much from in the years ahead.

I'd like to start with reading an extract from my book, *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination*. It's an extract from a period when I was a trade unionist in the clothing and textile union, during the period of Apartheid.

*On top of poor wages and working conditions, women often had to endure sexual harassment and strip-searching and were still expected to be sweetly submissive. Their reward was to be selected by the bosses as queen for a day, in the industry's much publicized Spring Queen competition. For many women, a leader was a man whom they could look up to, not someone who looked like themselves. Although women formed the overwhelming majority of workers in the industry, they seldom elected other women into leadership positions at the factory, regional or national levels.*

*On the night we gathered for the first workshop I organized for women leaders, everyone shared their ideas and images of women. I wrote their responses onto a large chart: "women are gossips", they "bitch*

*about each other", they are "jealous", they "pull you down", they "can't unite over anything", "never trust a woman" – a depressing litany of all the stereotypes we are told we are. I suggested that if this is what we believed of women, it was what we believed of ourselves because we were women. "Ugh, No!" said one of the participants "that's not about us – it's about the other women."*

*But if that's what we believe about the other women, then we might as well pack up and go home, because this union is overwhelmingly female. We are going to have to unite and change things.*

*An intense discussion followed. The women reflected together on how we internalize society's beliefs, which prevents us from acting together to change our lives and the lives of our daughters. Around the room, women recounted experiences from girlhood onwards that weakened their sense of self: beatings by parents and then by husbands, single parenting, the double load of work at home and factory, the triple load with union work, sexual harassment, rape. Tragically, almost all of us had similar stories of pain as children and adults.*

*Instead of using our collective power to solve*



*these problems, however, women sometimes became embroiled in power play, often driven by men, which threatened to destroy our unity. The 1988 Cosatu women's conference fought bitterly on whether to have women's committees in Cosatu or a national women's organization. And unions mobilized into opposing groups.*

I'm not going to deal with what happened in that conference in detail, but basically there was a lot of labelling. If you followed one position, you were a so-called "populist." If you followed the other position you were so-called "workorist." These were swear words, or they would have been used as such.

Two of us were asked to draft a resolution, a compromised resolution. What we drafted called for structures within the Trade Union Federation to address the problems facing women workers, specifically in the workplace and in the union, as well as a structure to help unify women in the community. Principals of unity, not division, served the best interest of women in our unions and communities. In our union, building such unity changed the face of the leadership. Women learned to support and elect other women into positions of leadership in an unprecedented manner. Within the course of two years, the leadership from factory level to national level became overwhelmingly female, truly representative of the membership from audience.

Between that moment and this, global policies such as the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs have decimated the clothing and textile industry in this country. Most of those women are today in the so-called informal sectors, in the least protected, the most vulnerable, and the very lowest [of the sectors] that we fought to change.

Patriarchy interacts with all authoritarian systems: religious, economic, political, and social. It can be incredibly powerful and incredibly overwhelming. Even if we examine it, critique it, analyze it ... at an intellectual level, we understand it. It permeates our bodies. It permeates our minds, our hearts. It eats into our souls, and it divides us from ourselves and from each other. The patriarchal power of hate and fear and greed [is] not just something we are fighting outside of us, but something that is within us. Too often in our movements, it becomes easier for us to destroy each other than to actually look at how we challenge what we are up against.

There are few models in terms of power. We are often trapped between the crass consumerism of American capitalism and the mindless collectivism of Stalinism. One of patriarchy's most powerful tools is to alienate us from ourselves, from the power within us and the power within each other. I'm not going to talk about the movements and the lessons of those movements in detail. I want to focus on this particular issue because I think it is a central one. In *Love, Courage and Insubordination*, I tried to explore what does this alternative power mean, how can it operate, how do we use it as feminists working within

patriarchal societies, working within patriarchal systems and structures including our own?

The process of reflection on the different movements that I have been part of in this country [has] brought back a great deal of pain. The most painful retaliation for me was not the retaliation of the African National Congress, the hierarchical patriarchal political party that I was part of. It was the reaction from those closest to me. It was of a sister saying to me, "you have betrayed the African National Congress, you have betrayed our movement" when I voted against the arms deal. It was of a sister standing up and walking out when I began to speak, because I had resigned over the HIV-AIDS issue, and she was in government. It was about being written out of the history that people were compiling because I had dared to stand up against the position of those who were powerful.

## Patriarchy interacts with all authoritarian systems: religious, economic, political, and social. It can be incredibly powerful and incredibly overwhelming

As I went back, I looked at various things and one of them was a chapter in my book, which is called "Elimination." It is literally about a request that was made in the ANC underground for my elimination. We faced constantly all forms of elimination, and they begin to link one to the other. What does it mean to be loyal and to whom should we be loyal? The reason given for the request for elimination was because I was insubordinate.

What does it mean to be true to ourselves and to each other when, in our country for example, the president said, addressing women last week, that the way in which we should deal with teenage pregnancies is to forcibly separate the mother from the baby, and to leave the baby with the grandmother. The mother will not be allowed to return to the baby until she is trained, re-educated, etc. I'm paraphrasing. I'm sure someone can get the exact words.

What does it mean when the president-elect of our country says that these young women are having babies so that they can access the child grant, to do their hair and paint their nails? What does it mean for all of us in our country and across the globe? How will we stand in solidarity with those young women? How will we stand in solidarity with each other? How will we do that in the most powerful way possible? Because what we are talking about is ways of reinforcing patriarchy, ways of reinforcing

misogyny. When it happens in one place and no one stands up against that, it goes unnoticed, and it spreads, and it spreads, and it spreads. So, how will we build that solidarity with each other?

I want to take a moment, and I'd like to ask you to do a little exercise. It's a very simple exercise, but I think it's one of the most important things. I'd like you to turn to the person next to you, to partner with someone for a moment. In this moment, I'm going to ask if you can all take a moment first to just sit with yourself, to connect deeply with yourself, to connect deeply to the love and joy and peace within your own heart. This session, the [description] of it says, "if we hold a mirror to our movements, what would we see?"

I'd like you to turn to each other and, without speaking, I would like you to see reflected, and to reflect back, that love and peace and joy in that other person's eyes. I would like you to uphold in that mirror the most beautiful picture of that person in silence, with no talking, in absolute silence. You can give your partner a hug if you'd like (laughter).

One of the things we learn early on is criticism. We must criticize, and criticism is very important. But actually, something far more important is recognition. The simple act of recognition. It is the simplest act. It is the most powerful act. It doesn't take any fancy technique or technology. It just takes our presence. In the years ahead in our country, and I think across the globe, in the challenges that we face, whenever we forget who we are, if we can take a moment and look into the mirror of each other and be reminded of who we are and who we can be together, I think we will be able to work very, very powerfully.

I think that all the things that I have learned in the women's movement from 1974 until now, mostly in my country [but] in the last few years, outside my country ... the things that I have learned from my mothers, from my sisters, from my daughters [are all] about the abundance of talent, about the generosity, the massive generosity, about the humility, about the wisdom that women have shared ... about the clarity, the strategic abilities, the respect, the self-respect, the joy, the pleasure, the analysis, the organization, the mobilization, the love, courage, and insubordination. Thank you.

Once upon a time there was a voice. She wore blue jeans shaped lovingly / to the fine fat curves / of her ass, the bold strong swell / of her thighs. She loved / red. And Motown. And silver hoop earrings, and anything lemon-flavored. But most of all she loved / the milky peanut butter smell / of her son's small body. She roamed the asphalt / of West Oakland calling / for her mother, trying to remember / what her mother looked like. Her right hand pressed deep / into the hollow / just under her left breast / where she kept an ache / she could not name.

You say: do you see me? Look – and tell me what you see.

I'm looking at you now. The lovely tired / contours of your bodies. The heaviness of your bellies, bellies that have ripened children, done the work of building life. Bellies that pack enough power to lift this landmass / from Richmond to Hayward / flip it over like a pancake / dump it into the Bay.

And if I know one thing / on this scarred and terrible earth / it is this. Your bellies / have one more life to birth. Your own.

If I trust one thing / on this scarred and merciful earth, it is this. All love begins with seeing. As I learn to write, I learn to love. Because to write anything, first / I have to see it. In its wholeness, without resistance. In its detail, without judgment. And I'm looking at you now,

# FOR THE WOMEN OF PROJECT PRIDE

Poem by Shailja Patel, Kenya/USA. Performed at the Forum by Shailja Patel.  
Reprinted with permission.

as you look at yourselves: well enough,  
deep enough, true enough, hard enough  
/ to write yourselves, well, and deep and  
true and hard / to love yourselves, well,  
deep, true, hard / to be the wellness  
deepness trueness hardness / that will  
rock the world.

Once upon a time, there was a voice. She  
wore big baggy white t-shirts / to hide  
the folds of her stretchmarked belly. She  
twisted her hair constantly, to quiet her  
fingers' craving for just / one / cigarette.  
She loved hot dogs. And pepperoni pizza.  
And tap dancing and ocean spray in her  
face, and rosemary-scented shower gel,  
but most of all she loved the taste / of  
sobriety in her mouth. She stood outside  
a bathroom door, calling for her mother,  
poking her fear through the keyhole /  
with a fingernail bitten raw, her other  
hand over her ear / to shut out a scream  
she could not name.

You say: Do you hear me? Does anybody  
hear me?

I'm listening to you now. The place where  
you catch your breath as you read / clutch  
it in your chest as if CPS / were coming  
to take it away. I am listening to your  
hearts break / over and over on the page  
/ listening to you re-make / your lives  
from shattered glass. Listening to the  
music / that still chuckles in your hips /  
that nothing has ever quenched.  
Listening to your hunger / that howls at  
the junction / of 27th and San Pablo / for  
lives that rise to meet / your largeness.

And if I believe one thing / on this  
scarred and silenced earth / it is the fire  
in your throats just waiting / for a match.  
If I believe one thing / on this scarred  
and singing earth / it is the hosanna of  
your hands. Diaper stained, exhausted,  
hands that heft / babies and strollers  
and cribs and parole hearings and 16  
months more and god my back hurts and  
who's he with now and what if I never...  
Hands that reach again and again for one  
/ word and lay it down / on the page,  
reach / for a second / word, and lay it  
beside the first, and sometimes / like a  
benediction / the third is given to you,  
and you write – the dangerous sacred  
irreplaceable / truths of your hearts.

Once upon a time, there was a voice. Her  
eyes were radiant with hope and flamed  
with intelligence, her body was a living  
question mark. She breathed in the world  
around her, turned it over in her brain,  
asked: Why? And for whose benefit? Who  
makes money from this? And how do I /  
fit into this / shit's-so-wacked-it-ain't-  
even-funny picture? She loved blues. And  
drums. And every question her daughter  
asked, and soft cotton on her skin, but  
most of all she loved / the muscles of her  
mind. She had strong feet which had to  
party / when the beats began. She shook  
her booty up and down / the corridors of  
Project Pride, relearning / what her  
mother felt like; re-defining / what a  
mother feels like, re-integrating / what it  
is to be mothered. Her stomach was  
round and soft with a contentment that  
she knew. Intimately. She named it /  
recovery.

You say: Do you feel me? Can you begin  
to feel – what I must live?

I'm feeling you now. The stab in your  
knees at the top of the staircase, the  
rise of hairs on your arms / in exact  
configuration / of your baby's body. The  
canyon in your pelvis / when you open  
your notebook, step to the stage / and  
begin. I'm feeling the yearning on your  
tongue, the chill in your toes, each day  
you choose, and choose, and choose  
again, to live from joy, not fear. I'm  
feeling the sadness in your spine for all  
the lost years, the warrior cry in your  
chest: never again! The hum in your very  
cells of coming home. To yourself.

And if I know one thing, on this luminous,  
fragile earth it is this. You are all / so /  
beautiful. So fuc-king beautiful. You are  
the soil beneath the asphalt, rich dark  
loam / where all life rises. You are the  
largeness you seek.

And if I have one prayer on this naked  
turning earth, it is this. That you meet  
yourselves / in the mirror. Name your-  
selves holy. Name yourselves power. Name  
yourselves true and terrified, blessed and  
bloodied, torn and reknitted, shattered  
and sanctified. That you rise into your  
voices, voices that have waited for you,  
like your children, like your hearts,  
voices that have always known, voices  
that have never doubted / you / would /  
return for them.





## PLENARY 3

# The Contexts of our Organizing

**Joanna Kerr:** Good morning, buenos días, bonjour .... how are you feeling? How many of you did not get enough sleep last night, raise your hand? How many of you had a really good time dancing last night? How many of you are looking forward to the next two days of this incredible forum? How many of you are a little bit grumpy this morning? I see a couple of hands ... right here, next to me!

It is my privilege to be moderating this morning's session. This morning we are going to be examining the context of our organizing and going deep into the strategies that we are using in the power of our movements. But, before we go into the session, I just want to acknowledge the incredible work that the AWID team is doing. I think we should give a round of applause. In particular I want to give thanks to Lydia Alpízar, who is the executive director of AWID, who could not be here with us because she is recovering from a very difficult illness.

My name is Joanna Kerr and many of you will know that I was the former executive director of AWID, and I also missed the last forum because of a tragedy in my family. Some people say this is the curse of AWID, but if anything I think this is actually a demonstration of how strong this organization is, and why we need to build organizations that can last well beyond any individual. Yesterday, in one of the sessions, we heard about how we can never see ourselves as indispensable. So just a reminder to us all that this work carries on: that is the power of our movement.

Today, we are going to share the stories, strategies and analysis of these six incredible women who are sitting around me at this table. Let me share with you who these amazing women are, who are truly at the front lines of organizing for women's rights, for human rights, for sexual and reproductive rights, for economic justice, for treatment access, and for the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS. I will start with Meena Seshu, who is from India, who is working with sex workers. We will hear about her amazing work in a few minutes. [Next is] Natasha Primo, who is a researcher and an activist with the Association for Progressive Communications, who lives in Johannesburg. She's also on the board of AWID and on the frontlines of the struggle for communication rights.

Before I get to the woman sitting on my left, there's a woman who should have been here today. Her name is Sussan Tahmasebi, from Iran. The Iranian government has not allowed her to travel for two years. Right before this conference, at the end of October, her passport was confiscated again. She has been interrogated twice and she is under particular threat. She was on many

conference calls in preparation for her participation in the forum, and it is our great loss that she is not here with us. This is the reality of our particular struggle. But I want you to know that there is something that you can do for Sussan. There will be a petition outside at the end of this [plenary] that you can sign, to put pressure on the government to release Sussan and her travel documents, so that she has the freedom to organize and to travel.

But look who stood in for her! We have here with us Dr. Shirin Ebadi, who is a judge [and] a human rights lawyer. In 2003, she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her incredible work with refugees and with children, and of course for [her work on] women's rights.

To my right is Wanda Nowicka, from Poland. Wanda has been working for two decades on health, women's rights, sexual rights and reproductive rights in a very complex region. She works in Poland with the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, but she is also the co-founder of the ASTRA network that is working on reproductive and sexual rights across the region. This is a woman who is also a fantastic dancer, among many of her other talents.

To her right is Martha Tholanah, who comes to us from Zimbabwe. Martha is an incredible HIV and AIDS activist. She is a leader of a positive women's network, organizing women across Zimbabwe, but also across the region. She's a member of the International Coalition of Women living with HIV and AIDS. She was just in Mexico, invited by the International AIDS Conference to represent women living with HIV and AIDS. And she is also an active member of the JASS movement building work in Southern Africa.

And last but not least is Nani Zulminarni from Indonesia, who is a co-director of JASS Southeast Asia. Nani is [also] the founder of PEKKA, which works with women's groups in Indonesia on economic empowerment [for] widows and [other] female-headed households.

So, the first purpose of this session is to really get at what is the context of our organizing. The second purpose of this session is [to reflect on the question], why movements at all? What is it about the power of movements that is actually transforming the lives of women and men on the ground? What is it in particular about our strategies that are so powerful, so difficult to implement? What is it that we can share here, collectively, that we can take back to our communities?

I'm going to start with Shirin. Shirin, what is going on right now in Iran? What is the political context right now in Iran? Why is Sussan not with us? What is it that is different

about now that we didn't know about 10 years ago?

**Shirin Ebadi:** The most significant difficulty that Iranian women are facing is the discriminatory laws. These laws were approved after the revolution. Whenever women protest against these bills, the government replies that they are Islamic Laws and [therefore] unchangeable. On the other hand, while we are struggling for justice and legal equity in Iran, we are [also] attempting to struggle for democracy, because women's rights and democracy are the [two] pans of the scale. There is no government that can claim to be democratic but deprive half of its citizens of their own rights. This is what is happening in Iran and most countries of the Middle East.

**Joanna Kerr:** What has changed? Why is there this kind of repression now? She's a very clever politician, you see. She didn't really answer my first question. What's going on Shirin?

**Shirin Ebadi:** The Iranian government views the women's movement with suspicion. They persecute many women's rights activists and create a lot of difficulty for them. This morning you were informed about one of them, Sussan Tahmasebi. Unfortunately, she is not the only one. Many women are banned from leaving the country and going overseas – Mansoureh Shojaei, or Parvin Ardalan who won the Olaf Palme Prize. She was on her way to get her prize, she had passed customs, her passport was stamped, and she had boarded on the airplane – which means that [technically] she had left Iran. Even so, the

revolutionary guards arrived and made her get off the plane. She has not been allowed to go overseas to date. I ask you to support not only Sussan but also all the women who have been oppressed by the government. It is very important to know that whenever they arrest a woman, the movement won't stop but will continue stronger than before. When a woman goes to prison there are 10 more active women who join the movement. This is a fact that amazes the government.

**Joanna Kerr:** It's true – it's the feminist backlash to repression. What you're saying is that the more women that get arrested, the more women that mobilize. It's our own backlash to repression. I'm going to turn to Meena. Meena, what is going on in India, around the world, in terms of the lives of sex workers? What is the context in which sex workers are trying to demand their rights that is so particularly challenging at this moment?

**Meena Seshu:** I think the sex workers' rights movement is, unfortunately, fighting many [other] movements that are currently trying to repress their rights [because] their rights are not the *right* rights, for example. Many movements now believe that sex workers – their visibility, their voice, their arguments – are problematic because they are talking about the right to sex work. [Most generally agree that sex workers] should get citizenship, ration cards, health service, education services – these are not so much contested areas, although we do have the abolitionists wanting to ban sex work totally, which is a different space altogether. But within the rights movement and various other movements,



the right to sex is tremendously contested. This is the place where there is tremendous discomfort. Is it good work? Can it even be called work? Is it not a form of slavery? Is it not trafficking? These are the various debates that sex workers are having to constantly deal with.

I think that the issue is that most sex workers we're talking about are male, female and transgendered workers who are adults and who can consent to sex work. Unfortunately, there are many rights people who question their ability to consent – which is for me, as a women's rights activist, is very scary. Because that's what we fought [for] all along, the right to understand our own realities and [choose] the best possible option – but that in itself is being questioned, I think. We therefore have these polarized discussions within rights movements, which is unfortunate.

**Joanna Kerr:** What about the HIV and AIDS industry? How are sex workers being identified, being attacked, being named, being symbolized?

## Funding is very scarce in the region. There are very few international foundations that would like to support us

**Meena Seshu:** This is when you come to talk about the state. As soon as the HIV/AIDS virus hit us, states moved in very fast, saying that people in multiple-sex partnerships should be targeted. With sex workers, the targeting was that they were vectors [in the] spread of HIV. Because [the state] believed that [sex workers] were vectors of the spread of HIV, they wanted them to use condoms.

**Joanna Kerr:** Just to clarify, are you saying that *all* states [are doing this]? Are you saying this a global phenomenon?

**Meena Seshu:** It's a global phenomenon. I'm talking about the state [promoting] condoms not [so that sex workers can] take care of themselves, which is what we would think, right? But rather to save the "bridge population" which is defined as the men who go to sex workers. This bridge population has to be taken care of – hold your breath – so that good women in their houses can be taken care of. We're [creating] all these programs, trying to save men. I mean, that's crazy – we don't give a damn (pardon my language) about sex workers [or] what happens to them if they get the virus, if they fall ill. There were no programs [for them].

The [labelling] of sex workers as one of the vectors of the spread of HIV [resulted in] a double stigma. You were

in sex work, which is traditionally the most stigmatized work that you can do, and then you added on HIV to it. The discrimination is so strong now that we are seeing a situation where sex workers are saying, "no more." The double whammy of HIV and sex work has actually given tremendous strength to the sex workers' movements to fight back.

**Joanna Kerr:** You've talked about the role of the state, but you also talked about abolitionists, and the power of the abolitionist movement. Can you speak to that a little bit more? Who are they? Who funds them?

**Meena Seshu:** Just to give you a little bit of a context, the abolitionist movement argues that [sex work] is sexual slavery. Because they believe sex work is sexual slavery, they have decided that the only [response] is to abolish it or to ban it. Unfortunately, with the Bush administration, the prostitution pledge institutionalized this understanding that trafficking and sex work were one and the same. A lot of money was put into the organizations that would work with the anti-prostitution pledge, which unfortunately turned out to be a lot of faith-based organizations, whose one strategy was to raid and "rescue" sex workers, using the most oppressive arm of the state – the police – to do that. Communities that had started gaining some strength in organizing themselves found themselves being raided and rescued after this prostitution pledge.

**Joanna Kerr:** I'm going to turn to Wanda now. You're also seeing repressive forces – often the face of it is the Catholic Church. Can you tell us what is going on in Poland, and in the region, in terms of women's reproductive and sexual rights?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Poland of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is experiencing a second wave of conservative and fundamentalist forces. The first wave happened in the beginning of the 90s, paradoxically soon after Poland regained freedom and democracy. But this freedom and democracy did not apply to women, [especially not] to their reproductive rights. So, as a result of the Solidarity movement, which turned out to be very conservative on women's rights, women in Poland lost abortion rights in 1993. In the 90s we were struggling against this restrictive legislation. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we're experiencing another wave of conservatives. These fundamentalists – who, as you said rightly, are primarily coming from the Roman Catholic Church – are pushing to restrict this restrictive legislation even further. For example, two years ago, we had an attempt to introduce into the Polish constitution a provision of protection of life from the moment of conception. They failed, fortunately, but they failed very narrowly. Since [then], we have one attempt after another. The situation is very difficult for Polish women. You can observe similar trends in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.



**Joanna Kerr:** Are you seeing a de-secularization of the state in the region? Is the state? Is it private actors? Who is really driving this agenda?

**Wanda Nowicka:** At ASTRA's session, after this plenary, I am going to show a picture [of] the current Polish president, Lech Kaczynski, kissing the hand of Pope Benedict XVI, which obviously shows the impact of the Vatican and the church on the Polish state. You cannot imagine [holding] any public gathering or ceremony [in Poland] without a [Catholic] mass at the beginning. In principle, we are still a secular state, but in practice I would say that we are a religious state.

**Joanna Kerr:** Have the Bush administration's foreign policies had any impact on your region?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Oh yes, they have had a very strong impact on our region. You should understand that in our region, the US used to be ... like Eden (laughs). People were looking at the US – and at Bush and at Eden – [as a] model to follow, a model of progress. The Bush administration introducing conservative policies was for them an additional argument [for their own conservative policies]. This is not what we had under Communism. We had legal abortion under Communism – which [for them] was not a sign of progress. The sign of progress, for them, was [the conservative policies] the Bush administration was introducing.

**Joanna Kerr:** What about the funding context in your region?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Hard issue. Funding is very scarce in the region. There are very few international foundations that would like to support [us], and I do not have to [tell you] that you cannot count on local funding on women's rights. Also, since we've been transitioning into the EU – some countries [in the region] have already joined the European Union – many foundations withdrew, but the European Union funding [that was supposed to replace the foundation funding] did not come. So we are really in some vacuum, as far as [funding].

**Joanna Kerr:** We're going to come back to this. Martha, some people in this room have come a very long way, from other parts of the world, and yet, just next door, there is a form of political repression, an extraordinarily difficult financial crisis. What is going on in Zimbabwe, right now?

**Martha Tholanah:** As you rightfully say, in Zimbabwe, things have become very difficult. It's beyond proportions that anyone ever believed could happen when we gained our independence about 27 years ago. A lot of the problems that we have now are all linked to the political system that we have. [This political system] has impacted more on

## The forum made me become more critical

"The forum made me become more critical about the strategies we use in our work and whether they contribute to movement building or are more elitist. It also made me appreciate other groups of women (sex workers, domestic workers, lesbians, etc) and their demand for justice. Previously I would dismiss them because I had not taken time to understand their needs."

- *Women's Rights Activist*

## I was beginning to feel burned out

"I have been a women's rights activist for about 15 years. I came into my activism through an intellectual understanding of gender and power and through deep empathy for the numerous kinds of oppression that we as women experience. Perhaps because of the location and the make-up of participants, I found myself being moved, laughing more, listening more and viscerally feeling the power of movements. I really need to be held in this kind of space as I was beginning to feel burned out. I had forgotten that there were ways to work in social movements with all our hearts and souls and I was shown that, by example, from so many of the participants who came, raw, honest, vulnerable and seeking. I am changed."

- *Women's Rights Activist from North America*

## I witnessed for real the "power in the collective"

"I am a fairly new person in the women's movement, and for me to see so much energy and meeting so many strong and committed women was a moving experience. I witnessed for real the "power in the collective." I am sure the experience will be with me for a long time and inspire me to be more active in the human rights and women's rights movement."

- *Women's Rights Activist from Southeast Asia*

people who are most marginalized. Food is very hard to come by. Even if you have money in your pocket it's very difficult to get food, but many people do not have the money.

**Joanna Kerr:** Power sharing was meant to come about after these last elections and the struggle around the elections. Is power sharing happening? Is there political light at the end of the tunnel that you see, at this moment?

**Martha Tholanah:** In principle, on paper, power sharing was supposed to happen, but many of us, particularly in the positive women's network, did not believe that it would work, because we've seen attempts at power sharing before where signatures have not been respected. Yesterday I just read that one of the parties had just withdrawn from the deal. So there is no more power sharing – [the party that withdrew] said they won't participate in marginalizing people more. I'm not sure [if] this is going to cause more difficulties, but in a way, I'm not sure the power sharing was going to be of any benefit to the common people.

**Joanna Kerr:** So no one had hope anyway?

**Martha Tholanah:** No.

**Joanna Kerr:** What about hyperinflation? Explain what that means to a woman in the rural areas? You have now ... is it a five million dollar note? Tell us what this actually means in terms of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe.

**Martha Tholanah:** When I left Zimbabwe on Tuesday, there was a one million dollar note and I'm not sure what's there by now.

**Joanna Kerr:** What's the conversion? How much is one million dollars in, say, Rand or US dollars?

**Martha Tholanah:** It's very difficult [to say]. It changes sometimes three times a day. The week before last, I went onto the street, which is the only fair market where you will get value for your money. I changed \$20 USD and I got almost \$2,000,000 ZBD – and that was from someone who was on the lower side of the exchange. [Later], when I asked them to transfer money into my account, for 50 US dollars, I got three quadrillion ZB dollars! I am not sure how many zeros that is, but that is what was deposited into my account. But by now, I'm not sure if it's of any value to buy even my basic commodities for a month.

**Joanna Kerr:** Under this political repression, we've heard some horrific stories of sexual violence against women. Tell us about some of this.

**Martha Tholanah:** Yes, we had elections on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. After that there were anomalies in the counting,

and the results took forever to come out. Then there was going to be a re-run on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, so there was a [period of] limbo in terms of activities happening by organizations. People were being taken into camps. People were being attacked in their own homes I think because [of] the way the SADC had prepared them ...

**Joanna Kerr:** What is the SADC?

**Martha Tholanah:** The Southern African Development Community. It prepared the election process in terms of the freedom of association [and] in terms of coverage by the media. It was not really fair ... there was some coverage of the opposition in the mainstream media, and that meant that people were open about who they were supporting. But that [openness translated into] repercussions after March 29<sup>th</sup> when it [became] obvious that the ruling party was losing. The funny thing was that as soon as the re-run was done, it didn't take many hours to get the results. But women from the network of positive women were sending me text messages from all over Zimbabwe to say they'd been attacked, they'd been raped. Some had gone to the police station to report [the incidents].

**Joanna Kerr:** Why? Why were women being attacked?

**Martha Tholanah:** Because they had been accused of having voted for the wrong party. Some had their hands chopped off because the opposition party had the open palm as its symbol. They were told that that's a lesson so that they can't use that hand again. [They were] sexually violated and homes were burnt...

**Joanna Kerr:** But why would they particularly target positive women or sex workers?

**Martha Tholanah:** I think they are the easier targets. They are an easier scapegoat. I think in any conflict situation, people will be targeted, but I think women suffered more. There were new infections. We had seen a decline in the prevalence rate announced last year, and then now with the impact of the violence that went on, obviously it's going to mean more infections in an environment where resources are very limited in terms of actually responding to people who are already positive. We thought after the elections, things are going to be OK, but the elections have gone on and on forever, and now there is a withdrawal. I think it's a lesson to us to say that we need to be part of all the processes, to actually ensure that we protect the most marginalized people, the most vulnerable.

**Joanna Kerr:** I think that is a useful segue to just pause for this moment. We recognize that not very far away from here in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is a horrific crisis. The sexual violence against women, the kinds of atrocities we are seeing, [have some people] talking about it in terms of the holocaust of the millennium. There are

representatives here from the Congo who have put together a statement, and it behooves us to acknowledge their particular struggle and be in solidarity with these women. In fact we are going to put the statement up if it's possible and I am going to read it. We are asking that people sign the call to action on behalf of women from the DRC – as we have said, if one of us is not free, none of us is free. I am going to quickly read this statement:

*[Excerpt] As representatives of women's organizations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) gathered at the 11th International AWID forum, we denounce the support to CNDP (National Congress for People's Defense) from external forces through neighboring countries, which signed peace agreements in the Great Lakes region. We denounce CNDP attacks targeting civilians who are not actively involved in war, particularly women and children. We also denounce human rights abuses perpetrated by all armed groups including the DRC army (FARDC), in violation of the Goma peace agreement signed in January 2008. We request a declaration of solidarity from the more than two thousand women meeting in this 11th AWID forum, in order to end the war in the DRC ... We ask all nations across the globe to take note of the holocaust of the millennium, which is happening right now in the DRC, with total indifference and lack of concern from the international community. Six million of deaths, two millions internally displaced, thousands of raped women and girls. We are calling upon the United Nations and African Union to immediately act to protect civilians, due to the DRC government's limit to do so.*

**Joanna Kerr:** Nani, I'm going to turn to you. For many of us, who work on women's rights, we completely bypass the role of economic empowerment [and] economic rights. Yet right now, there is an international economic financial crisis. What do you think is the reason why so much of the women's movement doesn't deal with economic rights issues?

**Nani Zulminarni:** I think first, it's really the perception that women are not economic actors. That is what we always face. It is culturally socialized in our lives that we are not economic actors. In reality, most of the women, especially the poorest, they work, they earn, and they contribute to the process of economic development in my country. I think that is the main reason why economic issues are marginalized in the women's movement. In the past, it even seemed if you worked on economic [issues], that you [were really] working on development issues, that you [were] a developmentalist. It was not strategy; it was practical.

**Joanna Kerr:** You work in Indonesia, the largest Muslim majority country in the world. You are working with women-headed households. What is it in particular about the way in which you are organizing women that

you can actually get at some of these fundamental economic issues?

**It is culturally socialized in our lives that we are not economic actors. In reality, most of the women, especially the poorest, they work, they earn, and they contribute**

**Nani Zulminarni:** I think for women-headed households, there are two main issues here in Indonesia at least and in some other parts of the world. The first is invisibility. In our contexts, if you don't have a husband, you are just invisible. You have to [be] a daughter of somebody, sister of somebody or the wife of somebody. The second is the stigmatization of women without husbands, especially if you are divorced, for example. [A divorced women] is a bad woman.

**Joanna Kerr:** Why is there a stigma there not to have a husband?

**Nani Zulminarni:** It's in the culture. It's the [cultural] values that [say] good women must be married. It is [supposed to be] the goal of women to keep the man. [Even if] there is violence – we call it a bloody marriage – you have to stay [in the marriage]. That is the perception that has been built. Many women [have] internalized [this perception] very well. If you are not married, if you do not have a husband then you are [a bad woman].

**Joanna Kerr:** Have you seen a trend in the past 10 years in terms of the impact of globalization on women in Indonesia?

**Nani Zulminarni:** Oh yes. It's huge. When we started to organize women-headed households in the early 2000s, the number of women-headed households (the national statistic, although we do not believe it) was 13 percent. Now it is 17 percent. There is a trend now that men migrate to other countries or other areas for earning, and leave the women behind with the children [and] with poor resources. Because of the [current] economic crisis and global markets, women who were [previously] not affected directly by the free market, now they are affected. Resources are now very scarce, and prices are very much influenced by global systems and decision-making at the



global level. So, life is more difficult and more women become the heads of households. With very limited resources it's a very difficult situation.

**Joanna Kerr:** We've been talking a little bit about the role of the state. We've been talking about the role of rising fundamentalisms. We've definitely been talking about the rise of militarization. How is this playing out in Southeast Asia? How do they connect to each other?

**Nani Zulminarni:** It's very connected. They influence each other. 1997-98 was a very critical time for our region. The economic crisis led to political turbulence and political turmoil [as] the region changed. Many parts of Indonesia wanted self-determination. Conflict happened at different levels – horizontal (where people used different kinds of issues like religion, ethnicity) and then also vertical (between people and the government, where the government had to force the military to really control the situation). [All of this] really impacted women directly. [There was a] huge [amount of] violence not only domestically, but also state violence, which really traumatized women.

**Joanna Kerr:** Ok we're going to come back to that. I now want to move over to Natasha, who's working on communication rights. How do you see the media and the role of the internet? What is being challenged at this particular moment in terms of our access to voice and our control of voice?

**Natasha Primo:** OK. I have to state first what the intent was around setting up the internet, and what the builders of the internet had in mind.

**Joanna Kerr:** Wasn't it the U.S. Military who started it?

**Natasha Primo:** Well it was some of that. But the researchers who were behind the development of the technology, what they had in mind was that it would be used for the free flow of information. That it would be used to connect people. [But] what we've seen in the last 10-15 years is the ascendancy of corporate interests and national security interests in the way that the internet is governed. That has profound implications for voice, for control over information about ourselves, [for control over] the way that we represent ourselves, and [control over] the way information [will] flow and who [will] have access to that information. [This ascendancy] also touches in on our ability to build communities, to express solidarity, to advocate for issues that we find of importance to ourselves. So that's the context within which communication rights and gender is being fought.

One of the issues for us who are working in this area is [how to get] the feminist movement and different sectors within the feminist movement to realize how key communication rights are to different feminist struggles. Part of [it] is to have conversations with different sectors

in the feminist movement around the need to take up these issues. Because it's not just a tool. In using the tool you transform the tool to make it do things that it was not originally designed to do. So you inform about abuses, you build solidarity using text messages, or you build solidarity using blogs or wikis. These are not things that these tools were necessarily designed to do. But it's transformative. In using the tool, we also transform the tool. Those are some of the issues.

**Joanna Kerr:** We have been talking quite heavily about extraordinarily difficult contexts in which we are working. We've only named just a few. But this conference, the Power of Movements, is about figuring out how to confront, how to resist, how to be the backlash. In fact, Shirin, communication has been a critical ingredient to the Million Signatures Campaign. Tell us a little bit about how women in Iran are using communication in very innovative ways, to push for their equality agenda.

**Shirin Ebadi:** Unfortunately, the use of technology in [women's rights] is not very high because of interference. You will be interested to know that all websites related to women's rights are filtered in Iran – and even more interested to know that the government has made a directive that says no movie can be produced, no theater can be played, and no books can be written to promote feminism. This is the government's attitude toward women's rights. About the One Million Signatures campaign: we created a website, in addition to the door-to-door strategy, to collect the signatures. Yes, we had a website! But they filtered it. It was not accessible in Iran. So we constructed a new one. They filtered it again, and again and again. It happened eight times. We will make a new website, but it will take a long time after constructing a new website to inform our audiences.

Actually, we do have technology and lots of computers in Iran. Computer literacy is very high in Iran. But the government filters websites and doesn't let people have easy access to them. The government also doesn't provide high-speed internet services for everybody. The internet speed in Iran is so slow that most of the time you get bored and regret using it. The problems in using technology in Iran are related to government.

**Joanna Kerr:** Of course, but women in Iran have stayed one step ahead every single time, in terms of changing the website, new URLs. You know, this is a real model in terms of [how to organize in] one of the most repressive environments in which to organize. But I look at Meena ... I had the privilege of going to Sangli last year and seeing Meena. First of all, I thought Meena was a sex worker when I first met her, and then I found out that in fact Meena is a married woman with three children – and that she's married to a man. We shouldn't make any assumptions here! I walked with her through the alleyways among the brothels as women poured out of the brothels to hug

## We believe in integration. We don't believe that we should be separated as women with disabilities.

*AWID interviews forum participant Ekaete Umoh from the Family-Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons, Nigeria.*

**AWID:** What is your name?

**EU:** My name is Ekaete Umoh.

**AWID:** Which region are you located in?

**EU:** I'm in Africa. I come from Nigeria.

**AWID:** Can you tell us a little bit about the work of your organization?

**EU:** My organization Family-Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons is an NGO that works to promote the issues of women with disabilities. Our focus is to mainstream the issues of women with disabilities in gender and development programmes. We do advocacy, research, raising awareness of the barriers that women with disabilities face in their daily lives and how women's movements or organizations can incorporate this into their work.

We believe in integration. We don't believe that we should be separated as women with disabilities. Within the work you're doing you should be able to create space for women with disabilities.

**AWID:** Which movement or movements do you or does your organization consider itself to be part of and why?

**EU:** Let me start by saying that AWID has really opened up a space for us to identify the movements. Sometime in 2006 I was in Mexico for the young feminist training program held by AWID. That also created the awareness for us and how we can take the space, so we were able to see various women's movements and have been collaborating with them.

Also, recently AWID has sponsored us to go to the Feminist Tech Exchange. That was very interesting. The training track I participated in was digital storytelling and I know I'm going to go back home to use the skills I learned.

We identify with cross-cutting issues, not just thematic issues. So we identify with every movement that opens up space as much as possible so that women with disabilities can benefit from it.

**AWID:** Why does movement building matter?

**EU:** This is interesting because I think collectively we have power in this space. What one single NGO network cannot do, movement building will achieve because it's global, it has more power and collectively

we'll be able to achieve much more. It's very very important because it's going to achieve what one single NGO would never ever achieve alone.

**AWID:** What does solidarity from and within women's rights movements look like?

**EU:** [Laughs] That is self-explanatory. Alliances, if formed within women's movements, means coming together with ideas, with a collective interest, with the space to actually advocate on our issues. You're identifying with the struggles, with successes, with the passion of your sisters. We identify with social issues and we go ahead to face whatever challenges or obstacles or celebrations we have. That's solidarity. Within women's feminist movements we have a collective agenda although our issues may be different and diverse. But the diversity is what is helping us to collectively achieve success.

**AWID:** What have been some of the organizational experiences with other social movements your organization has had? Can you tell us about your challenges and achievements and what did you learn from this experience about how you build stronger movements?

**EU:** Honestly, it is very challenging with other women's movements. This is not to flatter AWID. We've belonged to several other movements and the issue is that they never got to understand why disability issues should be reflected in the agenda.

I've been to women's meetings and there we were talking about women's issues. I got up to say, "Excuse me where is the space for women with disabilities in this discourse?" And somebody bluntly told me, "We're talking about women, not disability."

Honestly, I was highly embarrassed. I will never forget that. But because I believed in what I was doing, I stood my ground and said, "You are fighting discrimination but this is discrimination within discrimination! I'm a woman before a woman with a disability."

That has been my challenge. AWID has really given us that space, and we are free to express ourselves. Like you can see, the forum is very diverse. Everybody is so comfortable to stick with whatever he or she wants to stick with. There's collective respect and understanding for everybody's identity, beliefs. To me this is very important and I like it.

and squeeze and laugh with Meena. In fact, communication has been a very central factor in terms of the movement for sex workers – cell phones as well. Tell us about some of this.

**Meena Seshu:** The first part, of course, is that sex workers use cell phones to contact their clients. Sex workers who do not know how to read and write, using the cell phone to get better clients – I think it's super. The other part of it, of course, is that [the cell phone] has been very helpful in telling people when there's a raid. There's a raid and everybody's cell phone is ringing. You can get immediate communication. So cell phones have been very good because women who do not know how to read and write cannot use the internet. They don't know how to deal with email, so the internet is closed to them. But cell phones have been critical.

What has also happened is that the internet services have really helped. Sangli, as you know, is pretty remote. But every time we have a raid, the next morning we are able to tell the world what the raid was about. We are able to get signature campaigns out. In fact, we were part of the first e-mail campaign in India, when one of our workers [was] being attacked by right-wing political parties. The good thing [about] that [campaign] was that it was the first time that the women's movement actually bought into the sex workers movement. [It was] because we could actually reach out and tell them what happened – and they could understand the seriousness of an issue, wherein a sex worker, a woman, was being attacked.

**Joanna Kerr:** Wanda, you have been implementing some pretty innovative strategies. Maybe you could share, first of all, one that some of us might know about, the Women on Waves. What you are doing now in terms of pushing back as much as you possibly can against the attack on women's sexual and reproductive rights?

Let me challenge you. You've got all these documents, policy advocacy. You have a wonderful new documentary. Do you really think this is going to make a difference?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Inviting Women on Waves to Poland was one of the biggest advocacy projects, maybe not globally but certainly in my country. Women on Waves is the abortion clinic on the boat, which came to Poland in 2003.

It attracted enormous media attention and helped us to raise awareness in our society about [the] atrocities women are suffering as a result of restrictive legislation. As [far as the] other strategies are concerned, of course we do all the traditional stuff ... petitions, legal advocacy and so on. But maybe I'll mention some others, like for example promoting positive images of feminism, which has a stigma attached to the word ...

**Joanna Kerr:** Why? Why is this useful?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Let me first explain what we are doing, and then probably you will understand why. Basically we are organizing art contests, [inviting] artists to invent slogans and posters or other art objects that would promote [a] positive image of feminism. This is not only a way to involve [artists] in promoting positive aspects of feminism, but [it's also a way] to reach out to other constituencies. Feminists are not artists necessarily, and artists are not feminists, so this a way we could all work together. So that's one strategy. On a regional level, I would like to mention the ASTRA documentary. This documentary covers a number of sexual and reproductive issues in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, [in] Moldova, adolescent sexuality is a big problem – adolescent pregnancies. We have other stories from Georgia, and so on. If anyone is dying to see it, please come to me and I can arrange for you to have a copy of the documentary.

**Joanna Kerr:** Let me challenge you. You've got all these documents, policy advocacy. You have a wonderful new documentary. Do you really think this is going to make a difference?

**Wanda Nowicka:** First of all, what is important, imagine that we don't exist ...

**Joanna Kerr:** Who is we?

**Wanda Nowicka:** We – women's groups that are trying to push for better rights for women. So if we don't exist ... I can't imagine where we would be at this point if we weren't pushing, so that's one thing. But on the other hand, I also see some changes in society. For example, what we observe in our society is that feminism is becoming trendy among young generations, in the university. One of the slogans that is being used by women's movements in the demonstrations is, "Feminism – I deserve it." So, you know, society is changing. Society is not the politicians (fortunately), so there are some hopes that we are moving in the right direction.

**Joanna Kerr:** Great, thank you. So Martha. Feminism. Do you deserve it in Zimbabwe? How is the positive women's network and positive women taking on feminism?

**Martha Tholanah:** We deserve it, as positive women. The



way we've been taking it is actually making a difference wherever positive women live.

**Joanna Kerr:** How do you organize in your context?

**Martha Tholanah:** We use activities that are happening with other organizations, other activities – that's where we connect. [Or] we may have one-to-one or small groups at the clinics or at the hospitals. It is very difficult to organize due to the restrictions from the government. Freedom of association is actually reversed now. [There are also] issues of the monetary policy, which makes it difficult to actually get people together. If you are traveling for other things, you tell the women that I will be in such a place on such a day, in that area. That's how our communication moves. Also, the use of SMS text messages is difficult because many women have to borrow cell phones. There are also issues of electricity outages. Sometimes someone may go for a week with their phone battery flat, but we [also] get messages around by word of mouth.

**Joanna Kerr:** Feminists could have gone on trial, as we heard about in the African Feminist Forum. Feminists could have gone on trial over the past decade for not taking on HIV/AIDS in the way that we should have. Do you see a shift in terms of women's movements, feminist movements, engaging with positive women and HIV and AIDS activists?

**Martha Tholanah:** I think the shift is very obvious now. There [used to be a] stigma [in] the first messages that came out about the transmission of HIV. Women who were found to be or who declared that they were HIV positive were thought to be loose women. Sometimes they would have been widowed – and people would have been worried that [HIV-positive women] would steal their husbands or infect their husbands, really. But now people say that anyone can actually get an HIV infection. This is where we see the shift coming. Also, the feminist movement is actually taking up issues of HIV and the HIV movement. It is obvious now that feminism should be a part of the way we do our work, the way we live.

**Joanna Kerr:** I was hearing at this conference that it's taken a long time for people to make the link between HIV/AIDS and poverty. I find that incredibly odd that people haven't been making that link. I mean, it's pretty obvious. Why do you think it's taken so long for there to be a much stronger analysis and strategy around connecting HIV and poverty? What was going on there?

**Martha Tholanah:** I think the first messages were that HIV was a disease that gay men got. It was only white people from the West who had HIV. If you got it, you'd slept with a white man. So it wasn't really linked with poverty because in our region, being white was not associated with poverty. In that way, there were a lot of misconceptions. By the

time we realized [our misconceptions] a lot of damage [had] already been [done] by HIV. Even now in Zimbabwe, lesbian women who are HIV positive are more marginalized. We've tried to work on that in the network of positive women. You know, we're all discriminated against, and we're trying to support each other, because it's not about your sexual orientation. You just got an infection.

**Joanna Kerr:** So what you're saying is that over the past few years, one of the strategies has been to explicitly take on homophobia, explicitly take on feminism. I'm looking to Meena as well, in terms of the de-stigmatization, of removing the stigma around "loose" women ... I mean we're all embracing our looseness, right? (Applause) Is this a wave ... is this something we can feel very hopeful about?

**Meena Seshu:** The minute you said "loose women" I [wrote] it down. You know, it is the construct of the loose woman that actually attracted me to working with sex workers. I'm as loose as they are, and as good as they are! The fact is that it is these "loose" women who are liberated enough to enforce condom [usage] in these men. It was just so super that they had the ability to actually enforce condoms with men, in a country [where there are] women who are unable to reinforce condoms with their husbands.

**Joanna Kerr:** Finally, what mistakes have you made? What would you have done differently?

**Shirin Ebadi:** I believe we should not blame ourselves for our mistakes. Making mistakes is a human right. We have the right to make mistakes! The important issue is to realize when we have made mistakes, and be brave enough to admit it, and not redo them. I've made so many mistakes ... if you wanted me to tell you about them, we'd have to sit here until noon listening to me. But one of my mistakes is that I was not a feminist in the very first years after graduation from university. I was a lawyer at that time. After the revolution and our laws changed dramatically regarding women, I felt the oppression and I found my way. I realized I have to be a feminist for my lifetime.

**Natasha Primo:** Like Shirin, it took me a while, I think, before I saw myself as a feminist. I had more of a race and class consciousness. It actually took a man to bring me closer to an awareness of feminism, which is a bit strange thinking about it. But for me, all these things are important. I cannot be an activist, in [my] context, without an awareness of all these different parts of me. I have to acknowledge that part of the reason why it took me a while is because I come from a family of strong women. I grew up in a family without a male authority figure, so male authority was not for me something that was a problem. When I finally came to face [discrimination] in different institutions ... those were key learning moments

for me as well. And it's everywhere, so if you try to live [to] your full potential, you will have to confront patriarchal power, and you will have to be a feminist.

## We have the right to make mistakes! The important issue is to realize when we have made mistakes, and be brave enough to admit it, and not redo them

**Meena Seshu:** Many mistakes, so many that I cannot count them. But many of these mistakes were [mitigated] by the fact that I was working in a collective. When you're in a collective, [and] you make mistakes, somebody pulls you up. So that has been a good experience. But at a personal level, as an activist, I got so enamoured and glamourised about being an activist, I forgot to be an ordinary woman ...

**Joanna Kerr:** What does that mean?

**Meena Seshu:** Well, I forgot I had a sexual life. You know the computer is so much sexier ... it's not funny! We have a problem, I totally agree! The excitement of what is happening in the world out there, especially when you're sitting in a rural setting like Sangli, can be very very attractive. The other thing is, I was thinking of my friends, my close associates, and they're all people from the movement. We meet, we talk politics, all the time. There doesn't seem to be [room for] a normal life. I

think that's what we miss as activists. We tend to stick to comfortable spaces, and we don't make friends with the outside world – and we need to do that. If we want to change the outside world, we need to do that.

**Joanna Kerr:** It's funny none of you have talked about the role of conflict in your organizing. But we'd all recognize that from conflict, from crisis, many opportunities emerge. Perhaps the meta-analysis is that because we are working in a world that is defined by conflict – of all forms of ideologies, of all forms of economic structures – that in fact from this, we are giving birth to a new commitment to feminism. A new commitment to a feminist analysis that breaks down class and race and sexual orientation and brings in women with disabilities. I really think there is a feminist backlash to what is happening around us. We haven't got to talk about Obama yet ... I did think that perhaps our strategies might change going forward, in terms of the role of the United States government in terms of our organizing going forward. Wanda, do you want to say something very quickly?

**Wanda Nowicka:** Yes, quickly. All politicians of the right wing in Poland went to the US to follow Obama's campaign. Everybody is going to use Obama's campaigns nowadays, so we have to be aware of that. Everybody's learning.

**Joanna Kerr:** And Obama's campaigning, as we all know, was a vindication of movement building and the power of movement building (applause). But what you're saying is, be careful. Our opposition has learned just as much about the power of movement building, in terms of how they're going to address our particular feminist backlash. We are out of time, but nobody can go because there is a very big surprise for the end of this plenary. I just want you to give a huge round of applause to these incredible activists, who are also involved in many workshops so you can really engage with them one on one.

The plenary ended with an impromptu tribute to iconic South African singer and anti-apartheid activist, Miriam Makeba, led by up-and-coming singer and activist Khethi, singing Makeba's "Pata Pata" and accompanied by jazz instrumentalist Edwina Thorne.



# SCREAMING

Poem by Shailja Patel, Kenya/USA. Performed at the forum by Shailja Patel. Reprinted with permission.

I.

there are too many battles  
and too many wounds  
and I  
I can't take it  
I don't want to know

that Inez Garcia was sentenced  
to life imprisonment  
for killing the man  
who held her down  
while two other men raped her

I want to cover my ears and scream  
to block out the voices that chant

that Piah Njoki had her eyes  
gouged out by her husband  
because she did not bear him  
a son

I want to be free of the murder  
that pounds in my brain

because six hundred women a year  
in Delhi alone  
are doused in paraffin and burned  
burned to death for the crime  
of too small a dowry

I want to pretend it won't happen to me

did you know that a student  
at Sussex university  
was raped on her  
first night in residence  
by a man who just walked  
just walked  
into her room

I am not a part of this bleeding  
this scream  
I don't want to challenge argue fight  
construct confront negotiate  
beg for change

do you hear me

I want to retreat  
to a room filled with humans  
shut out the night  
the fear and pain  
hear myself stop  
screaming inside  
unravel my breathing ask

in a very  
low  
voice

dare I  
claim the right  
to a voice  
that does not  
scream?

II.

so it wasn't until I learned to fight  
I could be sexy

the swing of my hip developed  
in pace with my elbow strike  
I grew out my hair  
as my flesh grew harder  
began to wear lipstick  
bare my shoulders  
as I learned to judge  
how fast to strike

and where  
groin  
eyes  
jugular

It wasn't until  
I could walk down a street  
knowing I could turn rage into action  
that I could strut  
down the same street

say with my stride  
yes I think I look good too  
yes I revel in my body  
yes I love the sun on my skin

this body is mine  
the better I learn to defend it  
the better I flaunt it  
from sheer joy

III.

for the truth of experience  
Is in the body  
when I am a fighter  
my body is weapon  
when I am a lover  
my body is food

now my body  
is paintbrush  
story  
truth illusion  
sing through my limbs  
like the shock  
of cold water

breathe me clear  
breathe me free  
breathe me home



## PLENARY 4

# The Future of Movements



### “Where do we go from here?”

Introduction by Brigid Inder, The Netherlands

My name is Bridget Inder. I am on the board of AWID, and I'm also the executive director for the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice. In the last four days of this forum, there have been more than 160 panels, plenaries and workshops. Eight hundred women marched through the streets in solidarity with South African feminists demanding an end to violence against women. There have been caucuses, there was a Young Feminist Activism Committee day, there have been performances, plays, poetry... a few women have met every single morning to run or walk together. There has been music, parties,

dancing, tears and humour. If this isn't the way to build a global women's movement, I don't know what is.

But after all of this, where do we go from here? What are the possible futures our movements require? We know our size and our strengths, but where is our impact? What do we dare to envision, and how do we get there? This panel will reflect on some of the new ideas, some of the insights, lessons, gaps, silences, and key themes that have emerged during the forum. It will also identify ways in which our collective power can be harnessed and magnified.



## “We need an alternative way of organizing ourselves”

Presentation by Sindi Blose, South Africa



In the midst of all the pain, in the midst of all the violations of our rights, I still feel great. Don't you feel good about yourselves? That's how I feel about myself.

What I'm taking from this forum is a place from within myself, and a place from within ourselves, to organize ourselves better, to intensify the power of our numbers, to see the change that we want to see. The other thing that I'm taking away from the conference is that we've been organizing ourselves, and we've been fighting for space in the current existing structures. [Our efforts] have had some benefits, but we have compromised a lot of our rights in the process. I'm talking about the organizations that we belong to, the political organizations and some of the NGOs that we belong to that are mixed groups, where we've had to fight for space to have our voices heard.

I believe that we need an alternative way of organizing ourselves. We need to create a space that is initiated by us, on our terms. Giving an example in the South Africa context: I believe yesterday was a historical day, when a group of women from South Africa came together at the forum, and we said, “We are tired of what is going on in our country. We cannot take the attacks on our rights any more. We are organizing at a grassroots level as women's movements, but we are fragmented. We need to consolidate our movement and [our] power at a national level.”

We decided that [none of] the political parties in this country, [as we move] towards the elections of 2009, represent our voice. We [therefore] cannot vote, because if we vote, we are giving our votes to somebody who will not represent [us] when they get into power. But if we sit at home and [don't] vote, then we are silent, and we cannot afford to be silent. So we decided that we are going to look into options of opening a women's party, and running for office. As of today, and the many days that will follow, we will be convening as women in South Africa, to plan ahead.

I said that I would speak for five minutes and demonstrate for another [five]. How many people know the following song (sings)? I want [to know] by a show of hands. How many people know that song? How do you feel about the song? I hate that song too! But [in] the movement we are building, we need to demonstrate the change that we want to see. And right now I want to demonstrate the change I want to see using this very song. There was something I learned back in 2004 at the

Gender and AIDS forum back in Durban. They said, you must take your devil, turn him upside down, and put him on his head. That is what I want to do with the song, and I want us to do it together.

We decided that we are going to look into options of opening a women's party, and running for office. As of today, and the many days that will follow, we will be convening as women in South Africa, to plan ahead

When Zuma was accused during the rape trial, one of the defenses he used when he was questioned was that she was wearing a khanga. A khanga is a wrap-around, and the fact that she was only wearing a wrap-around indicated that she wanted to have sex. Now that is unacceptable. But there are a lot of men who think like that, that if you wear a miniskirt then you are asking for sex, however and whenever he wants. So I want us to change that song ... a khanga is a wrap-around ... it goes like this (sings).

So here I demonstrate the change I want to see with the song, because [Zuma] has made the song famous, but he hasn't realized that he made it famous for us. Because we are going to take the song, and we are going to use it. But we are going to change the message. So for all the women who know the song, I would like them to follow and echo (session ends with singing).



## “We are all united to change the world”

Presentation by Aninha Adeve, Brazil

When I was invited to speak [on] the last plenary, for the last session, I felt butterflies in my stomach, like someone in love. It seemed like such a huge challenge! For me, it's a dream to be here with all of you. When I was a teenager, and I was recently awakened to the global struggles, I read many texts about the struggle against apartheid. They inspired me a great deal in regard to my activism.

Over time, I have chosen four things that comprise a strong part of my identity: I am a feminist, I am Afro-centric, I am anti-capitalist, [and] I am a vegetarian. For me these four political choices structure my work and my feminist activism. I say this so that you know where I am coming from, and how I make my analysis.

**I heard a sister from Ecuador say that power isn't in one place, that it isn't static. I like this idea, the idea that power can change from hand to hand, that it can come from the north towards the south, and from the centre to the margins**

It seems to me that in order to talk about the power of feminist movements, we also need to talk about the political choices that we make in order to construct the movement. I think what inspired me a lot at this forum was the question of power. Many discussions that occurred in this forum pointed to the need to deepen our analysis regarding the question of power, and what kind of power we are talking about from within the feminist movement, from the centre of the movement to the margins.

I heard a sister from Ecuador say that power isn't in one place, that it isn't static. I like this idea, the idea that power can change from hand to hand, that it can come from the north towards the south, and from the centre to the margins. That it can change from being in the hands of an older generation of women, and then transfer to the younger generation. I think that we need to create a dance that will allow us to dance with this power. I dance with

power for a while, and then pass it to another, and another, and another. And like this, we are continuing to share it. But what power are we talking about? What power are we creating? What power will empower us? From what position are we defining power?

I don't think that we need to construct a linear definition of power. Perhaps we are talking about many powers, of many ways to generate and create power. I have a question that still remains to be answered. I would like to ask it again: for what reason do we want power? To change the world, yes? To end all forms of oppressions, to end social injustices, and to create another world for women and for humanity. I am talking a lot about power that for right now, seems to be in my hands. Still my hands continue sweating a lot. You can see them, no?

Yesterday something interesting happened to me. I was talking with a woman about a project we are doing in our youth network about [the] generational gap. We were discussing that we only realize that we have power when someone [else] reminds us of it. It might be something simple, and perhaps this is something that many of you have already realized. But for me, it was incredible to perceive that relationship. Ultimately, oppositions define us. If I have power, someone [else] doesn't have it, and I need to recognize this.

Another point that surfaced when we talked about power is the idea that in order to talk about our desire to create power, we also need to talk about privileges and lack of privileges. We need to confront that we are not all in the same position. We also have to share differences.

In Brazil, my Afro-Brazilian sisters always question me as to whether I, as a white woman who wants to change the world, am willing to give up my privileges in order to bring about a feminist revolution. What about for all of you? The feminist movement was always a social movement that questioned the relations of power, and it always generated passionate discussions about the topics at hand. I believe that now, in this forum, we have generated many passionate ideas about power both from the outside and from within. I think that it is a challenge to all of us – all generations, ethnicities, sexual orientations ... all us who form the feminist movement and have the desire to change the world.

It's amazing to look at all the pink scarves. I don't have mine on because I just passed it on to another young woman. It's incredible to be able to initiate intergenerational conversations.

If we young women are here today, it's because many things are working within the feminist movement. If we are



here today questioning the relations of power from within the feminist movement, it's because you have inspired us to think critically. When we talk about the invisibility of youth, it is certain that we are talking about relations of power. We are questioning what kind of power we are generating as feminists from different generations. We are part of the same movement, and we have to continue struggling. We are here to make poetry within the feminist movement. To redefine our struggle, every day and every second, is a step forward. The future still is not given; it is not predetermined. And like this, we struggle.

I bring with me from this forum the possibility to create safe spaces to talk about power from within the feminist movement. I leave here with a stronger desire to work with feminists from other generations. I also bring a plural feminism – feminisms – with many colours, many songs,

faces, experiences and knowledge. I bring the feeling of many women marching together, where borders do not matter. We are all united to change the world.

I also bring the concretization of a dream of many young feminists that was realized at this forum: the creation of a fund for young feminists. I re-affirm the commitment that all of us, young or not young, will contribute to the fund. And finally, I will bring to my country the resistance of the African women, with all of their songs and strength. For although we might not have the same language, I have the impression that we can share many things, with a smile or a just a look.

Finally, to finish, I hope that we can all continue fighting. Go forward sisters! We give significance to the time, and we cannot wait for things to happen on their own.

## I experienced the energy of activists working together

The holidays are over, the new year has begun. This is the time when the joy, hope and euphoria subside and the hard, day-to-day work picks up where it left off. For me, the AWID conference was a part of the joy, hope and euphoria. I saw glittering possibilities, felt deep connections with powerful women, and experienced the energy of activists working together.

In the forums, workshops and sessions, I saw the passion and unwavering commitment of the women who chose to be activists. Some wouldn't say that they chose their work, but that their circumstances, the women they saw abused, silenced or murdered, compelled them to respond. Sometimes, their own lives were in danger, and they did what they needed to do in order to survive. Yet, they made the choices to remain involved in the struggle, to help other women, and to speak for the silenced.

In addition to being awed and inspired by their stories, I also heard the undercurrents of sadness, of exhaustion, of burn-out. And the conference organizers directly acknowledged this. In the session "What's the Point of the Revolution if We Can't Dance," activists shared their painful stories and how they managed to persevere in spite of everything. The causes of everyone's struggles were different. For some, it was the prejudice and discrimination they faced on a daily basis. For others, it was the struggle to care for their families while continuing their work. The continuing cycle of grant-writing, reporting, and more grant-writing took them away from their work, their passion. Activism is a constant balancing act where, seemingly, you can never find your balance.

One session I participated in concerned the women's movements in South Africa. I was incredibly honoured to participate in this session, which was like sitting in the living room (well, a very large living room) of some of the most active, compassionate, rabble-raising women in the country, discussing their ideas on how to live up to the promise of the new South Africa. It's difficult to express the contrast of this session to my daily experience in South Africa, where the committed activists are lost in the tide of corruption, greed and apathy. Yet, I was concerned that the multitude of obligations each woman faced meant that the potent ideas generated in this session would quickly fade.

And that is where someone like me can participate in building movements. The more that budgeting, grant-writing and administrative duties can be transferred to someone focused and committed to building the infrastructure, then the more that the incredible passion and energy of these leaders can come out of the office and move the mountains that stand in the way of equality and justice.

*- By Ronda Ansted, South Africa*



## “Currents, undercurrents, seen and heard, absences and silences, and the big leaps forward”

Presentation by Srilatha Batliwala, India

The responsibility and the burden of having the last official word at the last plenary of an amazing forum has frightened me almost into speechlessness, which is a rare condition for those of you who know me. But fortunately we had a good process in place to have many, many people volunteer to track different sessions and give us feedback, so that we can pull together some kind of a synthesis for you at the end of the forum. But I must hasten to ask that the deficiencies of this synthesis be ascribed to me and not to AWID.

**We were surprised, and I think really affirmed, by the way several people claimed the f-word (feminism), who were uncomfortable with that label even coming to this forum**

I have tried to organize the different forms of feedback that have come in the categories of Currents, Undercurrents, Seen and Heard, Absences and Silences, and the Big Leaps Forward. So let me begin with Currents. I think these are the waves that have washed over and drenched all of us over the past four days. I think we have really begun to embrace the importance of an intergenerational way of working. That is here to stay. The young women are not going away, and neither are the old. So we really have begun to grapple with ways of constructing our organizations, our movements, and our work in ways that harness the power and resources of all feminists, regardless of age.

I think my sister has already talked about how pervasive power and the analysis of power has been throughout our discussions. I would only add that I felt that there was almost a celebratory embracing of our own power, like it was a lover. This could be linked to, I think, a resurgence of feminism as an ideology that truly informs our organizing. We were surprised, and I think really affirmed, by the way several people claimed the f-word (feminism), who were uncomfortable with that label even coming to this forum.

There has been, I think, a strong sense of the need to look inside our own use and abuse of power, and to find new ways of relating to it. [We came to] a recognition of the deep structures of power within our own domain, and the need to explore those and bring them to the surface, and create workable tools to transform our own use of power with each other. We have recognized therefore, I think, the need for ground rules – new rules of engagement – and the need to make these explicit and hold each other to account for them.

There has been a pervasive celebration, as my sisters have also pointed out, of the diversity of our movements, and hopefully a leaving behind of the politics of inclusion and exclusion that caused much pain and isolation in the past. It has been refreshing not to hear even once at this forum the question, “but who are the real feminists”?

Our sister said in the opening plenary that there cannot exist a feminist movement without lesbians, trans people and so forth. I’m sure she would have added to the list grassroots women, global women and all of us abled and differently abled. We have sensed the joy of many sisters who felt their voices and issues were once on the margins, struggling for legitimacy, whose sessions were now packed to bursting. There has been an almost unanimous feeling that this has been a very inclusive space, bringing a wider diversity of movements and feminist actors together than ever before. There has been a strong feeling especially among younger feminist activists that not only were they here in numbers, and everywhere, but that they were engaged with a process of real learning and respect and listening across the generations.

We have seen a strong attempt to tackle the politics of funding and donor-grantee relationships, and how these could be transformed. Related to this there has been a grappling, in many contexts and many sessions, with NGOization as a challenge that confronts our movement building, but also as a possibility and as a handicap. We have heard about locations where simply to have an NGO, to have the right of association, has been withdrawn or denied, and of locations where NGOs have become a substitute for movements, have depoliticized our movements, or have claimed for themselves the title of movement that is not deserved. We have also seen them as spaces from which movements have survived. So the challenge is to define ourselves and our structures in some new way. As one sister said “Non-governmental organizations?” Why the hell do we want to define ourselves as *non* something?”

We've been surrounded by laughter, dance, music – artistic expressions of all kinds. But what is even more significant is that, as a movement, we have made it all right to play, and we have recognized that this is what makes it possible for us to survive in incredibly frightening, criminally oppressive situations. We have learned how to create very political forms of celebration. Alongside, we have wept and had our hearts torn apart by the stories of the violence and inhumanity that our sisters continue to face. Most of us have felt safe in this space but appalled at those who enter it and make it unsafe, knowingly or unknowingly.

A remarkable trend at this conference has been the importance and legitimacy given to discussions of self-care. Not of self-indulgence, not the whispered guilty conversations we once had in the corridors about our exhaustion, our financial problems, our fears about our security and health as we age, but a legitimate conversation about ensuring the sustainability and future of our movements. We are learning to recognize a very important truth, that we have subsidized the social justice work of the world with our bodies, with our mind, with our souls – often by destroying all three – and we have finally said we cannot have a revolution if we can't dance.

Undercurrents: some good, some not so good. The safety of our space, I think, has been somewhat derailed at times by those who, in the light of their own convictions, have come not necessarily to listen and understand, but perhaps to wonder and judge other ways of being, and other ways of expressing our infinite capacity to love and be loved. Some have come here with an evangelical spirit, to save the souls of sisters they believe are going straight to hell, or threatening their faith. This is where the rules of engagement become critical. We would remind all of us that we have worked very hard to open this space, and to make it safe, but we still don't know what that means – what safety means – as we struggle to open and expand the space to as many as possible.

How do we protect its safety? We have to recall that at one time even a person like me would not have been on this plenary. That many were excluded because they were Southern, because they were activists. We remind those of you who have struggled with this space and the discourse that it permits to occur that some of us cannot talk about our issues safely anywhere else. We cannot allow those voices to be silenced or condemned here. We are not asking that you all agree. We don't even ask that you accept or understand. But we do demand that you listen and respect.

Attention: We have all embraced the importance of inter-generationality, congratulated ourselves on how wonderful we have become at this, at the huge mass of young women at this meeting. I'm told that 700 pink scarves have been handed out. Most of us have been wearing them very proudly through the four days. But only seven women over the age of 35 showed up for the multigenerational dialogue today.

There has been a tension between donors and grantees. Even amidst the constructive dialogue, there's a hunger for resources. There is pressure from back home, that if you have been privileged enough to come to this space, you better bring back some money. Donors have felt besieged. But also there are the deeper and really serious dilemmas of competing for resources, and the pervasive fear that we don't even know how this financial crisis is going to affect our already limited resource base. We're all still caught to some extent in binary thinking: good and bad, good and evil, sin and not sin ... also grassroots or global, younger or older, sexuality or poverty. We must still push ourselves to transcend these binaries, and build more embracing frameworks that will not be about *either* or about *or*.

There has been a subtle shifting of many paradigms – breaking the body/mind binary, speaking about the best thing about being disabled ... one could not imagine a conversation like this 10 years ago. [We have seen the] creation of new knowledge and ideas in other than the dominant world language, and the final breaking through of the glass ceiling [in terms] of where the best, the most powerful new concepts and strategies and ideas are coming from. They are coming from the South, sisters. They are coming from young women. They are coming from the struggles that were once on the margins of our movements, and they are coming from the ground. They





are coming from the most oppressive domains imaginable.

Seen and heard. I'm quoting now – our sister reminded us that when we speak we are afraid that our words will not be heard or welcomed, but when we are silent we are still afraid, so we might as well speak. This is something that our sister Nadine took perhaps a bit too seriously, when she said in the first plenary ... I still can't say the word, the c-word. I'm old. (Audience persists) Cunt! OK! Got past that. I knew you were going to make me do that. Ok I'm really running out of time.

You've come a long way baby. At the 1993 AWID Forum, the keynote speakers were two guys from the World Bank and USAID. In 1999 they wanted Hillary Clinton

Quick quotes. "We can't protect the rights of women in our movements and organizations, and yet we are asking the world outside to respect our rights." "Do we only communicate with the least different from among the different?" "Where is the lesbian caucus? The whole damn forum is a lesbian caucus." (Reaction from audience). Wait, and a straight woman says, "Why are you being so exclusionary?"

You've come a long way baby. At the 1993 AWID Forum, the keynote speakers were two guys from the World Bank and USAID. In 1999 they wanted Hillary Clinton. You've come a long way baby. Building movements is like a relay: it's about knowing how to hold the stick tightly in your hand, not letting it fall down, but also knowing when to pass it on and to whom to pass it on.

Absences and silences: a huge absence if not silence that many of our sisters experienced was the lack of a stronger stream of discussion around economic rights and the implications of the implosion of the neoliberal model and the structures it had put in place over the past 20 years. Well, there can't be a revolution if women can't eat, find water or work. As gender advocates and women's rights activists working to improve the lives of women and the people they love worldwide, there is need for a much stronger focus on alternative [economic] models, especially alternative feminist paradigms. And a strong sense that this vital discussion must be present at the next forum.

I think there was also a feeling that there's a need, or that there was an absence of, a more intersectional approach to all our discussions, whether we are talking about conflict or disability, or fundamentalisms or sexuality. We have to learn to do that much better.

There was also a sense of an absence of a discussion of the huge role that the mainstream media is playing in shaping our world, in shaping attitudes to feminism and women's rights. The huge role [the media] plays in controlling public perception and opinion about the issues we care about. There was a devastating example of this: a little thirteen-year-old girl from Somalia, was stoned to death in a public stadium with a thousand spectators. She was reported as being a 23-year-old adulteress. The media said, "she looked much older."

Big leaps forward. Are you ready? We have a few simple tasks ahead of us. We only have to reframe, shift, and create new trajectories of feminist political analysis and practice. We have to reclaim and reinvent mobilizing and organizing strategies that are the foundation stones of movement building. We will all go forth and think and act much more clearly and strategically to reach out to our constituencies, build bridges across and between them, and act intergenerationally and intersectionally to strengthen our collective power and the power of our movements.

We are going to seriously address ways of making our organizations, our movements, and our work truly intergenerational, not by paying lip service, but by struggling together to realize this goal. We are going to grapple with our own deep structures of power, and struggle to create better rules of engagement that enable us to treat each other well, and to harness the diverse strengths and experiences without the kinds of hierarchy and dominance that have damaged us in the past. We are going to learn to recognize the forces that, as Pregs said, divide us from ourselves and from each other. We are going to overcome all forms of discrimination!

We have seen the birth of at least two major exciting new initiatives. The young feminist fund was born right here at this forum. And so, it seems, [was] a possible new political party. Or at least a new political strategy by our South African sisters to interrogate and challenge the political culture of South Africa and teach the rest of us how you do it. I'm only seven minutes overtime. I know. OK. I had a hard job.

We are going to take the macroeconomic environment very seriously by challenging ourselves to understand it better and bringing the struggle of women for food security for livelihoods for physical safety and bodily integrity into all our work, no matter where we are located.

To conclude, I want to use the words of our sister, Muthoni, who said that the time for a second uprising has come. I say that our biggest task ahead is to build the next great feminist uprising. Make sure you are there!

## The young feminists were pleasantly shocked by the rounds of questions directed at us

The AWID forum's focus on "The Power of Movements" had a special meaning for me as a 20-something feminist activist. Are we meant to inherit the solidly built structures from our mother's generation, working for them to learn their hard-earned skills? Or should we, as they did, start from the bottom up, building movements that reflect our generation's mandate?

One workshop focused exclusively on inter-generational communications and conflicts that occur especially in civil society structures. Progressive and empathetic, we all read a realistic account of a generational conflict, discussing it first with women of similar age. Listening to the perspectives of every side, the young feminists were pleasantly shocked by the rounds of questions directed at us, as the older women grappled with what the "kids are up to these days."

University debt coupled with a difficult economic period has pushed the youth to a crisis mode. Do we continue to fight for what we believe in or do we eat? We can no longer be expected to work for free or for embarrassingly low salaries to work our way slowly (if ever) to the top. We are deathly afraid of failure and rejection. The Power of Movements lies in the worth

and respect that is extended to all members of the group. Young women want to be valued for more than their internet and technological savvy.

The women fortunate enough to attend this workshop were able to tackle these serious issues, openly discussing emotional issues in a detached and honest way. When we were able to speak one-on-one with women from different generations, we used anecdotes to illustrate our points. What became perfectly clear is that young feminists are wanted in the movement. That day, we were all able to walk away with our burning conflicts fleetingly resolved.

Young feminists are needed to keep the movement strong, but we need those in power to reach out to us. Feminism is not about struggling through the harshness of the patriarchy as our mothers have done. We do not seek to be alienated; we hope to be included and find our niche. The movement cannot become an ironic reflection of patriarchal movements. Through renewed conversations and openness, all it will take is a continuum of little mother/daughter heart to hearts.

- By Lynsey Bourke, South Africa

## There is a revitalization taking place within feminism

"The forum gave us the chance for reflection and self-criticism to find out how to advance our relationship with women's movements. This was the first international feminist event to which we had been invited in our 14 years of organizing. What was especially inspiring to us about the forum was to see that young women are integrating themselves into women's movements, and that they are more open-minded. We had discussions with them, and although we did not always reach an agreement, we felt that they are willing to listen to us. By getting to know young feminists at the forum, it occurred to us that we can also try to establish links with the new generations of the women's movements in Argentina in order to open a discussion and build something together on the basis of difference. The forum made us see that there is a revitalization taking place within feminism."

- Sex worker from Latin America

## Stand up high and speak out

"The forum gave me this pushing force to stand up high and speak out. It made me realize a lot of other women are also working towards developing and empowering women. It made me confident that I can also help make a change. It helped me to view other groups of people differently, e.g. homosexuals and sex workers, who are viewed negatively in my country. And as a volunteer in the accessibility team, my experience at the forum improved my skills of working with people with disabilities."

- Women's Rights Activist

# Young feminist activism and intergenerational relationship building

Reflections from AWID's Young Feminist Activism Program team



**Sanushka Mudaliar, Australia/East Asia & Ghadeer Malek, Palestine/Canada**

When we first sat down with our colleagues Hadil and Lindiwe to start planning for the forum we knew that it would be a great opportunity to encourage further discussion about age, young women and women's movements. But we also knew that doing so would involve more than simply creating a supportive environment at the forum for youth-led sessions. We'd learned from the experience at the Guadalajara and Bangkok forums that the youth-led sessions were not well attended by older forum participants and that this limited multigenerational discussions. We wanted to change this dynamic.

We kicked off the planning process with a few key observations and decisions. We noted that recognition of the role of young women in women's rights activism was increasing along with support for young women's participation. But too often that support translated into a simplistic "add young women and stir" model of integration. We also recognized that even in situations where women of different generations worked side-by-side, the interaction between generations was often weak. We needed to encourage more women's rights activists to move beyond participation and start actively strengthening intergenerational relationships within their specific contexts. We needed, in other words, to move away from the dichotomy of "young versus old" and start talking about the specific needs and contributions of every generation.

The forum theme - The Power of Movements - provided the perfect platform to generate dialogue on intergenerational relationships within our movements. But how, exactly, were we going to accomplish this? We decided that a committee was in order, and set one up with a roster of amazing and talented women of many ages from around the world. But rather than move directly to planning the forum, we started with a discussion about our personal experiences as younger and older women's rights activists. We talked a lot about the power dynamics related to age and how these affect our attempts to learn across generations. We also challenged each other about the impact of a "young women's identity" which, we agreed, has been critical in building a supportive community for young activists. At the same time this identity has alienated women of other generations as well as led to a glossing over of very real differences among young women themselves.

With these discussions fresh in our minds, the committee then developed a set of activities and inputs for the forum. Participation was the obvious first step, so we worked with AWID staff to ensure that presenters from a diverse range of ages were included in plenaries and breakout sessions. We publicized the Young Women's Caucus as a place for young women to meet, share experiences and exchange ideas. However, noting the difficulties we'd







discussed previously about the “youth identity” we decided that the Caucus should also reach out to all women by hosting a multigenerational lunch on the final day of the forum. We also set up a welcome booth and “friendship match-making” service for participants of all ages to meet others in their areas of activism. We did so in recognition of the fact that not all newcomers to the forum are young. And we actively encouraged participants to creatively represent their visions for ideal intergenerational relationships on the forum mural project.

Last, but definitely not least, we planned to bring hundreds of pink scarves to the forum. We agreed that the most interesting and useful conversations about multigenerationality would be one-on-one or in small groups that would enable people to really engage with this complex topic. We thought these more intimate discussions would also give participants the opportunity to share their personal stories of activism and, in doing so, actually build some of these relationships we’d been talking about. We wrote some questions to kick off the discussions, and then started looking around for something to get people interested in actually having this conversation with us. We chose scarves because we hoped people would wear them at the forum and take them home as a memento of their conversation. And why pink? Well, we wanted our message to be as noticeable as possible!

We had absolutely no idea whether the tactic would work, which made it all the more exciting to see people at just about every forum gathering proudly displaying their support for young women, intergenerational relationships and multigenerational movement building. The visibility of the pink scarves meant that everywhere you turned, you were reminded of the importance of these issues to women’s movements. These reminders, in turn, provoked a range of intense debates on everything from strategies to support new leadership and age-specific methods of organizing, to embracing diversity in our movements and organizations.

Thank you to the brilliant members of the forum committee and to all of you who listened and contributed. We hope you are continuing to nurture intergenerational relationships and discussing their role to our movements!

## Laughter and eye contact were ubiquitous

At the end of the first plenary session, *Women Organizing and Transforming the World*, I found myself sitting in a hallway engaging in personal conversations with strangers, acquaintances, and friends. As a member of the Young Feminist Activism (YFA) Committee, one of my roles was to speak in small groups with forum delegates about their personal and professional entry into the women’s movement. These interactions were not recorded or video-taped; they were informal and genuine. Hugs were shared, and laughter and eye contact were ubiquitous. I learned about close friends’ inspirations and challenges and others’ triumphs and thoughts. Some women were born into their movements and transformed by their political context; others grew into feminism through mentorships and social justice education. I heard stories I would most likely have never heard if I had not approached these women to converse. To encourage these intimate conversations, we offered those willing to engage a brightly colored pink scarf. I got to know many women in this way. The women I spoke with are in love with and passionate about the women’s movement and are committed to supporting and creating spaces for new feminists. Thank you for sharing your stories.

- Margot Baruch (*Center for Women’s Global Leadership*), USA

## Intergenerational Dialogue

By Perla Sofía Vázquez Díaz, Mexico, REDLAC-ELIGE

**We arrived at the forum in Cape Town and after several days of complaints, talks and lobbying in the hallways or at the Young Women's Caucus where young feminists invited other generations to converse and wear a pink scarf, they told us: "I support dialogue between generations. I'm ready to talk to them and for us to learn together."**

*- Young Latina woman at the AWID forum*

Young women, whether self-identified as feminist or not, but most certainly engaged in transforming the world, participated in the 2008 AWID forum in Cape Town, South Africa. We used the opportunity to issue a strong call to action to our colleagues in social struggles to recognize the importance of youth in the women's movement. Our message was this: to recognize the power of movements is to recognize the presence of new and older generations within those movements and the need to engage in dialogues. The power of movements is in recognizing and supporting young women as protagonists in the transformation of this world.

This is the view of at least some young activist women, and long before the forum took place (three or four months before) we designed strategies to promote reflection about difference, particularly to bring awareness to colleagues who don't know young women in the movement or who still look upon young women as needing protection. We wanted to remind them that young women never again want to be thought of only as daughters or as having mothers; we want to be 'sisters'.

The scarves were symbolically flooding the forum with pink. They were draped around necks, over clothes or tied into the hair styles of attendees, reminding and whispering that young women were present and that we had issued an invitation to recognize and dialogue.

Throughout the forum we invited young women to the daily Young Women's Caucus. We invited them to discuss and re-think our agendas, our challenges, and the possibility of dialogue between young women from different regions speaking in different languages. On the last day of the caucus we invited everyone who said they would dialogue with youth and who were happy to wear the pink scarves to contribute a few hours of their time during lunch to this experience.

**As we say in Mexico, actions speak louder than words:**

There were many young women present at the caucus planning how we might hold a dialogue with the large number of women we anticipated would participate in the intergenerational dialogue. Recognizing the cultural and

language diversity of the women present at the forum we decided on a methodology based on regions of the world.

Eventually it was evident that there were many young women prepared for the dialogue (about 50) than older women, of which there were no more than 10. This outcome meant that possibility for dialogue was limited, but we made the most of our situation. We decided to hold a dialogue among the young women on what had happened. Sitting in groups by region, the young women of Latin America (LA) sat to discuss what was happening in our own region with these types of alliances between generations, and little by little, like sprinkles before the rain, our older adult colleagues from LA began to arrive. After a little while we formally opened a rich and flavorful intergenerational dialogue, which was the only one of its kind in the caucus.

**When did you begin to call yourself a feminist? What were you like as a young person? How did you become involved in the feminist movement?** We began our dialogue with these three questions. They proved to be sufficient, unleashing a steady flow of sharing, debate and the retelling of memories. We talked for an hour, reflecting on the histories of others and recognizing the histories of the youth of Spanish-speaking women in Nicaragua, Germany, Colombia, the United States, Bolivia, and Mexico. We became aware of our fears of calling ourselves feminists or the fear that someone else, generally our fathers, brothers or friends, would call us feminists. We saw in other women our critical and tense relationships with our mothers. We looked at ourselves with complicity when we remembered caricatures or with remembrance when we remembered the impact of the ideals of Central American revolutionary guerilla warfare or of liberation theology on our lives. It touched our hearts when we remembered our violent loves and the domestic abuse that we survived, as well as when we accepted lesbian love.

We recognized that for at least some of the Latinas that we spoke with on the last day of the caucus, the intergenerational dialogues brought us closer together than the political agendas or the recognition of youth as rights holders or protagonists of social change. They/We reminded us that the power of movements is in the people who make social change happen from their own hearts and who recognize in another colleague in the struggle the capacity to build together without abandoning our own history.

## Multigenerational Dialogue at the Young Women's Caucus

The final session of the Young Women's Caucus was a multigenerational dialogue between older and younger feminists. The Caucus members had worked hard distributing its signature pink scarves to about seven hundred Forum participants, but the number of people over 30 years old who attended this session was small. However, despite the dismal showing by older women, the session provided for rich and meaningful discussions.

One of the key issues multigenerational dialogue proponents constantly grapple with is the power dynamics within feminist movements. Rathie Ramanathan, a Malaysian activist says that feminist spaces can be cliquish and that she and many other women tend to feel more at home in pro-democracy movements.

Peggy Antrobus from Barbados, who is 73 years old, offers an important insight; "young" isn't always about age. She joined the women's movement when she was 40. "The people who mentored me were younger," she says, "and I have always looked up to them." She does however acknowledge that there are issues of power related to age, class and other diversities. For instance in some situations a young white woman may be perceived as more powerful than an older black woman. Ponni Arasu, an Indian feminist agrees that older women can learn from young women. She points out: "It is never one-way learning." She says that there is often an assumption about the role of young women, without an understanding that they do possess different sets of skills.

Vinita Sahasranaman, who is also from India, feels that some of the angst about multigenerational relations comes from the set up of feminist organizations. They need to have strategies for transition from one generation to the next, and older feminists need to recognize when it is time to make way for younger ones. "Dialogue and debate won't work if one party doesn't leave!" she points out.

Older feminists often want to be supportive of their younger colleagues, but do not know how. Some feel that there has not been a clear articulation of what kind of support young feminists need. Bonnie-Lou Fatio from Switzerland says, "We can't read minds, so we need to know what it is that you need."

Many young feminists, like Marwa Sharafeldin from Egypt, have had very supportive older mentors. Marwa's mentor would tell her about important opportunities like conferences and would introduce her people who could contribute to her professional growth. Marwa suggests examining the way we speak to each other, because sometimes what we say is valid, but the way that we say it discredits our words. "In the South," she says "we honour and respect our elders and in return we are respected. As young women we need to realise that we have both rights and obligations within this respect paradigm."

Many young feminists are in awe of older feminists whom they have heard or read about and feel nervous about introducing themselves to them or striking up a conversation. Abiosseh Davis from the USA says, "In meetings like this we meet people we admire and aspire to be like. Often we don't want to walk up to them and talk to them, but we shouldn't be so consumed with ourselves that we can't do so." She says that on the other hand older women should not be so aloof. They need to acknowledge younger women.

Charlotte Young from South Africa appreciates hearing some of the older feminists candidly speak about their regrets. "It helps to realize that I don't have to be perfect. These women are incredible, but it is helpful to know that they are human." Merle Van Den Bosch from the UK feels that our behaviour is strongly influenced by painful childhood experiences and most people never deal with their pain, even into adulthood. She says that this pain is reflected in the ways we relate with others, and informs inter-generational tensions. She advocates emotional healing as a way to promote cohesion among the different generations.

Peggy Antrobus says that young women are more in touch with their world, and the world is changing all the time. "We need to listen to what they are saying," she says "The ideas that come from young women just blow my mind."

- By Kathambi Kinoti (AWID), Kenya



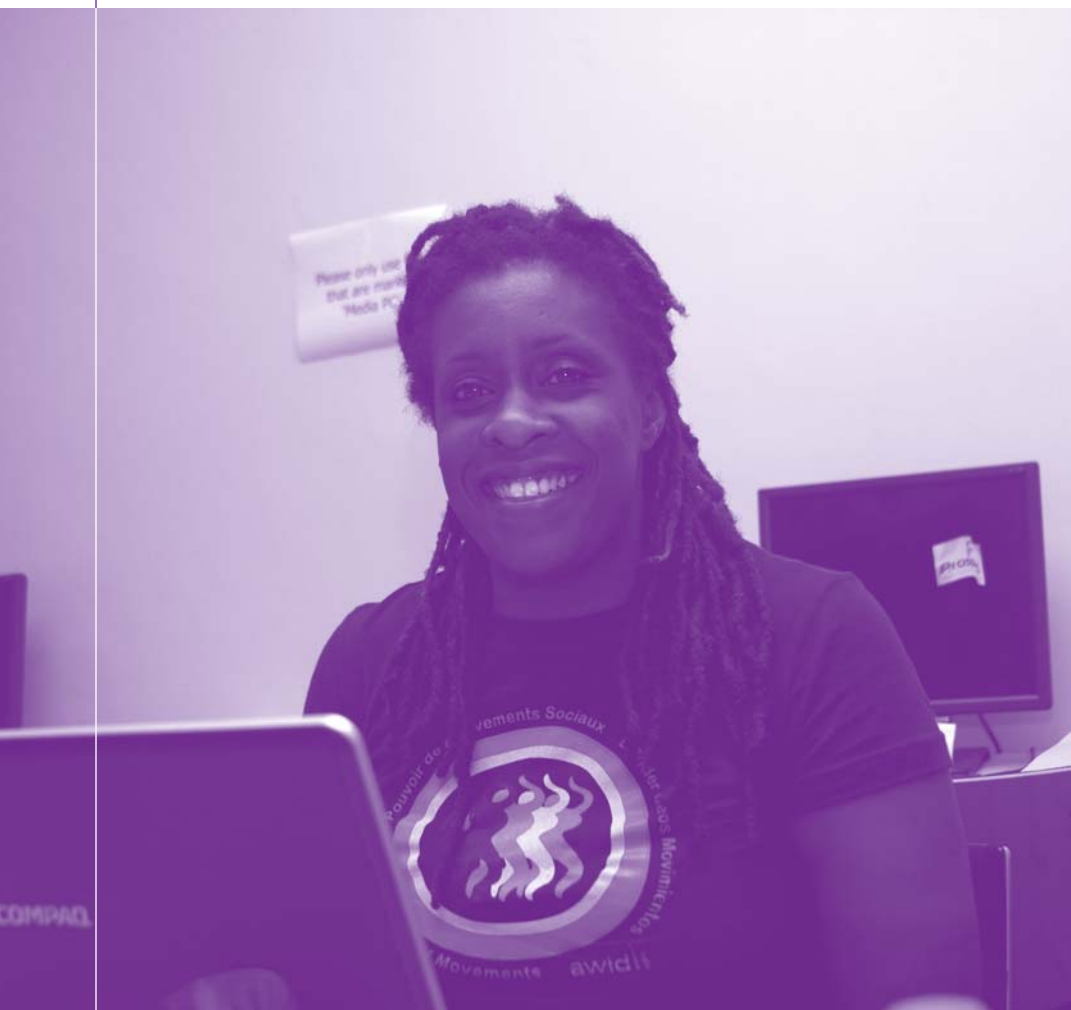
# The FTX (Feminist Tech Exchange) at the forum

Report by Anna Turley



How do we approach technology as women's rights activists?  
Where do communication rights fit into women's movements?  
How can we reclaim technology for women's empowerment?

The Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX) was developed in response to calls from feminist and women's rights movements for greater understanding of emerging technologies, and their potential and impact on the rights and lives of women. It brought together women's rights activists from around the world to share and build knowledge and skills on communication rights and information and communications technologies (ICTs), from feminist perspectives. Through skills sharing, information exchange and discussions, the FTX explored feminist practices and politics of technology, and raised awareness on the critical role of communication rights in the struggle to advance women's rights worldwide. Organized by AWID and the Association of Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC-WNSP) along with local host Women'sNet, the FTX had three elements to it: the FTX exchange, the FTX hub, and FTX online.



## The FTX eXchange

### 10-12 November 2008

The FTX was a groundbreaking capacity building event that aimed to strengthen the skills and knowledge of women's rights advocates and organizations in the area of communication rights and ICTs. It was a three-day event organized strategically just before the 2008 AWID forum, and consisted of five training tracks, plenary discussions and skills sharing activities.

The FTX hosted over 100 advocates and activists from Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America working on women's rights, research, ICT for development and communication rights. Together, participants explored the creative and strategic use of video, audio, social networking platforms, emerging ICT tools, digital storytelling, mobile phones and community wireless networks for transformation, activism, advocacy and networking. They also engaged in extensive discussions on the interconnections between ICTs, women's rights and movement building, and integrated this with their own articulation on feminist practices and politics of technology.



Sometimes we have moments of magic that make our heads spin, our skin tingle, our hearts thump and skip in tune to the singing inside. There have been many such moments at my first ever AWID experience here in South Africa

- Lisa's blog, FTX participant

On my first night at the FTX I met a wonderful sister and rasta feminist. I was inspired talking with her and another friend about rastafari, feminism, the ways they work and don't work together - and the fact that we are all ALIVE and THINKING, taking ideologies and mixing them up to make them our own

- Jessica's blog, FTX participant

"One of the hardest aspects of a massive forum such as AWID is the feeling of uncertainty that newcomers may have. The FTX was very helpful in creating a sense of community among all the participants, so that when they arrived at the forum in nearly every space they went there was at least one familiar face. It was also very good the way the FTX Hub bridged the FTX Exchange and the forum so that people could feel a sense of continuity"

- Margarita Salas,  
FTX Thematic Dialogues Coordinator

Who said women cannot be empowered to set up their own wireless networks? Who knew that a can of peaches, that women often use to make peach melba, could be turned into an antenna ready for transmission?

- Nyaki's blog, FTX Participant



## The FTX Hub 14-17 November 2008

Located right outside Auditorium 1 on the first floor of the CTICC, where the main plenaries were held, the FTX Hub was open to AWID Forum participants every day from 08:00 – 20:00 for a wide range of activities:

### Content creation:

During the Forum, participants convened at the Hub to create and publish content on their experiences and perspectives of the forum. It was a dynamic space buzzing with activity where blogs were written, videos shot and edited, interviews conducted and content published. FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavour) set up their FIREPLACE at the FTX Hub, and produced daily broadcasts of radio programs and interviews. Kubatana set up Freedom Fone and created short audio programs that could be accessed through a local South African telephone numbers using an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) menu. Throughout the forum, short interviews with forum presenters, selected excerpts from sessions, feminist news headlines as well as poetry and inspirational quotes were featured through FreedomFone. The FTX Hub also hosted daily editorial meetings by the Francophone alternative media collective led by Genre en Action, which was vital in supporting the creation of content in languages other than English to reach wider and more diverse audiences. Other partner organizations contributing content from and about the forum included the Global Fund for Women, the International Museum of Women and World Pulse.

### Skills sharing:

Every day at the Hub, open exchange sessions were held by a wide range of women's rights and communication organizations. The exchange sessions provided the opportunity for women's rights advocates and organizations to share, reflect on and learn about experiences of using a variety of information and communication technologies to advance women's rights. From wikis and simple animation techniques to mobile phones for activism and digital stories, forum participants were exposed to cutting edge tools to support their work around the world.

### Screenings:

The FTX Hub also hosted daily hour-long screenings of video shorts and digital stories. Women'sNet and Silence Speaks – both pioneer organizations in digital storytelling trainings – shared a wealth of digital stories that were produced in previous workshops held in different parts of the world. Topics of these stories included violence against women, HIV/AIDS and women's health, women in situations of armed conflict, economic empowerment and sexual rights. Videos created at the FTX eXchange were also screened at the Hub and throughout the forum, and numerous participants dropped by the FTX Hub and shared their own advocacy videos and documentaries for the screenings.





### Campaign activities:

The “Take Back The Tech” campaign, created by the WNSP of the APC, organized a Tech Hunt that took place during the forum. This was an activity where participants were led through the internet as they solved simple clues related to secure online communications. In the process, participants discovered different aspects of how information was stored online, and learned more about privacy and security issues. Take Back The Tech also organized several strategy meetings at the Hub with organizations working on violence against women to explore how they could localize the campaign, or use ICTs creatively and strategically in their advocacy areas.

World Pulse organized a raffle for a laptop by introducing new users to their community site, which provides tools that enable women to tell their stories, exchange resources, share solutions and collaborate in groups.

### FTX Online:

<http://ftx.apcwomen.org>

The FTX website is a community site where FTX participants published blog posts, audio casts, links to videos, snapshots and their reflections in multiple languages. These conversations are continuing on the FTX mailing list. Check out the site to read about the FTX and to learn more about the feminist practices of technology.

“We faced constraints and challenges in developing 10 digital stories in under 15 hours in an intercultural context. But we shared sisterhood, understanding, courage and willingness to contribute with a thread to weave this colorful tapestry.”

- Itandehui, FTX Participant

This phrase has been bandied about for so often and so long that I’m increasingly confused as to what it really means. Women’s rights groups have often said, it’s best to “agree to disagree”. But what are we agreeing to disagree on except for the fact that we cannot come to a consensus? With rising conservatism and fundamentalism and women’s rights groups seeing the work and the gains they’ve achieved fast dissipate during political, economic and social crises, can we continue to afford to “agree to disagree”?

- Running Toddler’s blog, Forum participant

“I can now say I am a satisfied techie when it comes to mobile advocacy and wireless network.”

- Oluwatoyin, FTX Participant

What an inspiring event it is. The 11th AWID forum brought a lot of women together from all around the world. These women identify as feminist. I do too now with confidence. What a fun event to be at! I am part of a collective movement for change. I identify with a lot of prominent women, and I am really encouraged to go back home and share the knowledge.

- Keba’s blog, FTX participant

# Breakout Sessions

The forum hosted multiple concurrent breakout sessions, which allowed smaller and more focused discussion and debate on a wide range of issues affecting women's rights and movement building in the world today. This section presents a selection of edited and abridged transcripts from the most popular breakout sessions at the forum, as indicated on the forum evaluation.

Audiofiles of these and many other sessions are available in the Forum08 section of the AWID website at [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org).



## The ABC's of Movement Building: What, Why and How

Edited excerpts from Srilatha Batliwala's presentation

*The concepts in this presentation can be found in "Changing their World" by Srilatha Batliwala, [www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Changing-Their-World](http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Changing-Their-World).*

After a couple of decades as a grassroots activist, I started doing a lot of teaching in the Center that I'm affiliated to in an American university. They call me a "pracademic" – a practitioner who is pretending to be an academic. But in classroom situations, I always found it was useful to start by defining what it is we're talking about.

A movement is, at the very least, an organized set of constituents (people), pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action. Embedded in this definition are a lot of very important key concepts, for example the idea that it's *organized* constituents, which is very different from a spontaneous uprising to protest against a power plant or a new factory being set up somewhere. The common political agenda of change is also critical, [as opposed to] a vague agenda of a better world for women. Movements have a very sharp, critical analysis and agendas of change. And of course, the most operative word, as you heard this morning in the plenary, is collective action. Acting together.

Let's look at some of the characteristics of movements in greater detail. What could the organized constituency base be? It could be individuals, it could be groups, communities. It could also be organizations coming together to form a movement – organizations of constituents. The protest march, for instance, that is being organized

tomorrow by the One in Nine Campaign is an example of a set of organizations that have come together and formed a movement with their constituency bases.

Movements will typically have both a very deep, critical analysis of the problematic that they want to change, the paradigm they want to change, and also a clear vision of what they see as the more just order.

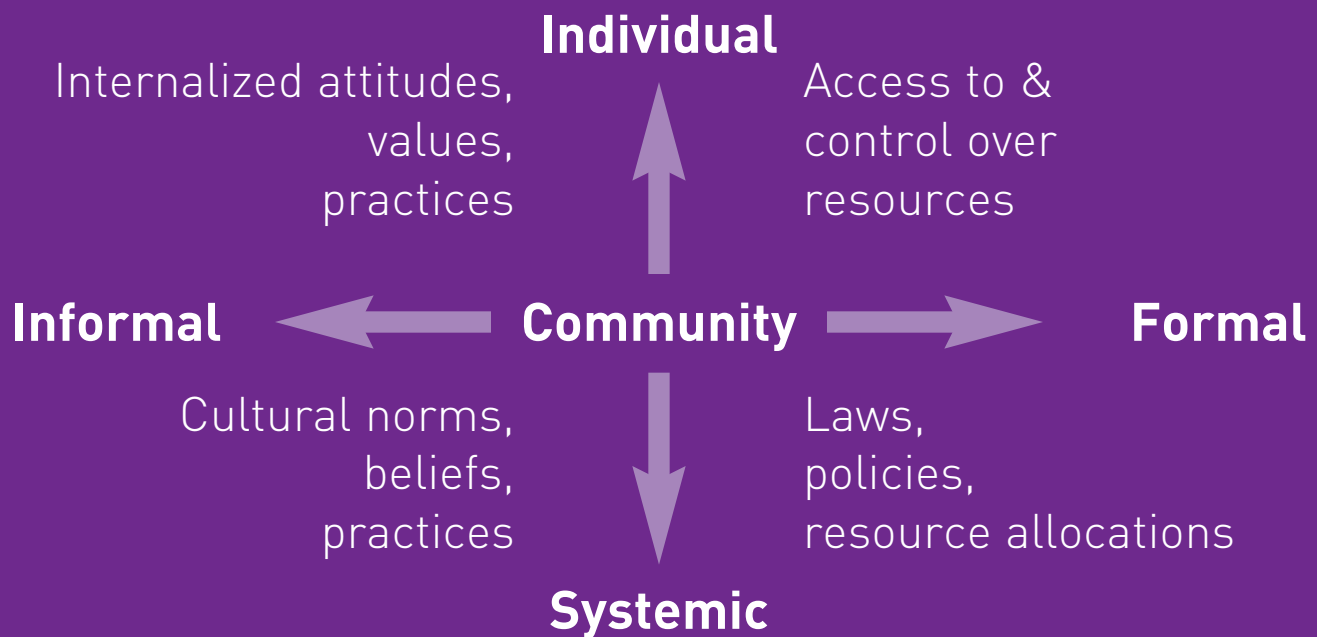
[A movement will have] leadership at multiple levels, leaders from the constituency. I want to pause a little bit here because this is often not a reality in our movements. There is often very strong leadership at the top, [but] as you go down, you find that the layers of leadership are not very deep, or that other layers of leadership don't have quite the same voice in the movement's agenda.

[Movements participate in] collective and joint actions, [and] they have some continuity over time. We have to make a distinction between movements and campaigns or spontaneous uprisings, because the continuity is what is required to achieve new political change. You can't do it in your three-year business plan that you send to your donor.

Finally [movements use] diverse strategies of political struggle. Now, when I'm using the word "political," I want you to understand that I'm not suggesting that movements have to form a political party – that's not what we mean by political. Political means a sharp analysis of power, of power structures and of the shift that you want to make in the power structure.

Now, let's get clear about what are feminist movements, because some of this is obvious but it needs

# The Dynamic of Change



detail. What distinguishes a feminist movement from other social movements? What distinguishes a social movement with a strong feminist perspective from other social movements?

[Feminist movements] will have first and foremost a very gendered political analysis and gendered political goals. Let's take a very simple example. In the current period, we are seeing a lot of activism around climate change. The environmental movement at the global level is probably the most powerful social movement in the world right now. But it is a feminist social movement? I don't think so, because for example, I heard the leaders of one of the most powerful environmental organizations in the world make a presentation on the impact of climate change on poor people, and [he] did not mention women even once. Did not even reference the fact that perhaps the impact and the consequences of climate change are somewhat differently experienced by women. That's what I mean by a gendered political analysis and a gendered set of political goals.

Let's [continue with] the same example. If you don't recognize that women, especially poor women, are a separate constituency in terms of how they experience and deal with the impact of climate change, then your strategies are unlikely to involve them as people who can suggest strategies. But guess who is coming up with the most creative ways of managing the impacts of climate change all around? Women. They're reviving traditional

farming practices, they are managing the natural resources, they are trying to renew and revitalize the natural resource base. The strategies they use are very, very different from what men in those communities might suggest if they were the only people who were spoken to.

Finally, it's important in feminist movements (and I'm not saying we've got there yet) that it is our constituents who are shaping the political goals, the political analysis, and the strategies we use. It's not the people sitting in the feminist NGOs. It has to be a very bottom-up process that defines and shapes our analysis, goals, and strategies, if we say it is a feminist movement.

Now, what are the elements of effective feminist movement building? This morning we heard Lydia say in her speech that we have to recover some of the strategies and methodologies that we've forgotten, or set aside, or aren't part of our collective history. We have to learn how to reuse those strategies because too much of our work, in many locations, has gotten focused on advocacy, research, policy work, etc. That's not enough anymore. We have to go back to some of the basic feminist popular education techniques, particularly if we are trying to organize large grassroots constituency bases. We have to do the consciousness raising, gathering women into collectives of some kind, building that mass base.

We have to have a clear power analysis and a political agenda, and that's a work in progress. It's not a static thing. It's something you keep refining, you keep sharpening,



you keep changing, based on the external realities. [The agenda] has to focus on formal and substantive changes, but it also has to address what has to be done on the ground to shift what my friend Michel Friedman calls norms. It has to create paradigm shifts and new norms. So if there is a community in which marital rape is not considered rape, you're trying to shift a norm, and you can't shift that norm by changing a law alone. You have to shift it by doing the kind of mobilization, consciousness-raising, and challenging of it within every household in every community.

Another important (but not very popular) principle is changing the practice of power internally and externally. To put it very briefly, we have all internalized concepts of the practice of power that are very patriarchal, but we expect ourselves to function very differently when we acquire power, without really interrogating, "what is my relationship with power? What's my history with power?" We forget that many of us are in this movement because we have experienced very abusive and oppressive forms of power. We're not healed from that, and yet we want to function as very healthy leaders within our movements. So this is a very key challenge for us.

I'm going to skip now to why movements matter. When I did the first draft of the chapter in the book about the wonderful strengths of movements, I was challenged by a young colleague who said, "Well, why do you need a movement to make this change?" And she named various examples where major changes had been brought about supposedly without a movement. I didn't quite agree – I think all the changes that we've seen in the last 30 years definitely have a movement behind them. Lincoln may have freed the slaves, but there was a whole anti-slavery movement behind it.

Nevertheless, I think it's important for us in today's context with all the NGOization and "projectitis" to look at why movements matter. This is one framework (pointing to graph) that I have found useful. It's not the only framework, but it's a useful way to begin to look at what is the role that movements play that makes them so powerful.

If you look at our achievements, if you look at some of the gains that Muthoni spoke about this morning, a lot of the gains have been in two domains. (Pointing to the right side of the graph) If you look here, you'll see a lot of laws, [which represent] access and control over resources that we try to increase through policy interventions, in order to reduce levels of discrimination, inequality and poverty. Our struggles have so far done very well in these two domains, especially in the last 20 years. Look, for instance, at the level of participation in women in formal politics. In many locations, we've done very well in getting those formal, systemic changes, so that individuals have rights at least in law.

(Pointing to the left side of the graph). This is the informal domain, where we are looking for changes in norms. We're trying to change those very norms, beliefs and practices that perpetuate and reproduce the kind of

violence, abuse, discrimination, and exploitation that recreates and reproduces gender inequality within classes, within ethnic groups, within regions, and so on. We are also struggling to change the individual, internalized attitudes, values and practices which this set of norms sanctions, [permitting people to] behave in ways that violate women's rights. How do we shift these, if we don't have mass-based movements?

We are also struggling to change the individual internalized attitudes, values, and practices which this set of norms sanctions to behave in ways that violate women's rights. So, how do we shift these, if we don't have mass based movements? If we don't find ways of working in these locations, where systems of discrimination are deeply embedded, we are dead in the water. That is where movements are the most powerful forms of intervention. That is the power of movements.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EDITED EXCERPTS

**Srilatha Batliwala:** I want to throw it open now. The lovely exercise I had planned ... I don't think it's possible. We are far too many. But, shall we try and experiment? I wonder if someone can think of an example, or offer an example of a not-a-movement? And then can we use our collective power to examine how we could make a movement in that not-a-movement context? Does that make sense?

**Participant:** Let's deal with the issue of all the movement and activity around HIV and AIDS, and then we can deal with something else as well.

**Srilatha Batliwala:** Is everyone OK with taking HIV-AIDS? Is it a good example? OK. So, do you want to begin by telling us why you think there is not a movement and not a feminist movement around HIV-AIDS?

**Participant:** I'm talking about not only about South Africa, but all the countries in southern Africa. For a long time, there were a lot of groups coming into this region to provide this and that, but no gendered approach. No feminist approach, in terms of saying, "Why is it that the people who are most vulnerable to HIV infection are women? Why is it that the people who take care of people who have HIV are women?" They're not talking about the fact that there's not enough food. They're just pumping ARVs into women who are undernourished. There is no analysis. There's a lot of activity. A lot of money is going in, and a lot of decisions are being made around the issue, but there's no gender analysis. I would like to see how we can move it out of where it is now, so that the money is actually useful from a feminist point of view.

**Participant:** I am from Macedonia. I'm a Romany women's activist from Europe. I don't know if I should call the

“Roma movement” a movement or not. One of the most lively strategies used by the Roma communities has been the total and absolute exclusion of outsiders and non-Roma from their lives. And Roma themselves can also be outsiders. In many European communities, I’m considered an outsider by Roma themselves because of many reasons – being single, not having children, living alone, being independent, etc.

**I would like to pose the question here: how do we start building a movement in a context such as the Roma that isolates outsiders and non-Roma from their lives? How would a movement look like in such a context?**

I would like to pose the question here: how do we start building a movement in a context such as the Roma that isolates outsiders and non-Roma from their lives? How would a movement look like in such a context? The Roma movement efforts began in the early 70s, but the only constituency has been individuals and organizations. I’m hearing [now in this session] that a [movement of individuals and organizations] is possible, but it hasn’t worked in the context of the Roma so far. Not having communities involved in shaping the goals and the strategies has been an excellent reason for the failure of many programs, initiatives, and policies targeting Roma communities in Europe. A lot of money [has been] spent.

We also heard that it is possible to have different layers of leadership. Within the Roma context, community leadership is what matters to people on the ground, whereas the political leadership in the form of organizations, NGOs, and individuals is what matters to governments, international organizations, and donors trying to improve the situation of Roma. A visible gap remains between the community leadership (in the form of traditional leaders), on the one hand, and the political leadership in the form of organizations and individual activists. Because the Roma movement is built by organizations, it is very logical to conclude that it is dependent on external funding. It’s being donor driven and has top-down approach.

By now probably you’re wondering, where are the women? Women only raised their voices and tried to address women’s issues in the late 90s. [These women] had to face the challenge of male-dominated leaders who

put women in the position of [having to] choose their Roma identity over their women’s identity. Intersectionality between gender and race is unknown.

**Srilatha Batliwala:** So, we heard two common factors between the two examples: there are lots of organizations, and there is money. We often say we can’t build movements, because we don’t have resources. [These two examples] have resources, and they have lots of organizations.

**Participant:** With HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa, interestingly enough, the problem is that the money is there, but the issues are externally defined: “What is wrong you, you’re very promiscuous? What is wrong with you, you’re not taking care of your sick people? What is wrong with you, you don’t have access to medication?”

What do we do? We all line up for the money to do those things we have been told we should do. We tell you how to use condoms properly. We give you anti-retro virals and then we get you to take care of the sick. We have not had the space and the time to critically questions [whether] those interventions, where the money is flowing to, will get us to deal with the fundamental, underlying issues around HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa and its impact on women.

So, you are so right. For me, that’s not a movement. The money is there, we are talking about the issues, but definitely there is no movement. I think that now would be the time in Southern Africa to say, “How do we create the spaces where we feed back information to say, you know, our priorities are *these*.” We [need to] form a movement around those priorities we have defined, and re-channel the resources in way [that is] most useful.

**Participant:** I’m from Canada. I’m spending time here in South Africa for six months with an internship. I think we need to [create] spaces where, as women, we can come together, where it’s going to be the women who are setting the agenda. The question that I have is how do we link these collective, grass-roots [agendas] to the NGO agendas, because we know we need that.

**Srilatha Batliwala:** In response to that, I thought it would be interesting to do quick poll. How many in this room have actually done consciousness raising and organizing in a community? So about half. How many of you know where to go to get that training today, supposing you want to start doing that kind of work? Because what we’re talking about is that we have lots and lots of organizations doing lots of stuff – except for building those spaces. The technology of building those spaces is a set of skills. There are very particular ways [to do this], in different contexts.

In the case of the Dalit [movement in India], there were people out there who knew how to do that. They went to those communities, and they created that space. And in [the Roma] example, what they’re struggling with is that there’s tons of money for Roma women activists to go to

the US and do non-profit management training. But it's unheard of for Roma feminist activist to be sent to India to work with the Dalit movement and learn from them how they did grassroots organization. And as you know the irony is that the Roma came from India! I say no more.

**Participant:** Another element that I want to bring into the dialogue of movement building is the reality that when you're working with the poorest communities, you also have to deal with livelihood issues, which are very much "nuts and bolts" and which require a lot of funding. The other challenge for feminist movement who have built this grassroots [consciousness] is how do you marry the two?

That's the other challenge we need to deal with in the movement building process.

**Srilatha Batliwala:** I am sorry but we have to conclude. Please keep the conversations and the questions going, as you go into different sessions!



## Addressing Legal Discrimination and Promoting the Equality of Women in Iran: The Case of the One Million Signatures Campaign

### SPEAKER 1: THE SITUATION IN IRAN

During the Iranian revolution, numerous discriminatory laws against women were passed. I will give you a few examples here. If a woman and a man go out on the street and they get involved in an altercation and they are injured equally, the damages paid to the woman are half that paid to the man. The testimonies of two women in court equals the testimony of one man. A man can marry four wives and divorce without any excuse, but getting a divorce for a woman is difficult, sometimes impossible. These are some of the discriminatory laws against women in Iran.

These laws are enforced in a country where the number of educated women in fact exceeds the number of educated men. Over 65 percent of the university students in Iran are female. Our women hold professional positions in our society: they are lawyers, doctors, engineers, and CFOs. CEOs of big companies are female. Even one of the vice-presidents of Iran (a fundamentalist) is a woman. But pursuant to the laws in Iran, if a woman wants to travel out of the country, she has to have the permission of her husband. It is unknown what's going to happen to Iran's seat in the United Nations if [the seat was filled by a woman and if there was] a fight between [that woman and her] husband, and her husband [refused to] issue the permission!

These small examples demonstrate how the culture of Iran is different from the discriminatory laws that exist in Iran. This is why the movement for equality is very, very strong. The feminist movement in Iran is one of the strongest movements in the Middle East. This movement does not have a leader, doesn't have headquarters or branches. But it exists in the home of each Iranian family that believes in equality of rights. This is why this movement is very strong. If the movement had a few leaders or a

few activists, they would be apprehended or executed by the government, and the movement would come to an end.

This movement has been victorious in the past few years. For example, after the revolution, a law passed in which custody of girls after divorce up to age 7 and boys up to the age of 2 were given to the mother. After those ages, the kids would be taken from the mother and given to the father. The government always [claimed] that this was Islamic law, and [therefore] it could not be amended. But when women added to their resistance, the government had to give in, and the law was changed.

But [these victories] do not suffice – not at all. Until [we achieve] total equality of women and men, the feminist movement will go on in Iran.

### SPEAKER 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN

The One Million Signatures campaign officially launched on August 27, 2006. It aims to collect a million signatures in support of a petition addressed to the Iranian Parliament, asking for the revision and reform of current laws that discriminate against women. One of the main aims of the campaign is to educate citizens, particularly women, about the negative impact of these laws on their lives. Those who agree with the campaign support it by signing the petition. Others who are interested in becoming more involved can work on our committees, our local groups, and in the campaign. In the provinces, local volunteers decide on the structure of the campaign and how to carry out its work based on local needs and resources.

The laws [that the] campaign is asking to be changed [can be] classified [into these categories]: 1) equal rights for women in marriage. 2) equal rights [in] divorce for



women. 3) an end to polygamy and temporary marriage. 4) An increase [in the] age of criminal responsibility to 18 both for girls and boys. 5) the right [of] women to pass on [their] nationality to their children. 6) equal blood money. 7) equal inheritance rights. 8) reform of laws that reduce punishment [in the] case of honour killings. 9) equal testimony rights for men and women in court. 10) other laws which discriminate against women, such as stoning.

The campaign has some specific strategies. The first one is the face-to-face approach. Campaign volunteers have very close contact with their fellow citizens. The second strategy is workshops. Campaign activists hold different workshops about the discriminatory laws and their effects on people's common lives. The workshop is usually supported by lawyers, in order to [present] an accurate perspective [on] the law and [its] effects. The workshops help us to reach one of the campaign's main goals, which is to increase public awareness about the laws. The third strategy is ICTs. The campaign volunteers use different aspects of information and communication technologies widely – my friend will talk about this later.

The fourth strategy [is] artistic. We have a photo-blog named "photo change" [which] shows the campaign event backstage. We have badges like this one, with the campaign symbols and logos, and T-shirts like this, with the same logos. We [also have] theatre performances. We perform invisibly in public areas, parks and others. The campaigners in groups of two or three go to the park or public area, and all of a sudden start to talk about the laws that affect our lives – about marriage, about divorce, about anything. When people [enter into] the conversation, [the campaigners] try to challenge them [on] the subject and give information [and] more ideas to the people.

### **SPEAKER 3: ICTS IN THE CAMPAIGN**

Technology and ICTs play an important role in the campaign. I want to talk very [briefly] about the sort of ICT tools that we are using and the role of the ICT in our activity.

I would like to start with mobile [phones] and SMS. Mobiles are used for sending news and congratulation messages for our achievements via SMS, as well as [for] reprinting bad news such as arrests of people. We use SMS because it is cheap, fast, and reliable.

[We also use] computer software [for] digital documentation. We are trying to make a soft copy of everything we produce or achieve. We also keep a digital copy of all the signatures to be on the safe side. [We also] make audios and videos [that] are more interesting for the people, [so they can] download the videos that we produce and can send them to each other.

Next is e-mail and messengers. [We use] emails and messages in different ways [than most of you]. We are using emails and messengers like Skype for arranging our meetings instead of phones, because these days telephone calls are not that secure. This is a very good example of changing a risk to an opportunity. Because of this risk of

using the telephone, I can say that almost all of the people involved in the campaign use e-mails. We are so proud to say that all mothers are using their children's computers to connect to the internet to check their e-mails, to read news, and check website articles.

Mailing list or mailing groups: We normally use them for newsletters, like everyone else. But the other usage of mail groups is to make really quick decisions about emergency cases. It makes our work easier as we don't waste time on organizing online meetings.

Online information sharing tools and social networking: The One Million Signatures campaign is also active in the virtual community as well. We are in Orkut, we are in Facebook, [our videos are on] YouTube. You can [become] a member of these groups in Facebook or Orkut.

Websites, the last topic. The campaign website [was] launched [in] the early days of the campaign. It is a multi-language website with more than 4,000 visitors per day. Our website is our main medium. So far, 15 websites and blogs have been [created] by volunteers from other provinces [and] other countries. That means we have around 16 or maybe more websites.

## **In its two years of activity, the one million signatures campaign has never used international or external funding**

Filtering. This is our main problem on the internet. [Every] two months our website will be filtered, [which] means that it is not accessible from inside Iran. Imagine how difficult it is to update sites that are not directly accessible! We found a way to change our DNS domain name server to a new one by the time that our website will be filtered, but changing our domain names serves cost money. Besides financial cost and technical difficulties, you can guess how many visitors we lose each time and how much our rank comes down in the search engines.

The campaign has been working for two years now. In these two years our website has been filtered 17 times. [But] we still have more than 4,000 people each day visit our websites and read our articles.

### **SPEAKER 4: MULTIGENERATIONALITY, FUNDING AND THE ROLE OF MEN IN THE CAMPAIGN**

I would like to talk about three different aspects of characteristics of One Million Signatures campaign in Iran.

The first one is the presence of the three generations of women in this campaign. I believe it's the first time in Iran's history that three generations of women [have] worked with each other. The first generation, I call them the revolutionists, are usually in their 50s and 60s and

experienced the 1979 revolution. Some of the members were part of political groups and some of them were only observers to this revolution. But most of them completed their studies or married before the revolution. So, in their memories, they have a clear view of the situation [of women] before the revolution and can talk about women's achievements and losses after the revolution.

## The second lesson comes from the bitter experience of the revolution in Iran. Women helped the revolution a lot in Iran, but after the revolution, they lost many rights. It was a real disappointment to them

Then we have the second generation, in their 30s, 40s. They are the ones who introduced the words "feminism" and "women's movement" to Iranian society. They are usually writers, translators, and journalists. They were the ones who believed in the women's movement. Before that, even the women who were socially or politically active were part of other groups. There was no such thing as a women's movement [before] this generation [started talking] about an independent women's movement in Iran. And then we have the third and last generation, my generation. They are in their 20s usually. They organize around most parts of this campaign, using the experience of the other two generations, of course.

[We have received] great support from our older sisters and mothers, [and we've] learned two basic lessons from them. One thing that we learned from them [is] to be independent from political groups – leftist or religious [or whatever] they call themselves – [and] to stand for ourselves, for ordinary women. The second lesson comes from the bitter experience of the revolution in Iran. Women helped the revolution a lot in Iran, but after the revolution, they lost many rights. It was a real disappointment to them. We now know that women's issues are a priority. We cannot wait for something big like a revolution to happen and [think] afterwards that there will be heaven for the women. We do not believe in this.

The second part of my discussion is about the funding of the one million signatures campaign. In its two years of activity, the One Million Signatures campaign has never used international or external funding. All the money in the campaign for the projects comes straight from the pockets

of the members. We do not have any kind of organized funding, only the membership fees which are about \$5 for a year. This [has made us] really strong because [it] helped us to be independent, to make our decisions independently. This is [why] most of us are part-time activists. We are [also] engineers, artists and workers. We always work. And then in the afternoons and on the weekends, we work for this. So, we earn our salaries, and then use it as a source to produce things and do advocacy.

The third issue is the presence of men in the one million signatures campaign. It's really important because Iran is a very traditional country. The presence of men is a very good sign of the change in Iranian culture. [This is] the first time in the Iranian history that men [have been] proudly part of the women's movements. [Previously], they'd talked about or wrote [about] the situation of women in Iran, but they had never been involved directly in a women's movement in Iran.

### SPEAKER 5: INTIMIDATION AND RESISTANCE

[In] the two years [since] the campaign started, there [have been] many threats against us. First, security guards try to [put] pressure on families to talk with their child to stop their activity. If that doesn't work, they make problems at university, at work. [There are also] threats in public areas, which [is where we] want to work. Another way they harass activists is to ban them from traveling abroad to international conferences.

[Over the last] two years, over 50 members of the campaign were arrested in different places and in different times. [This] takes so much energy and focus because when somebody is in prison, it [puts] so much pressure on her family, her friends and colleagues. Even after a person is released, they will continue to be interrogated. [Often] we will receive a prison sentence suspended for a few years. [The State hopes that if a] person has this [suspended] sentence, he or she will be more passive somehow. One of my colleagues was arrested when she was collecting signatures at the park in Tehran. I myself was arrested in front of the Revolutionary Court with 32 other activists. We are generally accused [of things like] action against public security or something like that. Two of our campaign members are in prison still.

But even in their hard situation, [during] long days in public world of prison, the [imprisoned activists] actually reach [out] to the part of society that they didn't see before, [the] ordinary [women who are] prisoners. [These women prisoners] understand that they are absolute victims of the unequal laws that we are trying to change. [In] the footsteps of unequal laws like polygamy or when a [woman] doesn't have the right to divorce, [she may] reach a level that she commits a crime, maybe kill her husband. So, many bad things happen [because of these discriminatory laws]. In these situations, we can gain so much information from these prisoners.

Even after my colleagues' release, they [sometimes maintain] connections with [the women in prison]. They try

to release them or establish a library inside the prison or trying to empower them so that if they [are] released, they can stand on their own feet.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EDITED EXCERPTS

**Participant:** This is a heart-felt congratulations for your efforts. I come from Egypt, from North Africa. We find this experience extremely inspiring. You said very proudly – and that really affected me – that you have a very strong women’s movement in Iran. I want to know, how did you reach that? I work with a group of NGOs in Egypt and this is something we are very concerned about, how to build a strong movement in a Middle Eastern country that has Islam as its majority religion.

There are no rules about promoting our demands. If you are religious, then you can talk about religious things, and if you’re not, then you can talk about human rights and women’s rights

**Respondent:** The problem that women have in Islamic countries are sort of the same. The problem is that whenever we speak of equality, the government hides behind Islam and says that this is an Islamic issue. In this way, governments are presenting women as anti-Islamic, and therefore they can oppress them [more easily].

[One of our tactics is to] work on religious texts. We usually use different Islamic or religious interpretations, after thorough research, in order to make our demands on the basis of such research. We have even used the *fatwahs* of modern clergy today [to support our arguments]. We use their *fatwahs* as shields to tell the government that we are not anti-Islam. We have been so thorough and so successful that among all the women who have been arrested and taken to court, none of them have been accused of [being] anti-Islamic. As my younger colleague told you earlier, their accusation is usually [about] national security. I have to tell you that if our problem comes from religion, we have to solve them through religion as well.

**Participant:** I know the history of the Iranian women’s movement has been plagued with many factions, [and] therefore activists have different political ideologies or

ideas [about] the role of religion in the movement. But the one million signatures campaign has been very successful in bringing these different activists together, regardless of background. I’m wondering if there is a plan after you collect one million signatures, what to do with those signatures? Do you think these different factions in the movement would pose a problem for the campaign after you collect one million signatures, and you have to decide what to do next?

**Respondent:** The plan is to send [the signatures] to Parliament to change the laws. That is our plan. But, you know, the end is really important, but the process is also really important, because [the campaign is] not only collecting signatures. It’s also [about] advocating and talking about this issue. [Over the last] two years, we’ve really seen an increase in public attention and public space devoted to [discussions] about women. This is, I think, an achievement.

About the factions, yes, you are right. One of the achievements of the campaign [has been] to bring [these factions] closer somehow. This is because our demands are so general that anyone can see herself or himself in there. And there are no rules about promoting our demands. If you are religious, then you can [talk about] religious things, and if you’re not, then you can talk about human rights and women’s rights. I think this is why many people from many backgrounds, political and non-political, and many ages, are attracted to the campaign.

**Participant:** First of all, I salute you and appreciate the great work you are doing. You are brave, brave hearts. I believe that there are many religious reformers in many Islamic countries. And they have very progressive views and opinions regarding some of the issues you have listed. So, would it be possible as one of your strategies to involve the ayatollahs or religious leaders in Iran? I have met two of them and I was amazed by their enlightened opinions.

**Respondent:** I agree with you 100%. I have always said that Islam is not in contradiction with democracy and human rights. [As I said earlier], we have used *fatwahs* of modern clergy, and will continue to do so. But the issue is that the government is not paying attention to the *fatwahs* of these progressive clergy and have not changed the laws yet.

The feminist movement in Iran has a number of sympathizers not only among women but also among men. In the film you saw the young men who are volunteers in order to collect signatures. But among the government, fortunately or unfortunately, we don’t have any allies. But this doesn’t mean that we are going to stop doing what we are doing. We are going to say what we have to say. The government may or may not accept it today but they will have to accept it someday sometime.





## Art as Advocacy: The One in Nine Campaign

**Dawn Cavanaugh:** I'm not sure about how many of you know about the One in Nine campaign. We are showing some slides at the moment that depict some of the most intense moments, especially at the beginning of the campaign in 2006.

In late 2005, the then-president of the ANC, Mr. Jacob Zuma, was charged with the rape of an amazing young woman and activist, a colleague who we named Kwezi. On the 13th of February 2006, Mr. Zuma appeared in the Johannesburg High Court under the charge of rape. There were 20 people who stood outside the court on that day, [despite] being intimidated or warned by friends within the ANC and other social movements [to] stay clear of the case because it was politically sensitive. Nevertheless, 20 human rights defenders and activists stood outside from

around five different organizations. Over the next couple of months, the numbers grew. At one stage we had 600-800 people standing outside the Johannesburg high court.

I think most of you know that he got completely free from those charges, and the woman in the case was forced into exile. I'd just to acknowledge her in this moment, Kwezi and fellow activists and women human rights defenders. It was very clear to us, after judgment on the 15 of May, that we needed to continue.

The work in South Africa on violence against women has always been really powerful. But the One in Nine shifted the focus of a whole range of things. One of them was the use of images [and] media in really deliberate, really proactive and creative ways to force our messages. [Whether] we were 50 people or 12, we found [we could] get our message



into the public domain in the most incredible ways. You don't need a permit to demonstrate for 12. So [we would put] 12 people dressed in khangas outside the court, and that would [make it onto] the BBC because the images were just so powerful, so strong, so compelling.

**But why we are marching? There are a hundred reasons, right? Why am I wearing this T-shirt? Why are we pissed-off women?**

This session is about recognizing the creativity of us as feminist women, human rights defenders, and activists. Even without the masses behind you, even when the masses are on the side of patriarchy, we can use our creative ideas to really build a movement. I am going to leave it there...

**Carrie Shelper:** Tomorrow we are going to take to the streets ... We hope that we're going to have large numbers of women both from inside the forum [and] from the communities in and around Cape Town.

But why we are marching? There are a hundred reasons, right? Why am I wearing this T-shirt? Why are we pissed-

off women? We are marching [to protest] the impunity that perpetrators get from the state, from the criminal justice system, from society. So part of it is to demand an end to impunity. Part of it is also to talk about a better, more effective, more responsive criminal justice system. But of course, we're also marching [in support of] women's human rights defenders. Those are the kinds of messages that we are going to be carrying on the streets tomorrow in Cape Town. We're marching about the general situation in all of our countries, but also in the name of these particular women for whom justice is not being done.

So, that's a bit about the march tomorrow, we will be handing over petitions to various government representatives. They will not be asked to speak. We will be handing over a memorandum to them outlining these demands.

**Dawn Cavanaugh:** (Speaking to participants who've moved to work stations) We've got five work stations? We are planning on providing a framework for the march tomorrow and also a framework [for] the experience of a wonderful way in which a large group of people can collectively produce media. Keeping in mind the kinds of content and messaging that we used in our posters, it may stimulate an image ... The only thing we ask is that [you identify your] country so we know that we are really representing international issues. You're absolutely of course welcome to print, paint, make marks, finger prints, foot prints, anything you like over the images ... We have three colours black, white and purple... The brushes we have two sizes...

## Building a Queer and LGBT women movement in the Arab world



**Samira:** My name is Samira. I am the general coordinator of Aswat Palestinian Gay Women. Aswat started as an e-list in 2002. In 2003, we had the first social, face-to-face meeting. I still do not have words to describe the feelings that we felt there, at that meeting. It was the feeling of finding a place finally that allows you to [exist] as a whole [person].

The first time that we [talked about] meeting face to face, we had been in touch by e-mail and by mail for six months. We had a lot of fear – fear of being exposed, being in a place where you don't know the people. We were different women, coming from the same society but from different cities, different villages, different ages, different educations, different economic situations. But still, in spite of all these differences, [there was] was one thing that was true for [everyone] who [came] together: our life experience of being strangers at home, an exile in our

society and in our homes.

In this panel today, we will discuss a few points or question. What does it mean [to have an] LGBT movement in the Arab world? How does it look like? How will it look like? What are our challenges? And what is the role of the feminist movement in the Arab world, toward building an LGTB community and movement in the Arab world?

**Inaam:** My name is Inaam, and I am a member of the group. I joined Aswat four years ago, but before I joined the group, I started wondering about my sexual identity and orientation. I started to realize that I am different, that I'm gay. I thought that I was the only Arab lesbian on the whole earth. When I started looking for materials in Arabic, I didn't find any. I found books [only] in English and Hebrew. I read about groups in Western society and groups in Jewish society. Eventually I joined one of these

groups. But I [had to] communicate with them in a language that wasn't mine, and I remained the only Arab lesbian among them. A year later, when the Aswat group called me [to say] there is a group of Palestinian gay women with eight members, I did not believe it! It took me [another] half year to join the group and go to the first meeting.

I haven't stopped going to the meetings since then. It was like – I'm quoting a friend of mine – going back home [to] a home I didn't know I had. The moment that I realized that I'm not the only one, that I'm not weird, was a crucial moment for me, a turning point. At that moment, suddenly, all the things I carried within me, the fear and loneliness, that heavy secret ... I [was able to] share it with other women, women who would understand me. That, for me, is when the movement begins, that moment in the heart of an Arab lesbian when she realizes that she is not alone and that her voice matters.

I have been wondering a lot in the last two weeks what a LGBT movement within the Arab world means. I try to imagine what it would look like, but I can't see a clear image of it. The word "movement" in my mind is connected to visibility and tangibility. The first image that comes to my mind is of people gathering in open spaces, marching together, raising their voice as high as possible. That made me wonder, would it be possible to build an LGBT Arab women's movement in the Arab world, a visible, tangible one? But then I ask myself, does that movement have to be visible? And if it's not, does that mean it doesn't exist? Is this movement an illusion or a reality? What does that movement look like, and what difficulties and challenges is it facing?

I will begin with the obstacles and challenges, because I think they affect the future of that movement. I can't talk about all of the challenges facing all Arab women, or even all Palestinian gay women. But I believe that [many gay Arab women can identify with] the difficulties and that I personally faced and the challenges that I learned from in my work with Arab gay women.

As an Arab women in an extremely patriarchal and conservative society I am expected to stay home with my parents until I get married. Even if I moved out to seek higher education, I'd be expected to go back. But four months ago, I actually managed to get out of my parents' home. It took me five years to be able to build myself up financially and to find a convincing story to tell of why I needed to move out. I am very lucky. Many Arab women can't even allow themselves to think about the possibility of moving out of their parent's home and living on their own. So one of the main challenges for Arab gay women and Palestinian gay women is how to communicate with other women under those circumstances.

When I was living with my parents, I had to find a convincing story every time I wanted to go to a meeting, and it wasn't an easy task. It was especially hard because most of the meetings were in the afternoons, or sometimes far away from my home town. Many women can't join these meetings because they have to be back home at a

certain hour, or they're not working or studying on that day and don't have a good excuse for why they need to leave home.

On the other hand, there are women like me, who manage to become independent and live on their own. But they're still not part of the community. Some of them don't wish to bring their voice to the political context, but there are many who want and need to, but they don't because they are fearful of coming out, even to other lesbians. Many lesbians in Palestinian society are inside Israel just to join Jewish LGBT groups, because they believe it's the safest place for them, where they are not going to run into another lesbian who may accidentally disclose them to one of their relatives, and eventually to their parents. For them, this is a very terrifying thought. The issue of homosexuality is something that we don't talk or hear about in our society. In many countries, it's still a crime, and in the eyes of many Arabs, it is still a disease.

**That, for me, is when the movement begins, that moment in the heart of an Arab lesbian when she realizes that she is not alone and that her voice matters**

I'm not trying to paint a bleak picture of the situation. I'm just trying to present [some of] our challenges. I think we can learn a great deal from LGBT and feminist movements from Western society and the world, but I don't think we can duplicate it to our world. I don't even think that even a group in Egypt, for example, can do the same as Aswat, because of our different realities and different societies. But I think it's important that we start to react, to make the change from inside of us as lesbians, then outside in our Palestinian society, and then in the larger society, and so on. The movement starts when we can hear our voice saying, "I am Arab, gay, lesbian. I am here and I have every right to choose to be, and to exist."

**Suzan:** (Original in Arabic) My name is Suzan. I am the administrative coordinator of Aswat. As Samira mentioned in the beginning, Aswat, which means "voices," began with the voices of women who initially were afraid to meet and to disclose their identity. [After Samira], Inaam added her own personal story about being inside the closet and coming out. I would like to connect here Inaam's closet and move to another closet, and say that as Arab women, even as liberated Arab women, we all have our own closets.

The closet that I want to [talk about] here is the social and political closet. In the shadow of the state of Israel



and [in the context of] a repressive and conservative society, it is very difficult for us to meet and to connect with women's groups from other Arab countries. Here, I would like to recount my own personal story. About a half-year ago, I met an Arab woman and we began a relationship. But the woman that I love and that I would like to spend the rest of my life with lives in a country that, according to the law, is an enemy state. Between us, there are borders and boundaries that are very difficult to cross.

But putting up laws and building walls between us will never stop the power of our will. Today we are sitting with our sisters from Lebanon who, according to law, we are supposed to be enemies with. On the other hand, we also met with other sisters from other Arab countries that are supposed to be from other enemy states. As Arab women, we face many problems, some of them common to us all as women, and some of them specific to us as Arab lesbian women asking for our rights – which can lead to us losing our lives. [Or] causing us to be completely invisible, somewhere between life and death. Which is better, being above ground or below? There is no law that protects us as Arabs and Palestinians.

The second and bigger challenge that I would like to stress is the role of women's organizations in supporting us. We're not asking here for you to fight for us. But we do ask you to stand by us and to support us, and to not accepting us in a partial way. Don't say "I accept you but only if you stay in your closet." Is this what we call support?

I sometimes think that women who work for freedom and women's rights are actually weak. Weak and afraid. I ask myself, what are they afraid of? I remember one time I was speaking with a lesbian friend, and she told me that when she came out to her friends, they were afraid to be seen next to her, and they refused to say hello to her any more. They were afraid to be seen as gay by association! There's an Arab saying, "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are." Is this the position of Arab women's organizations? I don't know. I don't want to deny the existence of Arab women's organizations that are supportive of our Arab lesbian voices inside and outside. What is the place of women's organizations in building an Arab lesbian movement?

From my own experiences I can say that in unity there is power. The role of support from the Arab women's movement in building the lesbian movement in the Arab world is very large. But at the end of the day, we are all Arab women seeking to build and reach common feminist goals. The fact that I am gay does not allow anyone to close the door on who I am. It is now time for everyone to acknowledge reality. You cannot ignore it any longer. Whether it is open or not, it is here, in our homes, among us, in our societies. We are here, and we will no longer stand for your ignoring us.

**Presenter:** The invisibility of lesbians in the Arab world is a big, big, big issue. Male homosexuality in our region is much more spoken of. This is due to the fact that the

affirmation of sexuality, for women, in itself becomes a queer statement, because this is going beyond the established rules. Because a woman is not supposed to have a sexuality. Because female sexuality in itself is restricted. So, how can an asexual person, with this restricted sexuality, indulge in a homosexual act in a phallocentric society?

Many groups that work with gender, interestingly enough, fear to be associated with LGBT groups because they fear losing partners, being stigmatized, and being cast out of the NGO elite. In our countries, feminism is already associated with lesbianism. If a girl comes out in the street and says, "I am a feminist," she is a ball breaker and she has to love women. Because why else would you be a feminist if not to hate men, right? Unfortunately, these groups that do not want to be associated with us ... instead of just being silent, they go on public television, in public conferences, and they voice an opinion against [us]. We are not asking [you] to go on the street and shout [for] LGBT rights tomorrow. But if you're not with us, then don't be against us. Don't provoke it.

A few cases through out the Middle East a few years back give us an idea of the situation in the region. For example, you had the Boyat, in Kuwait and in the Emirates. What are the Boyat? In these countries, in schools, girls and boys are separated. You have schools for girls and schools for boys. What was happening at the schools for girls was that you had these rings of young women who were spreading lesbianism in the school. This led the government to rethink years and years of ideology, where it was said that girls should be separate from boys. Now they're saying "OK, maybe we should mix them together so that we don't have lesbians any more."

**Don't say "I accept you but only if you stay in your closet." Is this what we call support?**

We have also cases of girls who are being pushed into marriage, [and] obliged to undergo psychological reform to heal. These are things that unfortunately [we] deal with every day. The sexual repression in Arab countries, even in the heterosexual context, has led to many arrests. For example, in Dubai, in the last two months, we had a case where two women were kissing – I don't know what was going through their heads – on a public bench, and they got arrested. But this is not a solely lesbian [issue]. It's also for heterosexual couples who kiss in public. These countries are repressed sexually.

This [is] the political context [in which our organization, Meem, was formed]. I'm going to present to you how we started, where we started from, and why we started. But I cannot present Meem without putting it in the [historical]

context of LGTB-organized struggles in Lebanon. Around 1999, a group named Hurriyyat Khassa started as an organization to protect private liberties, which included of course sexual orientation. However, in Hurriyyat Khassa, the small group that was working on sexual orientation decided that they needed to focus more on LGBT issues, and on removing one of the laws from the Lebanese penal code, Law 534. This law states that every homosexual act is unnatural conduct, and is basically a law against sodomy.

**We're looking for any initiative around the Arab world that has space to talk about homosexuality, to send our members and help them, instead of just asking them how they are going to help us**

[This group formed a new organization], Helem, an advocacy organization [whose original mission] was to get rid of this law. Later on they [also] started working on HIV and AIDS. The women within Helem were small in number, and power dynamics emerged, not only because of the [small number of women] members, but also because gay men [conformed] to [traditional] roles of men towards women. So two years ago, a group of women decided to create a support group within Helem. Nobody was envisioning a separation. We called it Helem Girls. We felt that space was needed to discuss matters that are rooted in feminism, gender equality and sexual orientation.

However, a year later, Meem was born [out of Helem Girls] as a separate entity, though still collaborating with Helem. The reason for this was because we decided to be a community of support and empowerment for LGBT women and questioning women. We felt that the lack of LGBTs showing up previously was mainly due to the fact that advocacy was too public. Helem was becoming too public, and the people who were coming to us needed a private place to be able to shape their identity.

Meem started as a mailing list online. It was mostly nicknames at first, and first names. Nobody was sure about what to say and when to say it. Then we told ourselves, "OK, why not just meet?" So we set a date, we got a house, which was one of the members' houses, and we met. [After that], week after week, every Saturday, we would meet in a yoga center, and we would have a two-hour discussion about different topics. In one of these discussions, the idea of a safe place came out, to have a women's house. Everybody was laughing, because come

on, you can't be serious ... a women's house, work on lesbian research?

And then, what happened was that suddenly we had our house, a beautiful house. We started shaping it. This was only in February. Once this house came together, and people started coming together as well, we started to form committees. We started researching because we wanted to find *our* words, words that describe us, and that come from us. We wanted to speak in our voice. We have so many languages in Lebanon. We wanted to discuss representations, analyze them, support discussion, diversity. We dealt with, and still do deal with, emergency cases, even though we are an underground group. Recently, we put out our first lesbian magazine.

We [also] started to offer counseling, and it became huge. We are now offering about 30 counselling sessions per week. Last month, we opened the house to family members and supporters, and we had a great, great discussion. So we're also working on that right now – how to have allies and the people who support us come and share their support with our friends in the house.

All of these is done on volunteer basis. Meem started as a grassroots [organization]; it started with every one of us. And it takes so much effort just to come to the house, to ring that bell and to give your nickname. Most of us are afraid to give our names, because what if I come across someone who knows the family. People [were] coming through that door, crying. Meem became each of us, and the general feeling of each of the current 266 members in one year (applause) is that Meem is us, and we are Meem.

Our empowerment is not only a moral and psychological one. We believe it is of utmost importance to give the means, the tools for development, from technology to feminist history, to gender and sexuality workshops, to sexual health. Because by shaping a strong, smart work community, we build ourselves stronger. I will let Nadine speak to you more about the structure and how we put all this in place, our strategies. Thank you.

**Nadine:** We are running out of time. So, let's talk a bit about strategies, because this session is about building an LGBT movement in the Arab world. The situation in the Arab world is very bad for women in general. We cannot have an LGBT movement outside the context of the feminist movement. So what we've decided [is] that if the women are not going to step up and push feminist boundaries, then we're going to help them do it. One of the things we've done in Meem, for example, is that we sent about 40 or 50 volunteers to this violence against women organization that is working on this fantastic new law. They're doing it alone, and don't have a base of support, so we actually sent them members. We're looking for any initiative around the Arab world that has space to talk about homosexuality, to send our members and help them, instead of just asking them how they are going to help us.

Also, another issue is the political situation. We've got some genius political analysts in the group who tell us what's happening. They tell us where the situation is going, the political context of the country. Because a lot of times you can fall into the trap of thinking very naively about things. There is so much underlying [our contexts] that in order to do something in these countries, you have to [have a strong] analysis.

We've talked a lot about visibility. Our strategy, until this article (about Meem's participation in the AWID forum) came out, was to remain an underground organization, and to do everything very secretly. This is what we believe is the basis for the movement. Why? Because when you are a lesbian or a gay person, you come into activism but you know [nothing] about activism. You are just there by virtue of your own body. You haven't necessarily studied it; you haven't gone to trainings. You don't know what to do. A lot of gay groups suffer, and they get into fights with each other. They can't really get out there unless they have the capacity [to act] as a community and love each other. So what we're doing now in different Arab cities is [gathering together] lesbians from these cities and initiating conversations of support between them, so that there [would be] a nucleus of people there, supporting each other already.

Unless we start from the bottom up, there is no change that is going to happen in the Arab world. Here [is where the] very important role of the women's organizations [comes in]. We seriously can't do this without the women's organizations. If it's going to take us years of talking to them and pleading with them, and buying them flowers and chocolates everyday, and washing their cars – whatever it takes for us to convince them. And if they're not with us, then let them just facilitate the work that we do.

That's the number one strategy that we're using, and that's why it's so important, when it comes to these places. I wish there were more of these women here. But we've been seeking them out throughout the entire forum, in places like this and with the role of funders to help us do that.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EXCERPTS

**Participant:** I am truly honoured to have sat here and listened to what you have done in such a short period of time. I can swear today that we here have learned more here than we have in any other session. All of you have put your souls into a struggle that you feel so passionately about. I only have one question: with your religious beliefs in your countries, how do you deal with having to over and over explain to people that you can be spiritual, and you can have your own sexual identity and religious identity?

**Participant:** The question of women's movements that don't want to associate themselves with lesbians ... I find it very disturbing. I think that one thing that binds us is oppression against women. If lesbians are not free, [it] means all women are not free. Coming to the question of the media, I don't know how progressive the media is, hearing what has been reported. Again, we need to challenge the media, and form alliances with the media. I don't know how difficult this is in your country, but I think it's important to form relationships with the media and educate the media.

**Participant:** There is a saying: "the best things are happening when you're not watching." I think that raising the question of creating an LGBT movement [is itself] a sign that something is happening. Ten or even eight years ago, nobody in Palestinian society would have ever imagined that there will be Aswat for any kind of those voices. I want to say about the relationship with the feminist movement: we've been discussing this back at home for many years, two to three years. I myself was re-educated through the activism [of lesbians] in the feminist movement. Others have to go through that process, so keep challenging us in the feminist movement. Because your challenge is making us much better.

**Participant:** I am from Indonesia. I would also like to share my experience. I think it's very important for us to think about if we are ready to go into the public arena. We have to think about our families. It doesn't mean that we have to follow [a] culture [that] thinks that for a good image of family we have to be heterosexual. Our mothers, for example, our parents ... they have pressure from our society and our [extended] family if they know about this. I think it's very important for us to be activists and to do advocacy for LGBTs. But first we have to advocate to our family, and *then* go out to the public. So [that] when family finds out about this news, they are also ready to answer, ready to face the stigma, ready to face the pressure from society. We have to be really careful with this.

Second, I would like to state my objection, because I heard Islamophobic [comments] here. Well, I am lesbian and I am Muslim. I would like to say that not all Islam is like that. Have you seen the Jihad for Love movies? It's about Islam and homosexuality. It is a problem of fundamentalism, not about Islam. So if you won't want homophobia, please don't be Islamophobic. As feminists, we have to respect other religions.





## Feminist – No “ifs”, Not “buts”! – Mobilizing Feminist Activism in Africa

**Jessica Horn:** Welcome to all of you on behalf of the African Feminist Forum. [The African Feminist Forum] is a collective of individual feminist activists. We are not an organization. We are not a fund. We are not an NGO. We are an independent platform of individual activists who are committed to feminist liberation in Africa. All of the sisters here are involved in that process.

So, today we are weaving. As one of my favourite poets Sandra Maria Esteves would say, weaving is a woman's thing. Women weave souls into healing. Women weave life into being. Women weave societies into freedom. Today, in this talk show, we are weaving. We are weaving a common understanding about what it means to be feminist and African. We're weaving an understanding about what it means to inhabit different bodies as feminists. Different ages, different languages, different locations. I would like to welcome all of you into this weaving process.

I [want to] introduce some of the women who are going to be grilled by the Hope of Africa, Hope Chigudu, our talk show host for today. Coumba Toure is weaving a purple basket. Coumba is from Senegal and she is such an inspirational woman. She's an educational activist. She's a writer. She's a publisher. She is mobilizing young women in very, very disadvantaged communities in Senegal to begin to find voice and write their stories. She is involved in a range of activist work across many different social movements. And obviously she's a very proud feminist. Who can really dance.

Sarah Mukasa is a Ugandan feminist currently living in Ghana. She is the director of programs for the African Women's Development Fund. Sarah has been in this for a long time. She has been mobilizing young women through leadership training, through feminist advocacy. She's very involved in the Ugandan women's movement and mobilizing black women in Europe. Welcome to Sarah.

And on the far right, is field marshal Muthoni who is a Kenyan feminist freedom fighter. Who has taken a lot of organizations by storm, currently the Kenyan Human Rights Commission. And she was very vocal and very visible in denouncing abuses and defending the cause of democracy in the recent coup in Kenya. Muthoni is a journalist, a broadcaster. She writes for the East African Reader every week. You can read it online.

And last but not least, the Hope of Africa. Hope is one of those people that comes into movement spaces and just turns us around. She's the most incredible visionary mind and she is a creative deviant. Everything she does makes us think differently. Because activism is about the

practice of thinking differently. Hope is always challenging us, and she going to be really challenging these people today. She's also been dubbed the Inspector General of the Feminist Movement in Uganda. So, watch out.

**Hope Chigudu:** Welcome to this discussion. It's a very friendly discussion. It'll be an interesting discussion – you chose wisely. Before me [are] feminist veterans. Some of them have got scars, some of them are limping, some of them are tired. But they are feminists, they are activists, [and] they are doing great work on the continent. Could you tell us why you are feminists without ifs, without buts, without swish, swish, swish?

**Coumba Toure:** Hello everyone. I'm happy to be here and I'm so inspired just this morning by the plenary. I am a feminist and I don't try to justify it. I don't care what people think about what it means to be feminist. I say not ifs, not buts because I think too many times we shy away and run away from being called feminist because of everything that could be attached to it. So, we say that we are not trying to justify anything. Whatever you think is in it, it's in it. And we own it. No ifs, not buts.

**Hope Chigudu:** Thank you. Veteran Sarah?

**Sarah Mukasa:** I am a feminist. No ifs and no buts because feminism is the revolution that taught me how to dance. It is a movement that celebrated who I am. It is the one movement that told me I deserve dignity and respect regardless of who I am, regardless of what I do. It is a place in which I constantly find liberation. It takes me to places, sometimes kicking and screaming. But when I get there, the self-discovery, the growth and the inspiration is amazing. So I am committed to this movement. I have very many warts. I have very many shortcomings. But I give and I am determined to give what I have for the feminist movement in Africa.

**Hope Chigudu:** Thank you, Sarah. Commanding Chief of the Feminist Forces, Muthoni?

**Muthoni Wanyeki:** I think we all have adopted the slogan in the African Feminist Forum of no ifs, no buts because so many ifs and so many buts still prevail in the broader African women's movement. No ifs, no buts is an assertion of feminists within that space. It is an assertion, I think, on our continent that we do try to stand for all women. I am a feminist because I think feminism is the one sort of space

that pushes us to look at our personal practices, far more than any of the other kind of ideologies that I identify with, pan-Africanism, Leftism and so on. It forces us to ask questions about our own behaviour and how we bring that behaviour into the institutions that we work for.

**Hope Chigudu:** Thanks very much. There are many professions in this world. You could have chosen to be doctors. You could have chosen to be nurses. You could have chosen to be teachers. Why did you choose to be weavers knowing that we might get underpaid for this work that we do. Should we start with you Sarah?

**Sarah Mukasa:** I don't know if I found the work, really. I think this work found me. I was a young African woman, living in the United Kingdom. My mother was there as a refugee. I saw the difficulties that they were all going through, the women in my mother's position. I, like many young women, would sit and agonize about these things. And then one day, a friend of mine said to me, “Stop waxing lyrical about these complaints. Come to this organization and volunteer your time to help these women.” I didn't think there was much I could do but I went all the same. I found a whole library of books in this tiny little organization. Books I had never seen before in the school curriculum, written by African women about the experience of African women. I thought “I have found a home.” I started off as a volunteer and things have sort of moved on. I don't think I can do anything else.

**Coumba Toure:** How did I get here? Getting involved was just part of how I was raised. I always saw my mom getting involved in everything. She's never been part of any movement or any organization, but if a neighbour needed something, she'd be walking with her, taking her somewhere – or finding this paper, seeing this doctor. I grew up knowing that when you witness something, you are part of it and you have to do something about it. I think that's part of what brought me here. But also I think I am a testament to the fact that there are good mentors in this movement. I am here because there are women, older than me, who supported me. They gave me the opportunity, the space, to do what I wanted to do.

**Muthoni Wanyeki:** I think I got involved the way all of us get involved. I think it's that constant search to understand yourself in the context that you come from. I come from Kenya, from a middle-class, mixed-race family. But all around me was the context of the Moi regime and the repression of that regime. I then moved to Canada to go to school [and had to deal] with racism, with a sense of being an outsider. In feminism and in the different strands of feminist thought that exist, I found analysis that helped me to understand my place in the world, and my obligation. So feminism is much about saving myself as it is about saving anyone else.

**Hope Chigudu:** So there you are, our stories are woven into our bodies and that's why these women are weaving. I have a question for you Sarah. We have talked about the African Feminist Forum. Who is she? What are the exciting ideas that have come out of her? What are her colours? What is her identity?

**Sarah Mukasa:** Women's organizing has been going on in the continent for a very, very long time. Towards the end of [the 90s], a few of us in different parts of Africa [started] thinking about having an internal discussion amongst ourselves: What is this movement? What are our values? What are our principles? How are we going to negotiate this terrain we're finding ourselves in? There was a need for us to deepen our analysis and sharpen our tools of engagement with different processes.

**I am a feminist.  
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So a few of us met together in Zanzibar in Tanzania in 2003 to try and create this space in which we could all come and sit and say, “What has this movement achieved? What are the challenges? And what are we going to do about it?” That process evolved [into a] kind of framework [for the African Feminist Forum]. Then, three years down the line in 2006, we had our first meeting in Accra, Ghana. That gathering brought together women from all over Africa, from different levels of engagement, different levels of activism, and different locations from which they were trying to push the feminist agenda.

**Hope Chigudu:** Could you comment on what has been achieved? You've met twice and twice you should have achieved something?

**Sarah Mukasa:** Fair question. I think the most important outcome of the African Feminist Forum is giving the women who come to it a sense of confidence about moving forward and standing openly for everything that the forum stands for, including very difficult issues in Africa like choice, like gender identity and sexual orientation. So that's a huge outcome, I think.

Apart from that individual sense of confidence is the creation of an autonomous pan-African space that isn't linked to the UN. Up to that point, we were always meeting in the corridors of the UN, always fighting to retain some

little gain in policy frameworks. Or more recently, at the African Union, where we got huge gains, but our meetings were always frenzied and focused on very specific legal policy outcomes. This is an autonomous space where we can actually argue, actually debate.

Other outcomes: the Charter. We have a Charter of African Feminist Principles that addresses all the terrible things that all of us have experienced within the movement. Everything from corruption to being treated really badly by our boards and by our management, to being excluded, to really insisting that standing for feminism means that you stand for all women at all times, no matter what the cost. That Charter is amazing. I think it's started to become a tool for debate within women's organizations around the continent, and that's huge.

## That Charter is amazing. I think it's started to become a tool for debate within women's organizations around the continent, and that's huge

The other thing that has come out of it is national Feminist Forums. Some women were so inspired after the first one [that they created their own]. Nigera has held its first Feminist Forum. Uganda held its first Feminist Forum. Tanzania brought the Feminist Forum into their gender festival. Kenyans have just started to meet. I'm ashamed to say that we are a little bit behind. I think [the African Feminist Forum] is sparking off a new space for constructive critique of the women's movement – critique that will move us and our practices forward. So it is spinning off in different ways.

**Hope Chigudu:** What should the African Feminist Forum focus on in the next five years? Muthoni, what do you see as key issues on the continent that they should be focusing on?

**Muthoni Wanyeki:** I think I spoke a little bit about it this morning. There is real crisis of democracy on the continent. We have to address it because that crisis is what is leading to the failure of peace agreements all across the continent. It's leading to leaders retracting on promises that they have made around agreements to resolve that conflict, around agreements to move forward democratically. I think also we are going to be focusing on the real economic issues. This food crisis is real. This fuel crisis is real. And even if not very many of the masses of African women have investments in venture capital funds, we are certainly

going to feel the fallout of that sooner rather than later. So I think we're back to real basics about political organizing and real basics about economic organizing.

**Hope Chigudu:** The feminist veterans, the generals of the feminist movement, have talked about their lives and how they started weaving, why they started weaving and how they are weaving. I now want to turn to you and ask if you have questions for them. I think in our own right we are all weavers. That's why we are here. So let's weave a very, very strong, huge basket. Any questions, any comments, any disagreements, angers, joys, pains, bring them here. Let's discuss them.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EDITED EXCERPTS

**Participant:** I'm a feminist from Kenya. My question is about the Congo and women in the DRC who are experiencing a holocaust. Being based partly in the US, what I'm seeing is that holocaust has turned into a *cause célèbre* among Western feminists. I am sick of hearing about the women of the Congo from Eve Ensler and Suze Orman and a whole bunch of Western feminists. But I don't have something concrete to counter it with and I want us to be doing something, but I don't know where we stand on that in a way that we can say, "This, as African feminists is where we stand on this and how we are mobilizing around this."

**Sarah Mukasa:** I will respond to the comment from the Congo and what are African women doing to respond to some of that. There are a lot of African women – Congolese women, women from outside, many who are in this room – who are fighting for the rights of their communities. The African Women's Development Fund has a number of grantees in the Congo who are doing work. That is also the same for other funds – the Urgent Action Fund, MamaCash – all these women's funds, feminist funds, are giving support to the organizing efforts of women on the ground. I think maybe what we are not doing is getting that story across. Maybe that's what we're not doing. But definitely those efforts are taking place.

My organization and the organizations I've mentioned are not the only ones that are doing this work. There are many, many, many others. I'd encourage us to go and look at some of the publications, some of the documentaries. There are numerous documentaries and stories coming out of the agency of Congolese women and what they are doing and the support they are getting from women throughout the continent. Maybe we are not telling that story loud enough, but definitely those efforts are there.

The continent is riddled with conflict. But I also think that African women [are having an impact]. I look at a country like Liberia and what came out of women's organizing efforts in Liberia. They sent these guys packing



with their guns back to where it was they came from. And they didn't stop there, the women. They then organized to get the first women president in Africa into office. And not only that. They have organized to take over key ministries within the state framework to ensure that their needs and their aspirations as women are taken care of. Same thing in Sierra Leone. Women are organizing, and we should hear their stories. These examples are going on throughout the continent.

So yes, whilst we are faced with all of these challenges, I think we must celebrate the fact that there are efforts taking place, not nearly enough and they all have their own challenges, but those efforts are there. We owe it to ourselves as feminists who come from Africa to celebrate those and to not lose sight of them in our agonizing, and to use them to inspire us to move from one level to the other.

**Muthoni Wanyeki:** I think women are doing in the Congo what they have done in every other conflict situation on the ground. They are first and foremost documenting what is happening to women, and they have been doing that for 10 years plus. They are the ones who first got the story of the massive rape and sexual violence out through community radio networks, through the women's movement, and so on.

They have also been fighting extremely hard and continue to fight very hard to be at the tables where negotiations and discussions are happening. Just last week, the International Conference on the Great Lakes met in Nairobi. Once again women were at the margins trying to get out. A couple of weeks ago, women from Burundi, Rwanda, and the Congo, from the parliamentary level as well as from women's organizations, met to discuss how they can best move forward on the process. These are not unique efforts.

It is incumbent upon us to always assume that women are acting on the ground, because they are, and to find the means to reach them through institutions that either fund them, like the feminist funds, or that leverage their position in the political processes of conflict resolution. UNIFEM's offices spend a lot of time in this region doing exactly that kind of work. Trying to identify who are the women who can speak to the issues and bring them to the peace tables. There are ways to reach these women. We just always have to assume that the women are there and reach out to them.

**Participant:** I am a feminist from Tanzania. I wanted to agree that we need to document and really understand what is going on in our own societies. I wanted to share an example from Tanzania, where at the moment we are working on a study. We call it the women's movement/feminist movement study. This study is a way of trying to understand what is happening with our own processes regarding women's movement and feminist movements. The initial findings show us that women are

organizing with their own leadership, and working on their own issues, and are celebrating while they are struggling. I really want to emphasize how they are celebrating while they are struggling. I think they are giving us a lesson on the way we, at the national and other levels, have always said “we have not done this, we have not done that.” They keep saying instead, “we've done this, we've done that. We're not there yet, but we have the energy to move on.”

**Participant:** I am from the United States. I am a writer and I work in Communications at the Global Fund for Women. This idea of our stories and our voices – what's happening in Congo and why isn't it in the media – that is something that we do try to address directly, and we need help to do that. That's a big part of our strategy – is to share these stories. We have been working with the press while we are here. There is someone from the Financial Times who is interested in speaking to one of the Congolese women who are here, because we are pushing out to the media that there are women who know what is happening on the ground. But this is also a big opportunity for us, with the Feminist Tech Exchange, to do it our own way, to be telling our own stories, because the media will always re-interpret and often times only give a fraction of what it is you need to say. So it's a multi-pronged process that we all have to engage in and be strategic about.

**In our movement we talk about inspiring young people. I want them to see people that they want to look like, not people that they want to run away from**

The other thing I want to ask about is Obama. Barack Obama has been elected president of the United States of America. That is an amazing moment for us as African Americans. In my time here in South Africa everyone is asking me about that. But I see where South Africa is now. We looked with such hope at South Africa in the 90's. How do we, as black people in this world, make sure that we sustain this change that is going on right now – this moment of change both in the US? How do we make connections and support him as African people?

**Participant:** I am from London. I am a personal development trainer and I have a question. I am curious to know what is happening on this continent with regards to the individual healing process – that pain, the emotional bleeding when someone has seen their family massacred. I'm in London and I deal with the refugees, and I can tell you I have

heard about that pain. And that pain does not go away with a school, with a dam, with a new road. I am concerned with what is happening on the personal level. That quiet moment when you go to bed and you have this psychic scars and the memories are coming back. What sort of healing process is going on?

**Muthoni Wanyeki:** I want to respond to the question of supporting change with the new, incoming US President. Of course we're all overjoyed. Of course it's one of those moments that you don't think you'll see in your lifetime, and you do, and you're there – which is amazing. But I think at a very practical level we have to remember all this really means is that the Democrats are back in power. For Africa, possibly, that means that there is an opening to really address long-standing questions of American foreign policy. The intention is apparently to break down the 3D strategy – which we totally support. And of course, sorry, I got so carried away I forgot one of the most important things for African women, which is the whole question of the global gag-rule [brought in by Bush and reversed by Obama], which just devastated support to reproductive rights on the continent.

**Sarah Mukasa:** I want to agree with some of the comments that have been made from the floor about our documenting and understanding the processes that we want to engage with. I really think that we need to arm

ourselves with information that can help us because that's part of the process of raising our voices. And just to reiterate the point that Muthoni made: let us always assume that something is going on with women who are in the most vulnerable positions but who have nevertheless taken the decision or taken the very bold step to try and address some of the very many challenges. Muthoni has said everything about Barack Obama. I didn't think it would happen even when all the indications were that it would happen.

**Coumba Toure:** On that note. I get a new slogan to play with, with the kids [I work with]: Yes, we can! And we can decline it in any way we want. To me that is part of our work – is to inspire people. If all of us really look at what brought us here, we have been somehow, somewhere, inspired by somebody.

I would also like to speak a bit about healing, not to bring an answer because I don't have it, but because it is something that I am feeling right here. Someone earlier was saying “Who's tired? Raise your hand.” I think so many of us feminists are tired. So many feminist mentors that have been going for so many years – fighting and fighting, fighting and fighting, and falling. I don't see any space for healing for them. To me that's a question that needs to be addressed.

In our movement we talk about inspiring young people. I want them to see people that they want to look like, not



people that they want to run away from because they are so destroyed by so many things that they have been fighting for. I have right here in my mind, images and stories of people that I know of that I am looking for spaces, places somewhere, someone to do something and I don't know where to take them.

I want to say the name of Constance. I just spoke it this morning. She's from the Ivory Coast, a feminist who has fought and done so many things. She has been stripped naked by the police, beaten. She has continued to speak for women who are raped at police stations, and has been accused of being a rebel. Today, she is still living in the Ivory Coast, but even when we try and help her, we don't know what to do because she's so destroyed. I don't see any organization that is ready to take on women, feminist or not, who have been hurt. So it's really something to think about. Even in this place, as we come to this forum. I think we need spaces to renew, to heal.

**Hope Chigudu:** I'm afraid that we have to finish up because I think our time is up. Sorry, I know there's still more questions. I'd like to thank the panel so much for their insight and to really emphasize that we need to start weaving together – purple, red, brown, whatever. Let's weave, support each other and make a very, very strong movement. We can bring all our baskets and move mountains together. We can actually build a mountain if we weave together.



## I became more assured in what I'm doing

“The forum helped me to open my minds and see women's rights and gender equality in broader way. It helped me to see how many women from different parts of the world act for promotion and protection of our rights! I became more assured in what I am doing because I am not alone with my colleagues in my country. We are all together all around the world. The forum and the FTX also changed my views on women's access to technology. It is not only men's priority or job. We can do it by ourselves.”

- *Women's Rights Activist*

## It was overwhelming to watch all the women

The FTX or feminist technology exchange was the personal highlight of my life. There I became part of a group that worked with digital story telling. Others participated in programs that included radio, video, social networking – all things that involved technology via mobile or PC. The four days there taught me many things that I was aware of but had no experience doing.

The forum itself was mind-blowing in my life as a woman and a lesbian from a small place in my country. It was overwhelming to watch all the women from all over the world come together and speak their language with so much pride and pain. To feel their ambience in the air was enough to make me love and live life even harder.

Despite the challenges of all that we came from, just being there with all these beautiful and strong women was an amazing experience. To this day it still lingers and will always be in my heart forever.

- *Participant from Fiji*





## New Insights on Religious Fundamentalisms

*For more information about the Challenging and Resisting Religious Fundamentalisms program and to download copies of related studies and reports, visit <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-Initiatives/Resisting-and-Challenging-Religious-Fundamentalisms>*

**Shareen Gokal:** We've heard a little bit about what is religious fundamentalism, and who is a religious fundamentalist. I'd like to talk a little about the *impact* of religious fundamentalists on women's organizing. [In our survey], we wanted to learn more deeply, where is the impact being felt? [We therefore asked this] as an open-ended question, and received more than 600 very detailed examples from all over the world, which we tried to sort into some broad categories. Because there are so many examples, I can't really go in depth with each one, but what I'll try to do is maybe pull out some of the [common threads] along with the more obvious impacts.

**Control of women's bodies and issues of sexuality:** About 50 percent of the examples concentrated on or mentioned reproductive rights as a major challenge in terms of the obstructions of those rights in their contexts: things like access to contraceptives, criminalization of abortion or resisting any changes to legalizing abortion, sex education. But we also got examples that talked about broader health issues. For example, both Muslim fundamentalists and the Vatican had opposed polio vaccinations, which led to many deaths but that we may not relate to religious fundamentalisms. Issues of morality and sexuality were also often mentioned. We found that these took different manifestations in different regions, but they were all linked to issues of controlling morality and defining norms around morality and sexuality. LGBTIQ communities were most frequently targeted – in about 75 percent of the cases we reviewed.

**Violence against women:** We received a lot of very stark examples of violence against women perpetrated by religious fundamentalist groups. But also included amongst these examples were more nuanced examples of violence where religious fundamentalist groups were, for example, encouraging women to stay in abusive situations or not allowing counseling for women to get out of those abusive situations. There was even some silence on the part of some religious authorities that let violence go on within communities.

**Negative impact on development:** We know that religion in its more positive and progressive forms can be quite a transformational force, but with very fundamentalist interpretations of religion, it wasn't playing that role. In

fact, fundamentalist religions were very complicit with the power structure of the day, and keeping those very unjust power structures in place. So there is also a negative impact on development, despite all the rhetoric of helping the poor.

**Negative impact on civil society:** We had a lot of examples where religious fundamentalists were either directly harassing, threatening, or obstructing the participation of women's rights in civil society. But women's rights activists [also] told us of [indirect impacts] – for example, that they'd diverted so much energy fighting this backlash that all of the resources and the energy the might have put into other things – such as sustainability issues, equity issues, economic justice issues – were taken up in the fight on reproductive rights and sexuality.

**Public policy:** this is important to mention because there are many negative examples of how public policies have been affected by religious fundamentalist groups. The example that we have from the US is just one in terms of a leader that comes in with very fundamentalist tendencies and issues the global gag order, for example. We received examples of the effects of public policy in a range of areas, like reducing the minimum age of marriage, or criminalization of abortion, of sex outside marriage, or pornography, of sex work, etc.

Women's rights activists also talked about the very divisive influence that religious fundamentalisms were having, [by] undermining pluralism and tolerance, and this shows up in different places. For example, in India it shows up as a heightening of communal tension, and in Pakistan as sectarian violence. In many countries in the West, for example, they're fighting for separate school and separate legal structures, which just shows the very insular nature of fundamentalisms. There's also the creation of "in-groups" and "out-groups." Groups that follow the norms set up by religious fundamentalist groups, and everyone that doesn't falls into the out-group.

Lastly, there is the **psychological impact**. A lot of women's rights activists referred to this in terms of religious fundamentalism narrowing the space for thought and action on the part of women. [This narrowing] makes women's rights activists conform to a very narrow set of identities and uses psychological violence, fear, and intimidation in a way that other political forces do not.

**Cassandra Balchin:** Shareen has talked about the highly negative impact of religious fundamentalisms but I'd like to add a bit of a word of caution here. I think we also need to remember that there are other aspects to religious



fundamentalists. So, for example, they're also pro-poor, they campaign against poverty, they provide essential services, they remind us of the essential importance of family in human society, they're also less corrupt and more honest than other political forces, they defend national and local traditions in the face of the onslaught of globalization, and finally, aren't they just a political force, like any other political force, and don't they have the right to operate in a democratic space?

Actually our research revealed that every single one of the statements that I just made to be largely a myth. And there are many, many myths that women's rights advocates hold about religious fundamentalisms, and many myths that religious fundamentalists would like society to believe about them. In our research, we focused on ten of the major myths. We don't have time to present all the myths in detail, but they are in one of our publications.

**Juan Marco Vaggione:** Briefly, [these first two] myths are like two faces of the same coin. One myth is making us believe that simply to follow religion is the same as being a religious fundamentalist. The other myth, which is the opposite, is thinking that religious fundamentalisms are like any other political force, that they are purely political. It's clear that religious fundamentalism doesn't have to do exclusively with religion. But it isn't purely political either. The symbolism, the presence of texts, and the appeal to the divine are all aspects of religious fundamentalisms. It is in this duality of the religious and the political where the strategies to confront religious fundamentalisms have an important place.

**Cassandra Balchin:** I'm going to look in more detail at the myth that religious fundamentalism is like any other political force, and that we should allow them the democratic space. The way this works is that very often, national governments as well as multilateral agencies insist that space be given to religious fundamentalists as part of the democratic space. So, for example, you have a foreign embassy in Bangladesh talking frequently with religious fundamentalist groups who have serious criminal charges against them. When they challenge [this practice], women's rights advocates are told "yes, but they are part of your democratic political space."

I really want to challenge this [assertion] that religious fundamentalists are like any other political force. Indeed they're not. The way they operate is very, very different. Religious fundamentalists are not like any other political force because they claim to have god on their side, and that is an extremely powerful weapon. It becomes very difficult to challenge something when you're told, for example, that gender roles are natural and god-given. That's very difficult to challenge because you can't provide empirical proof. Metaphysical questions are very difficult to challenge. So, for example, you have huge emotional rallies called by evangelical groups in Brazil that bring people together to answer the question of why do they

exist. Other political forces don't do that. Other political forces can't do this.

Religious fundamentalisms are not ordinary political forces because they're absolutist and intolerant. They're also extremely violent. They're violent against political opponents, they are violent against other religions, and they are violent against political opponents within their own religion. They're also fundamentally anti-pluralist, anti-democratic. To give just one isolated example: Hindu fundamentalists in India have attempted to make villages Muslim-free by violently chasing out Muslim families. In other contexts, they have polarized society between the religious and the non-religious. We were given many, many examples of how religious fundamentalists have attacked the public education system and tried to divide it along religious lines, so that society in fact is not pluralist, but atomized and divided up.

## Religious fundamentalists are not like any other political force because they claim to have god on their side, and that is an extremely powerful weapon

We were also given very concrete examples of how religious fundamentalists seek to de-fund their political opponents. For example, in Mexico, the fundamentalist-influenced minister of health obstructed funding for all NGOs that were working on lesbian-gay-transsexual-transgender issues. In Bangladesh, the fundamentalists were able, through a coalition government, to take over the ministry of social welfare and de-register progressive NGOs. In Canada, the evangelical-influenced conservative government has cut funding precisely for those women's organizations that were doing accountability work on the Canadian government.

Religious fundamentalists also attack feminists and collective organizing. They may claim to promote democracy or democratic activism, but they attack collective organizing. For example, the progressive church in the United States was strategically undermined throughout the 1980s and 1990s by religious fundamentalists. And in Latin America, there have been attempts, for example, to de-register Catholics for Free Choice. The religious fundamentalists' love affair with democracy is very self-serving.

**Juan Marco Vaggione:** Another myth has to do with religious fundamentalisms existing only in some regions or

religions. This myth has two different faces. On the one hand, sometimes there is the belief that this is something that happens in another place, somewhere else, or to other people. On the other hand, there is the belief that this happens to me only, my region, my people, my struggle. What stands out in our study is that despite regional and religious differences, there are many similarities in the opinions and attitudes of women's rights activists when they tell their experiences or describe religious fundamentalisms. We believe that these similar conceptualizations open important spaces to think about transnational strategies.

**Deepa Shankaran:** [Another myth is that] religious fundamentalisms stand for the poor and the downtrodden, for justice for the little guy. That's because flying the banner of justice is a powerful way of gaining support for the fundamentalist cause. Fundamentalist movements are able to gain legitimacy through service delivery and charity, and in some cases, by co-opting the language of human rights and even gender. In this way, they gain support from governments and aid agencies. Some are even able to partner with development organizations and even some women's rights groups. [Because of these tactics], it becomes crucial to unpack the rhetorical campaigning of fundamentalists groups and to measure it against concrete actions and impacts.

## While religious fundamentalists claim to stand for the poor, in practice, they are often parasitic upon the economic and social stresses of communities

While religious fundamentalists claim to stand for the poor, in practice, they are often parasitic upon the economic and social stresses of communities. Many women's rights activists note that service provision is a band-aid solution, superficial and short-lived. They encourage passive acceptance of existing economic structures and urge people to turn inwards for salvation rather than supporting communities to challenge the root causes of poverty and inequality.

Religious fundamentalists do not protect the poor nor do they stand up for the little guy. In human rights language, to stand for justice is understood as promoting and protecting the right to non-discrimination and protecting the marginalized. The AWID survey revealed, on the

contrary, that marginalized groups – including LBGTIQ groups – are frequently targeted by religious fundamentalists. Ethno-nationalist discourse, homophobic discourse, and racist discourse are all exploited by religious fundamentalists. The targeting of women is also widespread: over 77 percent of women's rights activists say that women are frequently or sometimes targeted for verbal or physical attack. This means that they are subject to fundamentalist violence simply because they are women.

**Saira Zuberi:** The next myth that we looked at was that religious fundamentalists defend our traditional ways and our authentic identities. Religious fundamentalists portray and position themselves as defenders and upholders of “our true authentic selves,” portraying their particular interpretations as representing the “true” church, or “pure” Islam, or “correct” Buddhist, Jewish, or Hindu practice. They claim that these ideologies defend us from foreign or western domination. At times, these claims make it difficult to separate ethnic, nationalist, or cultural supremacist ideologies from religious fundamentalist ones.

The emphasis on the way of being “true” or “correct” or “authentic” to any religion can make religious fundamentalisms very difficult to challenge. From the survey responses, however, and the interviews conducted, we've seen many examples of how purportedly “true” ways of practicing a religion are not actually traditional at all. They are often products of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of powerful transnational organizations such as the Opus Dei, the Hindu RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), the Muslim Brotherhood, and the World Jewish Union. The extent to which these religious fundamentalist ideologies are defending authentic local ways and identities is called into question by our research repeatedly. One survey respondent points out how advertisements that are talking about the pro-life movement in Puerto Rico use actors that don't actually have Puerto Rican accents. So, you can see how the actual materials for marketing these advertisements are created in one market and used in other markets – it's very transnational.

**Shareen Gokal:** The last myth that we'd like to expose about religious fundamentalisms is a really good one: the fact that they're not invincible. While we don't want to deny the influence of religious fundamentalisms, we also don't want to overstate it. The fact is that they want to be portrayed as very credible, legitimate, influential forces in society, and often they're not. We should be careful not to give them credit and legitimacy, or to overstate their influence. In fact, it was women who were living or had lived under the most oppressive religious fundamentalist regimes who told us that we shouldn't think that they are invincible or larger than life forces – that in fact when they come to power, they're often exposed for their true selves as being illegitimate, corrupt forces who can't, even themselves, live up to what they preach. Unfortunately, that comes at a really great cost in terms of women's rights

and human rights when that does happen. But the fact is that we shouldn't let them take too much power. They often sow the seeds of their own destruction when they come into power, [because they] cannot live up to their own ideas that they preach.

At the same time, we also want to remember the strength of our own movements. The fact is that even though our research has shown that religious fundamentalism is on the rise, we have been able, as women's rights movements, at the same time to [achieve] many gains in light of religious fundamentalisms. So, we shouldn't forget all these gains that have been achieved.

It's on this kind of more positive note that we'd like to end the session and give you a chance to tell us what you think about it. Is this what you are experiencing in your own context? Are there questions that you have for us in terms of the research that we've done?

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EDITED EXCERPTS

**Participant:** In terms of fundamentalism being a political force and the claims about democracy and being part of a democratic process, I see a real danger in trying to counter that with playing into efforts to counter other political forces that are seen as marginal or undesirable. My question is how do you suggest dealing with those claims of fundamentalism being democratic without threatening other groups that see their own laws as democratic?

**Participant:** I'm the director of Catholics for a Free Choice in Mexico. I want to congratulate AWID for this investigation. I think that what you're doing is right. I wanted to ask if there was something related to strategies to deal with fundamentalisms.

**Participant:** Given the list of the myths that you have outlined, I note that actually what we are calling religious fundamentalisms is a belief system, and religion is just one part of those belief systems. There are other beliefs in cultural systems like in our communities or societies. Genital mutilation is a belief system; it's not a religious system but it is fundamental in its outlook. So, I think that religious fundamentalism is only part of the belief system, and what we are talking about is belief fundamentalism.

**Shareen Gokal:** I can respond directly to the strategies question. In fact we did a call out for strategies from women's rights activists to resist and challenge fundamentalisms this summer, and we received about 200 responses to that call. We've done a selection of case studies based on those responses. Eleven of the authors are here at the forum, and will be doing a two-part session tomorrow. We invite you to attend that session. What we hope to do by next year is have a publication that

documents those strategies as well as 12 other shorter strategies, across regions and across religions.

**Cassandra Balchin:** How do we deal with religious fundamentalisms claiming to be democratic? Precisely by exposing them through the examples that we gave, and through the examples in your own contexts of how anti-pluralist, absolutist and intolerant [they are]. What do they do that undermines the essence of democracy? Democracy may have its own manifestation in your local context, but it's going to fall into some basic patterns that we would all recognize as democracy. What is it that religious fundamentalists do in that particular context that is fundamentally anti-democratic? We found some commonalities: they are anti-plural, they are anti-collective organizing, and most importantly at least for me, they go out of their way to de-fund other people. You can say that certain other right-wing ideologies are anti-pluralist, but we found very clear examples of religious fundamentalists trying to de-fund everybody else. Also, the fundamentalist's instrumentalization of democracy is very self-serving, and that's also useful to expose.

**Juan Marco Vaggione:** Just to add something from a more Latin American perspective on the issue of "well, they claim to be part of the democratic arena, what should we do?" In Latin American, the idea of laity or laic states has become a crucial strategy for saying, OK, you want to be public, you want to have a space in democracy. Well, democracy requires some dimensions, for example Church-State separation. So, you can be public, you have a role in democracy, but the role has limits like every organization, every political party, every individual. Democracy has rules that should also be obeyed by religious fundamentalists. So, thinking in the Latin American context, democracy in itself provides the strategies to say what are the limitations for fundamentalists actors when they act publicly.

**Cassandra Balchin:** As regards the third question on religious fundamentalisms as a belief system: clearly religious fundamentalisms are part of a broad complex of right wing ideologies, and we recognize that. In some instances, it's very difficult to separate religious fundamentalisms from other fundamentalisms, particularly from ethnic fundamentalisms. So, again, the example of Sri Lanka, which is a very clear example of ethno-religious fundamentalisms working together. We wanted to look specifically at religious fundamentalisms [in our study], because there seems to be a particular way that they were operating that was different. This comes back to the myth we were talking about earlier, about being able to claim [that certain things are] god-given. It's something that makes the impact of religious fundamentalisms quite different, and what we wanted to do with the research is actually look at what it is particularly about religious fundamentalisms that have meaning for women's human rights.

**Participant:** I'm with the Women's UN Report Network, and we monitor cases like this every single day. I can say truly in the past five years I've seen an increased polarization of religious fundamentalism intersecting with government power. Whether it's five women buried alive in Pakistan or an honour killing, the intersectionality of religion and politics is profound. But no government wants to be embarrassed,

and one of the one of the ways we've been able to move these issues forward is to document then, to put up pictures. Another way is to continue to keep the pressure on, day after day. This study is brilliant, but putting it out once isn't enough. It's got to go out again and again.



## The NGOization of Women's Movements and its Implications for Feminist Organizing

**Dzodzi Tsikata:** Good afternoon my sisters and a few brothers. We on this panel all agree that NGOization is a big issue in our movement. I would like to add that NGOization clearly represents the growing dominance of a certain organizational form that is different from the early consciousness-raising organizations and also different from the mass organizing that women have been very good at. NGOization is not particular to women though. It's a huge wave that has engulfed all of civil society organizing. I think we are correctly concerned about this.

In this presentation I want to discuss with you how women's NGOs in Ghana have responded to some of the challenges they face because of NGOization. [The primary strategy has been] to amplify the strengths of NGOs [in order to] deal with some of the inherent weaknesses in NGOs, which is the vehicle we've chosen [for our organizing].

One can trace the period of NGOization back to the 1970s when women's organizations began to take an interest in policy issues. In that period we had a military regime, but we also had a proliferation of women's NGOs: small, focused, working on all sort of issues, and very effective in the small areas that we had chosen. In the late 1990s, a number of events took place, which led women to decide that the lack of a common platform was a problem. [First], there was a study on the national machinery for women. It was done in eight African countries, and Ghana was one of them. Many Ghanaian NGOs participated in the study. The study found that one of the reasons why they could not influence the national machinery was that they lacked a common platform. So, they resolved to establish a Network for Women's Rights in Ghana. This was a collection of individuals and NGOs and also, interestingly, some mass organizations. The Trades Union Congress of Ghana was actually a member of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana.

This remarkable coalition meant that, for the first time, the issue of our membership – who is in, who is out, mass politics, and so on – was put on the table. So although the Network for Women's Rights never had the kind of mass

membership that its founders [hoped for], it did something which changed the NGOs landscape. NGOs now had a platform: to work together and therefore to reduce some of the challenges of the NGO approach. The other thing Netright did was to insist that *rights* had to be at the centre of our organizing, and that the issue of *need* had to start taking second place sometimes. And also, at times, the developmentalist approach also had to take second place. Netright also decided to cushion itself away from donor demands by not going directly to donors for money. It determined that its membership should fund the organization, to ensure that it had a life, and that individual members had to pay dues.

Netright had several successes. [First], what it did was introduce a new type of organizing into the life force of women's organizations in Ghana. [Secondly], that led then to the birth of the Women's Manifesto Coalition, a huge undertaking of women who managed to marshal all sorts of mass organizations – including trade unions, teachers, nurses and so on – to produce a manifesto for women. [This was] something quite unprecedented in the Ghanaian space. Thirdly, it led to the Domestic Violence Bill Coalition, a collective which tried to push domestic violence legislation. It took this coalition six years to have this domestic violence bill passed.

This coalition became the real test of whether the women's movement in Ghana had arrived or not, because the state came out in full opposition to the bill. In that sense, it was through the Domestic Violence Bill Coalition that many women came to understand the limits of relations with the state. Because one of the key issues is that NGOs don't like to have bad relations with the state. [NGO's] have to register. They have to work within the shadow of the state. Many donors want to see that they engage in policy advocacy, which means that you cannot stay outside of policy work. But through the struggle [around the] violence bill, NGOs learned that the state was not an arm of the women's movement or a friend necessarily to the women's movement.

While NGOization still remains a huge issue for the



women's movement in Ghana, I think that women's organizations in Ghana have come to recognize by their work that NGOs are not synonymous with civil society nor with the women's movement.

Women's organizations have learned the importance of a common platform. We learned some methods which work better than others. We've also learned that when we are in control of our voices, it's easy to achieve [our goals]. We were able to write a manifesto, [which] was a huge success. Everybody celebrated it. When it came to the domestic violence bill, there were a lot of fears, [but] eventually the bill was passed. Some clauses we wanted did not get into it, but NGOs still remain committed to ensuring that the bill is implemented. Last but not least, we learned the need to build constituencies over the long term, beyond our individual organizations.

**Saba Khatak:** I want to [place] the women's movement [in Pakistan] in the larger context of Pakistani politics. In the 1970s, the military took over, and soon after that, Afghanistan's war started, in 1979. [The war] provided a lot of support for Islamic Mujahadeen, and in Pakistan it also brought a lot of support for Zia-ul-Haq who introduced discriminatory legal systems in Pakistan [that] were anti-women.

[It was in] this context that the Women's Action Forum was formed. I think it was among the first feminist organizations that was completely voluntary [and] did not accept any donor funding. It was a very powerful [organization] and continues today to be the main platform through which women state their demands.

In the 80s and 90s, as NGOs started to proliferate, many of the women who were at the forefront of the movement [through universities] had to leave [their] universities, because spaces within universities for any kind of activism for women's equal rights shrank. NGOs provided an alternative space for many of these women to push forward for what they believed was right. [This situation created a] dilemma for feminists because on the one hand the feminist movement did not accept donor funding. On the other hand, in order to have their alternative space, feminists were forced to work through NGOs. So activism became, at one level, NGOized. Of course, women argued that we are doing this on our own terms. We will not accept projects that are not acceptable within our principles, and so on. But, ultimately, we find according to unreliable government data that 45 percent of NGOs in the 1990s stated their focus to be women and children. So yes, there were lots of NGOs that claimed to be working on women's and children's issues, because there was a lot of funding available for [these issues]. In the process, the feminist agenda became blunted.

There were pros and cons to the NGOization phenomenon. On the one hand, it provided spaces for women. On the other hand, there were NGOs that were strengthening the family rather than questioning the family, because there was donor funding available for

strengthening families. Where was the feminist agenda going? That was being questioned.

In 1999 we had another military government, this one slightly different to the Zia regime in that it claimed to be more progressive. Of course it was a mix. It was not entirely progressive. It was ultimately a military regime. But the movement itself seemed a little split. Initially they were all opposed to the military takeover, but gradually many of the women activists who had opposed military rule in the past started to serve on various committees created by this regime and [were] collaborating with the state at one level.

## The urgency of questioning the NGOization phenomena was lost, as the major challenge to the feminist women's movement now came from the ultra-right

[At the same time], there was a rise in religious political parties, especially in the areas bordering Afghanistan within Pakistan. You had a huge challenge for the women's movement from ultra-right, religiously based political parties and their women's wings. So, the urgency of questioning the NGOization phenomena was lost, as the [major] challenge to the feminist women's movement [now] came from the ultra-right. The ultra right claims that *they* represent the real Pakistani women. They were among the few who organized rallies that questioned women who were opposed to Hudud laws, discriminatory laws. They said that we want these laws, and we are Muslim women. This happened in 1995.

So, the movement as such was faced with, on the one hand, the donor phenomenon of "projectization" – of particular kinds of projects being funded, and not necessarily those with a feminist consciousness. [During this period], yes, culture came to be questioned. But then again culture came to be questioned through the World Bank's policies and other institutions that like to blame economic failures of policies upon culture. So, if educational policies under structural adjustment policies don't work, you blame it on local culture. It's very convenient.

The challenge that is in Pakistan, [we are dealing with the] NGOization phenomenon, but in addition to that, what is urgent is the challenge from the ultra-right and various other people in the West who need to be sympathetic to the Muslim voice and Muslim women, and are getting very confused about who to support. So there is this whole issue of representation and of Muslimness that we are also facing. Secular feminist progressive movements are therefore questioned for their ability to represent women of Pakistan.

**Aida Tuma:** I was sitting and listening to my colleagues here talking, and to tell you the truth it is scary to see how similar the situation is in many places in all over the world. On the one hand, it's good to know that we can share our experiences and learn from each other. But on the other hand, it brings me back again to the fact that if the situation is so similar, if it is evolving in the same direction in most of the countries, then probably we have to look for the cause. And we have to think about why and how things are developing in such a way.

## Most of the NGOs were becoming more and more led by a group of sincere women, mainly academic, a kind of elite among women

I'm not a scholar. I'm an activist. So what I'm going to say is more of an observation. Palestinian women have been suffering for many years from continuous occupation, and the situation has been deteriorating. All the agreements that have been signed have just brought more complexity to the situation. After 1967, most women were active with [underground] political movements or parties. Women were active on women's issues, but connected these issues with ending the occupation. After Oslo 1993, when political parties and movements could organize themselves [more openly], most women's movements that were affiliated with political parties went to the step of registering or establishing as NGOs. At that point, it sounded like a very good option for organizing women, because we thought the Palestinian people were building their own state, and women should contribute equality issues into the laws and into the constitution that was supposed to be prepared. But of course we all know what happened with the Oslo agreements, and how the situation deteriorated, [and how we] ended up with an authority that was not able to deliver what had been promised.

Between 1993 and the outburst of the Second Intifada in 2000, what happened was that most of the women had moved, little by little, into project-oriented [work], delivering services to women, focusing on issues of violence against women and personal issues. Those kinds of activities [resulted] in the end in [organizations moving] away from their own constituencies, from mass organizations, and becoming more professionalized.

That has created a situation where most of the NGOs were becoming more and more [led by] a group of sincere women, mainly academic, a kind of elite among women. [This elite] was not creating a lot of space for the common women, for women in general to be active inside each

organization, because you needed highly educated professional women to do the work. That created a gap in decision-making. Those who were deciding inside organizations were not the activists. The activists were vanishing little by little. The volunteers were vanishing little by little. Those who were taking most of the decisions [were] either the boards of the NGOs or the professional people who were doing the work.

This created a huge gap between the discourse used by NGOs in analyzing the situation and the real activism on the ground. That gap between these two levels created a kind of alienation. The ability to mobilize and organize masses of women when it is crucial and needed [was lost]. The Second Intifada came to reveal all that.

Palestinian women played a major role [in the First Intifada]. [But] NGOs and women's organizations could not play that role in the Second Intifada. [We were unable] to connect, or mobilize, or organize ourselves as Palestinian women at that point. The general political situation that was created after the Second Intifada deepened the problem. Many of the women who were active inside the NGOs [were] women who in the past were active among political left parties or movements and were disappointed by those parties and those political projects. Those political parties did not deliver what they promised to women. They did not deliver the space [or] the agenda. They did not deliver even the discourse at a certain point. [The] women were disappointed and withdrew massively from the political parties, [and] created their own spaces among the NGOs. When the Second Intifada happened, it was really hard to see how the connection would be made again in between the NGOs and the political parties.

You heard that the main challenge faced by the Pakistani women's movement today [is] from the ultra-right. It is very clear that we are facing the same situation. It's not only by the ultra religious or fundamentalist men who are challenging the issue of representation of women. They are smart. They are creating their own women organizations [and] movements that are standing up and saying, "Listen, you cannot speak in our names." The resources are there, and they are organizing themselves into movements [rather than] NGOs. They are connecting to the grassroots. They are creating themselves out of the grassroots. I think this is the biggest challenge we have to face these days.

**Sonia Alvares:** My name is Sonia Alvares, and I'm speaking about Latin America, which is a region that actually defies generalizations; nevertheless, I'll make some. I'm going to try to provide us with a brief overview of what's called the Latin American NGO movement of the 1990s, and then offer a few reflections about why I think we may be moving beyond the movement in Latin America, perhaps even beyond NGOization.

In Latin America, as many of you perhaps know, the debate about NGOization was, to put it mildly, particularly heated and often acerbic. In fact, in the eyes of their

staunchest critics, NGOs were traitors to feminist ethical principles. [NGOs] depoliticized feminist agendas and collaborated with neoliberal ones. But those kinds of blanket assessments of feminist NGOs as handmaidens of a global neoliberal patriarchy, in fact, failed to capture the ambiguities and variations in and among NGOs in particular countries, and regions, and even the same neighborhoods. The good NGOs/bad NGOs binary simply doesn't do justice to the dual or hybrid identity of feminist NGOs: technical organizations that are, at the same time, some of them, intricate parts of what we call "the movement."

What I want to do is to move beyond that binary and offer, if you will, a critique of the late 1990s critique of feminist NGOs. Here I join others like Julie Hemment and Donna Murdock and others, who are revisiting many of the claims that were made in the 1990s. Julie Hemment, writing about Russian feminist NGOs, says that we need to understand that the good and the bad are often intertwined and interdependent in NGOs. In the case of Russia, she argues that the critiques [by] NGOs resonated with anti-democratic, anti-human rights forces, and led to the withdrawal of funds from rights-promoting projects. So I think we need to be more conscientious about what our critiques are doing when they leave the movement circles in which they are often articulated. Indeed, in some Latin American contexts, the case of Colombia for instance, NGOs have even become the target of paramilitary forces who dubbed them para-subversive. President Uribe himself has called human rights NGOs "defenders of terrorism."

Beyond joining feminist Julie Hemment in a critique of the 1990s critique of NGOs, I want to suggest that Latin American feminisms may have already begun to move beyond the NGO boom. I want to explore with you the possibility that, at least in Latin America, we may be poised to move beyond NGOization. But before proceeding any further, I want to clarify that I never meant the term NGOization to be understood as a shorthand for the proliferation of NGOs as such. NGOization, to me, is not about the formation of more NGOs but rather the formation of particular kinds of NGOs.

It was the promotion of more politically collaborative and more technically proficient feminist practices that triggered what I've call the NGO boom of the 1990s in Latin America. [This boom] challenged and ultimately unsettled what I call the hybrid identities of many feminist NGOs in the region, leading some of them to place empowerment goals and a wide range of movement-oriented activities on the strategic back burner. They were replaced on the front burner with "demonstrable impact" – or getting more bang for your development buck – short-term projects, large scale workshops and forums, and more overt participation in the policy arena.

In Latin America these front-burner activities were further foregrounded by three developments in the 1990s. First of all, states and inter-governmental organizations increasingly turned to feminist NGOs as gender experts rather than as citizen organizations advocating for women's

## The forum calmed, encouraged, and revived me

"The forum calmed, encouraged, and revived me through its acceptance of diversity, and its celebration of women and all that they bring and mean to the world and life. Nothing seemed too far out. I danced so much, and met intelligent, strong, beautiful, confident, sexy, courageous, outrageous, generous and wise women. Very grounding."

- *Women's Rights Activist*

## In my country, the word "feminism" is still unknown

"The AWID 2008 forum gave me a new vision of building and strengthening my home network movement. My experience with Young Feminist Activism was wonderful. In my country, the word "feminism" is still unknown. Women's organizations don't even know about feminism. During our [Young Feminist Activist] meeting on November 13 at the Fountains Hotel, I saw young women very engaged in the movements. To be with those young women was very challenging, exciting and inspiring for me. I also met some more experienced women and shared my humble experiences with them. I received a lot of advice from them. I can say without any doubt that my first experience with AWID brought me many positives advantages. I came back from Cape Town with a vision that I would like to set up in my country to ameliorate women's status through strong networking and contribute to sustainable development in my country. After this forum, I understand now the power of movements, a power that can change the world. I agree with this sentence of AWID: "When people struggle together, what was once unimaginable, suddenly become possible". I will do all my best to bring all young women together in Cameroon so that we can struggle together to change our world with positive leadership."

- *Women's Rights Activist from Sub-Saharan Africa*

rights. [Secondly], NGOs began to be treated as surrogates for civil society. [That made it] very easy now to claim that you were consulting civil society in policy formulation and implementation because you called your three favorite NGOs. Finally, states increasingly subcontracted feminist NGOs to advise on and carry out government women's programs. Many organizations found themselves caught up in this NGO boom, becoming more hierarchically organized, and sometimes governed by corporate business management principles – becoming what one Colombian feminist referred to as “empresas sociales” or social companies, increasingly focused on executing projects.

## Almost everyone is dissatisfied with the limits of an NGO-based feminist movement model, and have begun to understand that implementing hard-won rights that will require public pressure

Nonetheless, what got overlooked in the late 1990s critique is the fact that, even at the height of the boom, professionalized NGOs continued to play three crucial roles beyond service delivery. First of all, feminist NGOs [were] responsible for producing feminist knowledges, in the plural. Alternative knowledges of various sorts. Second of all, NGOs were crucial, and remain crucial, in disseminating feminist discourses much further than people in the academy or even the media are able to do. And third, NGOs were crucial nodal points in [both] multiple networks [and] communicative webs that linked the ever more dispersed and diverse feminist actors.

I didn't even get to the movement beyond NGOization. One of the things that is evident is that in Latin America [is] that feminist NGOs have begun to again place movement work on the front burner. Many of them are seeking to rearticulate and to create new bridges, or fortify existing ones, not only within the feminist field but [also with other] civil society and social movement activists. In Latin America, there are specific reasons this is beginning to happen. One generalizable one is that almost everyone is dissatisfied with the limits of an NGO-based feminist movement model, and have begun to [understand that] implementing hard-won rights that will require public pressure.

I'll jump to changes in national-regional-global forces, which I think are also placing different premiums [on] particular kinds of organizations. I mentioned that

NGOization entailed sanctioning and promoting particular kinds of practices. But this may be, as anthropologist Bill Fisher famously put it, a “passing fancy.” The development field is a fickle industry, and [it] has been changing in ways that may have dramatic effects for NGOs in feminist and other social movements. We are at a conjunction where the crisis of global neoliberalism could shake the very foundations of NGOization. We've already begun to see that in Latin America, where the challenge to neoliberalism began already in the late 1990s [and NGOs] began to be undermined in the 1990s. These “pink-tie” governments – they're not quite red – [were] looking to partner with NGOs that had real social constituencies.

I think NGOs may be on the decline, at least in Latin America, but I think NGOs have a future. They can be vital to movement building. There isn't any sort of intrinsic antipathy. It's not like NGOs are the antithesis of movement building. Rather, they need to be, and have been, crucial to it.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EXCERPTS

**Participant:** The [issue] I want to raise is that we tend to think of NGOs as necessarily progressive. In fact the majority of NGOs are right-wing. The majority come out of the church and religion. In Pakistan, you'll find the majority of NGOs [coming out of] the mosques. To me, the question is, why are those NGOs getting more successful? I'm suggesting that actually it is the ideology that is important to them, the ideology that we have lost in our movement.

**Participant:** In three days, this is the first time I've heard the word “neoliberal” at the AWID conference. I'm really delighted that I was able to hear it today. What we see on the ground in India, and I might generalize this for South Asia, is that there are three trends in this discursive space. One is the [push for] professional-managerial-technical skills in reconstructing NGOs. The second, which was not spoken about here, is an increasing trend in India to set up SNGs, government sponsored NGOs [or] government sponsored movements if you will. [The third] is NGOs with the kind of radical spirit that we all want to work. Now, the contradiction is that on the ground, there are tremendous ambivalences that women have to face. All these ideologies co-exist, and when you go to organize, the problem is that the same woman is having to be part of different types of movements in the pursuit of various aspirations. This is one of the things that one needs to be cognizant of. The other thing is that [while] it's good to be self-critical about NGOization, this kind of critical reflection sometimes can work against feminism. I see in India a push from the neoliberal state to push NGOs to become slimmer, thinner and weaker, meaning pushing women to have very few staff in the name of putting money into movement building instead. I think these contradictions are important to note.



**Participant:** I come from an organization that started long before the term “NGOization” was invented, and I think we need to challenge this term. What is a non-governmental organization? This is a UN term that was invented because you're not [part of the] government. But when we started, we called ourselves a collective. You were social movements, you were associations, you were cooperatives. At home in Pakistan, we have perfectly normal words we have been using for decades, but now everyone is an NGO. You can't start by calling yourself a non-something. We have to be *something*! (Laughter and applause.) I'm

very unhappy when movements get reduced to women's organizations. A movement is about change; it has to be [about] more than one sort of organization. I think there is a lot that we need to think about. One is that we are so upset that there are no more volunteers, but when I talk to the younger women, they say, “Hey, you remember what you told us? Don't ever get exploited. Don't do what we did. You are criticizing us for taking your advice.” Civil society, by the way, like NGO, is something we presume is good. It's not necessarily.

## Pop Culture with a Purpose: Using Edutainment for Social Change



**Ellen Sprenger:** Welcome everybody to the session. We are going to be talking about entertainment education or pop culture with a purpose. You'll hear about the theory and practice of this field from four global pioneers in this area. My name is Ellen Sprenger and I have the honour of moderating this session.

Let me introduce the panel. On my left we have Arvind Singhal. He is a professor and teaches entertainment communication strategy. Next we have Mallika Dutt. She is the founder and executive director of Breakthrough. Breakthrough is an innovative, high-impact human rights organization that works in India and the United States on women's rights, sexuality, HIV-AIDS, racial justice, and immigration rights. Then we have Yerina Rock. She is with Puntos de Encuentro, based in Nicaragua. They're a feminist NGO that promotes youth and women's rights on challenging social norms. By the way, what these panelists produce is viewed by millions of people, sometimes tens of millions of people or even more. Lebo Ramafoko is a senior executive of Soul City Institute of Health and Development Communications in South Africa and has been with Soul City for over ten years.

Before we start, Arvind, help us a little bit. What really is entertainment education, and how do we know it's effective?

**Arvind Singhal:** Ellen, the last time I was asked this question I was on a massage table in Kampala, Uganda. You can imagine what a professor is doing on a massage table; let your imagination run wild. The answer to the massage therapist was that entertainment education is a full body experience. Think about a message that involves you emotionally, a message that appeals to you cerebrally, a message that touches you viscerally, hits you in the gut, and we've got entertainment education.

You may tune into a popular soap opera, perhaps flip open a comic book. And let's say you see a five-year-old girl, and let's say the context is rural India, and let's say

she is asking, “Mommy, how come my one-year-old brother is celebrating his birthday, and I'm five years old and I haven't had a celebration yet?” It's that kind of message, which appeals to you at these various levels, which comes couched in a popular format so that it gets to millions of people. That, in essence, is a professor's definition to a massage therapist!

**Ellen Sprenger:** Now we are going to hear from Mallika. Mallika, you are a lawyer, and in 2000 you started Breakthrough. What motivated you to do this work?

**Mallika Dutt:** I'm a lawyer, but I've been a feminist and a human rights advocate for the last couple of decades. I think one of the things that began to really challenge me in my practice of feminism was that I began to feel like I was having the same conversations over and over again with the same group of people. The other thing that I was experiencing was that after 20 years of doing feminist work, my mother *still* couldn't understand what it was that we were trying to do. So, for me the challenge became, “How do we take our feminist values, our human rights principles, and how do we really make them part of a larger public conversation?” I didn't know about a damn thing about the media, or music videos, or anything! But clearly pop culture and the entertainment industry were emerging as very important spaces that people engaged with and occupied.

So, I started to try and produce a music album and a music video on domestic violence, which we were able to launch in 2000. We showed the video two AWIDs ago, which is why we didn't include it here. But you know, it was one of those journeys where a lot of women in the movement were very critical because they were like, “Why are you engaging with an entertainment industry that objectifies women, that perpetuates violence against women? Why do you have a male lyricist, a male music

director, male video director?” For me, it was really important to figure out how we can take the tools that oppress us, and flip them, and really penetrate those spaces with a different ideology and a different vision. I also started to feel that it was really important to make men partners in this journey to end violence against women, so that they became active participants in ending those violations.

That was my thinking. [The video] was very experimental, and ended up winning the National Screen Award. It ended up in the top ten in India for several months. And it really made us think more seriously about Breakthrough. This is the journey that we’ve been on for the last eight years.

**Ellen Sprenger:** How do you know that you’re not just entertaining people or giving them maybe an idea, but that you’re actually turning things around, promoting social justice?

**Mallika Dutt:** I must confess that all of us at Breakthrough actually owe a great debt to our co-panelists sitting at this table. Our ability to evaluate our impact at the community level, at the individual level, and at the mass level is deeply informed by folks like Arvind, by the experiences of Puntos. What we’ve done is things like, for example, identify target communities and create a baseline to look at what are the current attitudes. Because we are a human rights and a feminist organization, the indicators that we develop have specifically to do with things like stigma faced by HIV positive women, for example. What form does that stigma take? What are the specific things that are happening in terms of women being thrown out of their homes or being excluded from being able to eat at the table, or losing their children, or not having access to medical care? The last campaign we created focused on the question of women being evicted from their marital homes because in all the conversations that we had, women told us over and over again that homelessness was one of the biggest and most dangerous consequences of this kind of discrimination against women.

## After 20 years of doing feminist work, my mother still couldn’t understand what it was that we were trying to do

Then we go back after the campaign is over to look at what happened. What kind of impact did we have in a change in attitude? We also look at television measurement data to really look at how many people actually saw those ads. How many people recall them? What’s the recall

value of these things? And then as a result of that, what happens in conversations around the kitchen table or at the community level?

It’s not in an exact science. It’s very challenging, and it’s also not cheap. That’s another thing, it really requires a lot of organizational commitment and resources to do this kind of measurement. But certainly I believe that transforming these dialogues in larger media spaces and larger social spaces has to be an important goal of the women’s movement and of feminists.

**Ellen Sprenger:** The last question before we go on to the next speaker. In terms of movement building, what are some of the challenges that you face in your work or that you would like to share with the audience more generally?

**Mallika Dutt:** I think that as women’s movements, one of our challenges is to figure out how do we go from being in a reactive space, a critical space, to becoming a more proactive force in society and really taking on the big issues in a big way. We’re constantly challenged by issues of capacity and resources. If you compare the size of women’s organizations to other kinds of organizations there is always a big resource crunch that one is dealing with. So, when one looks at mass media as a tool for movement building and change, there is always this issue around resources. We’ve been fortunate in India where the dissemination of our campaign has been developed through pro bono partnerships with advertising agencies, without whom there is no way we would be able to claim the kind of regional impact [we had]. The other challenge is that the media and entertainment space is occupied by a lot of forces that say and do things that severely undermine women’s rights. So, your interventions are momentary and never as wide-spread as the forces that you’re trying to counter.

That’s why it’s so important to link a mass media strategy with some of the things you saw in our video, like community-based education. So it’s not just that you interface with the thing on your television set, or you see a billboard somewhere. [Rather, the work] becomes a living, breathing part of community dialogue and community action, and hopefully community change.

**Ellen Sprenger:** Amy Bank likes to say “the magic is in the mix.” It’s not just one thing. It’s a bunch of things that converge and come together. I know, Puntos, you have a lot to say about that too. Yerina, how would you like to introduce the video that we are going to see in a minute?

**Yerina Rock:** Hi everybody. I’ll be starting with a video, and then telling you a bit more about what we do, and how we’ve been working with soap operas in Nicaragua and the Central American region. (Plays video.)

**Ellen Sprenger:** Tell us more about what we just saw.

**Yerina Rock:** This is the project that I completely fell for when I came to Nicaragua four years back, and I managed to convince Puntos to let me work for them. Basically, Puntos was created in 1991 by three feminist women. We all kind of fell into this. There were two big “aha!” moments that led to us starting to think that we could actually make a TV series in a country which does not have any television industry. You have news shows, you have chat shows, but that’s about it. There was no industry, no infrastructure to be able to make this.

For me, it was really important to figure out how we can take the tools that oppress us, and flip them, and really penetrate those spaces with a different ideology

The first “aha!” moment was in the mid 90s during the Beijing conference. We were thinking, “There are all these amazing things happening in Beijing, but this doesn’t really come out to most people living, for example, in Nicaragua – and what does that actually mean for women in their everyday lives?” The idea was to do a kind of talking heads show on TV, very standard and quite boring. We did just a few sessions. But what we realized afterwards was that the woman who was presenting this show kept getting recognized on the street. We thought, “My god, if this happened with something really boring, imagine if we could actually do something that’s more interesting?”

The other big “aha!” experience for Puntos was when there was an evaluation process of many of the strategies that had been implemented in the 90s. [We learned] that the longer people are exposed to strategies – seeing posters more often or hearing about it on the radio, or seeing it on TV – the more open they were to the message. We were thinking, “My god, what if we actually manage to do a television series?” Not only would you be having something that expands over a much longer period of time, but you’d actually get to look at people’s lived experiences. You’d get to get into the whole depth of real human experiences, real human lives, which is what we are all about in the end. So, actually, it took about five or six years. It took a long time but it got into its feet and now you’ve seen some of the results.

A key idea behind all of this is to get radical ideas [out there]. It’s sometimes very hard to connect when you talk in terms of ideas and concepts, but once you get [the ideas] out there as real, lived experiences and connect to people’s emotion, you end up getting amazing receptivity as you saw here on the video.

**Ellen Sprenger:** Is it not really expensive to do that? How cost effective is it?

**Yerina Rock:** It’s on the expensive side, yes. It does cost money, but [it’s not as much] if you actually look at the costs per viewer. You’re reaching a huge mass of people. *Sexto Sentido* was made for Nicaragua and ended up showing in Nicaragua, [as well as] in seven countries [so far], as well as a Latino channel in the United States. So you reach an immense number of people. When we actually did a calculation, a rough one, just looking at the number of young viewers in Nicaragua and what the costs were per episode ... Does anyone want to guess at how much it costs per episode?

**Participant:** One dollar?

**Yerina Rock:** Four cents, if you [take into account] that it’s been re-transmitted three times in Nicaragua, and [that] it’s been shown in seven different countries. You’re talking about amazingly small numbers per viewer. (In terms of young viewers only in Nicaragua, the cost is about \$3.20 USD per young viewer.)

**Ellen Sprenger:** Similar to Breakthrough, you also know that the magic is in the mix. You have a whole bunch of activities coming together. And [the actors] are actually young people – they’re not professional actors, right? Give us an example of how you connect, of how the mix works, briefly.

**Yerina Rock:** A lot of it kind of develops as it goes. Actually, we have one of our actresses here. A lot of the actors and actresses which you saw there, they kind of ended up filtering each others’ roles in the organization. A lot of people just kind of ended up in different roles. Adeline is now the director. She directed the last part of the series and is also directing the new series.

**Ellen Sprenger:** So, can I just ask her directly? Can you tell us, how did you become an actress, how did that work?

**Adeline:** Most of the leading characters in the series arrived at the project by chance, and we fell in love with Puntos de Encuentro. We realized we were not crazy by dreaming about changing the world. Even though we were not professional actors, we embarked on this project, and now we are training new and younger actors and actresses, passing on our experience. The first episodes were a bit of a disaster. The acting was not so good, but it had passion and conviction. We were presenting topics that were controversial in the country.

**Yerina Rock:** A lot of the people who ended up starting off with the project have come into different roles, and a big part of those roles has been to go out to different communities in Nicaragua and also in other countries.

**Ellen Sprenger:** And the actors also help write the script, so it is a very participatory process. Moving now to South Africa: Soul City, you also have a visual for us. Do you want to briefly introduce it before we look at it?

**Lebo Ramafoko:** In 1999 in South Africa, the domestic violence act had been passed but it had not yet been implemented. Some of the reasons were that the justice personnel had not been trained, the police were not aware that it was a crime to beat up a woman, and the public was not aware. They still believed that it was a private matter between husband and wife. Women who were facing abuse felt that it was a secret and not something that they could speak up about. (Plays video clip)

**Ellen Sprenger:** (Referring to the video) This is so incredibly powerful. Tell us, what this has done in society – the numbers, the impact. Tell us the story.

**Lebo Ramafoko:** This was part of 13-part television series that went out on air in the largest television station, the public broadcast station, SABC 1. We printed a million booklets on violence against women, in four languages. The little leaflet that the doctor gives Matakala has a toll-free line on it that we set up in association with the National Network Against Violence Against Women, so that women could call. For me, the major achievement of the series was the establishment of the National Network Against Violence Against Women.

The question of how cost effective is this ... For me, the simple answer is that what tools like this can do is to help other organizations to plug in. It gives them a way of putting in the mainstream platform a lot of the work that they have been doing in the background.

**Ellen Sprenger:** In terms of movement building, you said that in some ways it's also a channel for NGOs to amplify the issue. How does it work in practice? How do you work with other organizations around Soul City. How do you connect?

**Lebo Ramafoko:** It starts with our research phase. We develop our messages through different partners in government, in civil society. At the beginning [of a project], we investigate the issues that we would need to deal with and the messages we need to deliver. [At the same time] we also investigate what are the organizations working on the ground that we can work with. So, for example, when we did this series, we identified a number of smaller organizations that were not networked, and that's when we fundraised to get the network going. So it starts in the research phase.

**Ellen Sprenger:** Arvind, you know the work of these organizations quite well. What are some of your observation or reflections that you'd like to share with us, with the audience before we actually take questions and comments.

**Arvind Singhal:** I think the proof in the pudding lies in your consumption of it, and you've seen in some ways a slice of the work that these three outstanding organizations do. Breakthrough, Puntos, and Soul City, I'd say, are the leaders when it comes to using the power of the popular media, but of course they dovetail [their media work] with other activities on the ground, whether it's partnering with other organizations, alliances, or other kinds of movements. [These organizations] reach tens of millions of people every single day. They reach them proactively, they shape discourses in existing places, and they create the possibility of new discourses. In essence they are changing the stories that people live, day in and day out. They create possibilities for new stories to emerge, for people to live out possibilities which did not exist for them before.

The first episodes were a bit of a disaster. The acting was not so good, but it had passion and conviction. We were presenting topics that were controversial in the country

I think what's unique about these organizations is that they are sort of intuitive indigenous movements – indigenous in the sense that Soul City is an organization of South Africans, by South Africans, for South Africans. And Puntos is people in Nicaragua doing things for Nicaraguans. The work that they do, in a sense, is informed by local wisdom, by local creativity, by local passion and strategy. So, I think it's a combination of these factors which make this strategy potentially a very powerful one.



## Sex Workers Meet Feminism



**Veronica Magar:** There is a lot of feminist ambivalence about the sex workers' movement. [Some] feminists take an abolitionist position, meaning they would like to abolish prostitution. And then there's the sex worker rights position that [other feminists] take, which wants to legalize sex work. What we hope to do in this sessions is get beyond this polarization and look at how these issues play themselves out in government positions and policies.

**Meena Seshu:** The collective that I work with (VAMP) started working on HIV/AIDS 16 years back. The government of India was pushing NGOs to work with sex workers, so that the "bridge population" – meaning men who were going to sex workers – would be saved. We were shocked by this written policy. As women's rights activists, we wondered, "who is worried about the sex workers?" But sex workers were just not part of the agenda. Their agenda was men, this "bridge population."

At the same time, I was grappling with the issue of my own understanding of prostitution, because I come from a very typical educational background that taught that prostitution was exploitation, victimization, oppression. Since I was programmed to think that, when I went to work with the communities, I was looking for it. I said, where are the victims? But they were not willing to accept the construct of victimhood. And it just freaked me out. We were working with condoms, under the understanding that enforcing condoms was impossible. In my other life, I worked with dowry victims, and knew that condoms were just something that could not be negotiated. But these supposedly total victims took the condoms like that (snaps fingers) and were talking about resisting men and enforcing condoms. How come this entire group of women, who are supposedly victims, can actually enforce condoms so easily?

The thing that worried me was that nobody was addressing violence within sex work. Everybody just thought that since sex work and prostitution is violence per se, you just talked about abolishing it. You did not do anything for the women who were in sex work. There was tremendous violence, and nobody was addressing it. I remember at the time that a man got drunk, raped a woman, murdered her, and nobody batted an eyelid. Nobody. I was thinking if we can collectivize the women to resist violence from all levels – from political parties, from police, from criminal gangs – that is the solution to this issue. And that's what we started doing. We started collectivizing, and in the process, we took a group of women to the police to talk about a criminal gang doing violence to them. The police inspector, who was a woman,

said, "Meena, I don't think they're women." I said, "What do you think they are?" She said, "They're petty criminals; they're not women." It freaked me out because she actually felt that because they sleep with different men every night, they are not women. She believed that as a police officer implementing the law, she had to treat them as petty criminals, and that was enough.

Both Meena and I admitted that actually we were very nervous about this session, and I want to start with that on a personal level. Because I think that it's that nervousness that has become attached to the way in which this issue has been discussed in the feminist movement that I most want to address

The other layer I'd like to talk about is this issue of being forced into prostitution. The women were challenging this construct, but I had it in my brain that most women who were in sex work were actually forced into it. I asked, "You chose to be here?" And they said, "We neither chose to be here nor were we forced." I said I didn't get it, and they said, "Listen, choice is a very cruel mirage. You put it out there, and say there are 10 [types of] ice creams and strawberry is the one I want. But that's not the way it is. In real life, there are [a limited number of] options, and you choose what is the best possible option for yourself." And that's what most of the women were saying they did.

The thing that made me grapple with this issue was that these women were asking very serious questions and challenging some very strong patriarchal norms. One that I found absolutely fascinating was who controls the womb?

The sex workers kept telling us, "This baby is mine. It belongs to no man. He's just incidental in the process." Which brings me to the issue of property, because these women are heads of their own families, and they have property under their own names. I don't know how many rural women can claim they have property in their own names, but a large group of sex workers have got a lot of property in their names, which for me was very interesting.

Things that worried me ... One was that I was facing a situation where sex work was either a form of slavery or at the other end of the spectrum an exercise of the right to work. These were exclusive positions. I was very disturbed by this because it was putting two human rights violations against one another: slavery and victimhood on one side, and choice and the right to work on the other. As a feminist, I was like, "OK, this is one layer that I'm working with," but the other layer that fascinated me much more was what I call the female sexual condition, and sexual control. There was this construct of acceptable female sexual behaviour, which definitely meant that the sexual self could not be used for the pursuit of making money. Women had to be pure. All of this really came to me as two distinct worlds: one, the world of those who wish to control sexuality, couching it in terms of societal norms or the good of the species, and the other the world of the resisters, who break the norms and live by rules unacceptable to the good moralists or saviours of norms.

The journey with sex workers has been consumed with discussions on sex, love, multiple sex partnerships, and discomfort with sex as just a physical activity or as activity of pleasure devoid of love. Concepts of sexual morality, sexual sacredness, sexual pleasure, sexual preference, sexual diversity, sexual health and sexual rights ... all of these became very important in the puzzle of life, and I deeply believe that the feminists with their analysis can really help the sex workers rights movement in unravelling some of this mess.

**Charlotte Bunch:** Both Meena and I admitted that actually we were very nervous about this session, and I want to start with that on a personal level. Because I think that it's that nervousness that has become attached to the way in which this issue has been discussed in the feminist movement that I most want to address.

I was thinking about whether I was going to do this panel, and it wasn't that I don't have an interest in the issue. It was rather, do I want to put myself into that place where we'd had so much painful, divisive and disrespectful non-debate because it [was so] polarized? So, I think that what both of us want to start by saying is that what's most important today is for all of us to feel safe to say what are our confusions, what are our questions, what do we need to learn and hear and think about. I'm not saying that we'll come out of this agreeing or loving each other. This is a very difficult issue because it brings together a variety of issues that are very important to feminism and that have everything to do with the control of our bodies. Who controls them? How do we control them? What does it mean?

I think it also has everything to do with the huge debate in feminism between "victimization" and "agency." I want to agree with you so much that we are all both victims and agents all the time. This notion that we are either only victims or only agents making free choices doesn't help us get to the intersection of where are we victimized and where we are making choices in a limited universe. And I don't think there is anybody here who doesn't feel we live in a limited universe of choice. We want the ability to have protection for the choices we make. How do we do all of that in a world where the sexual control of women's bodies is so central to all of the institutions that we live within?

One of the challenges that Meena brought to me in suggesting this conversation is where is the space that we in the feminist movement are actually listening to sex workers? I want to recognize that, of course, not all sex workers agree. We're all so used to being told, "Women are divided, you don't agree." Well of course we don't all agree, and neither do sex workers. Why should they? Why should any group of us agree on everything? But if we ground ourselves in talking this through with the women who are most affected, I think we would get further in understanding the ambiguity and difficulties of taking effective action in this area.

I agree with most of what Meena has said, and I want to talk about it in terms of my own work. I have come to the intersection of these issues out of two histories that lead me to see different strands of this. One is my own work, which most of you know about, on violence against women, including work on anti-trafficking that I started in the 1980s when I helped to organize an international workshop on female sexual slavery. In the beginning of that work, much of my concern was of course for the women who have been trafficked. Human trafficking is very real, and the victimization of those women is very real. How do we get them understood on the human rights agenda, to get the kind of remedies and resources that we saw male human rights defenders getting from the state in the 80s when they were coming from struggles around political repression from the state?

In the beginning, much of my own focus, and I think that of many of us in the feminist movement, was around the aspects of trafficking for sex work that are exploitative and that did have to do with literally being kidnapped and forced. But in trying to think about how to create policies for that, I saw very early on the tendency for this work to become another version of the protection racket, which is not real protection, but protection at the price of giving up your rights. I think this is the question for all of us in the human rights struggle: how do we get protection for women from very real abuse without that protection coming at the price of giving up their rights to sexuality and mobility. Many of the anti-trafficking measures that were being initiated right from the beginning were anti-migration.

I also [had concerns that women were being told] how we could use our bodies. I [reflected on my experiences in

the] lesbian feminist movement [and I thought], “Oh oh, somebody is telling me again what’s the right kind of sex, when and how I use my body, and what I can do with it.” I remembered all those people – and I think they thought they were doing it for our own good – who locked up gay and lesbian children to make them straight, because they thought being lesbian or gay would bring you so much trouble in the world. I thought, you know, we have to be really careful that we aren’t restating a protection mode that’s based on somebody else’s idea of how we should live our lives, and somebody else’s view of what’s happened to us in the choices and situations that we’ve ended up in.

With respect, I tell you that the sex workers movement is being underestimated. Many of us have not attended university, and many times not even primary school. But I tell you that for 30 years we have been standing on a corner or inside a brothel. Those 30 years give us authority and experience to say what we ourselves want

Like many women who have been struggling with this issue, I feel it’s very important to create space where we can really keep talking about how do we give women protection. Everyone who’s worked in the battered women’s movement knows this dilemma: how do you give women protection where they’ve experienced some kind of violation, but not decide for them what they want to do. It’s not our right to decide where they’re going to spend their lives, and who they’re going to live with, and who they’re going to decide to be with. I think that’s the really difficult part of this issue. That’s why we’ve made these imperfect divisions – and I agree we need to rethink them – between forced prostitution and sex work. There *is* attention [being paid] to this; there is money, and there is government work being done. How do we make sure that that [work] both protects women in sex work from violence they experience in the work and also expands their

options if they don’t want to stay [in sex work], without predetermining what their answer is.

I think this is where the real challenge lies, because we *do* live in a world, all of us, where there are forces that control our options. We are all always struggling to be sure women have opportunities to choose. But I think there is a certain set of assumptions in sex work that goes to the issue of sexuality, [which is that] we somehow know what [sex workers] want. I think this is where we really have to challenge ourselves. [That’s] not to say that women should not be given an opportunity and a way to change their situation if they want to. But not if we do it in a way that preconceives the answer and that denies them other kinds of rights and either makes them illegal or makes it impossible for them to organize. I can’t think of a better way to feel that you have more rights than to be able to not be illegal, to be able to operate and have some rights in your work, to improve those conditions, and to see whether that’s what you want to do or not. If you’re trapped in that, you have no chance to see if that is what you want to do. At the same time we have to be very aware that there is a lot of money being made in this business, and most of the time women are not getting that money.

So, how do we pull those strands out and figure out what *does* it mean ... It’s not even so much important what *my* tentative ideas are of how we might get there as it is about how we can talk about this differently. How can we really take the threads of this issue and begin to understand that we are facing a dilemma where the root causes for women not having power as sex workers are of course the same [root causes of] the inequity that women face in every area of life. So if we could relate the work we’re trying to do on the issue [of sex work] to the work we’re trying to do to empower women across the board, I think that we would make more progress, both in the increase of options for women and in bettering the situation of women in sex work.

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION: EXCERPTS

**Participant:** Good morning. I am the general secretary of Asociación Mujeres Meretrices de la Republica Argentina. I am also the regional secretary of the women sex workers’ network of Latin America and the Caribbean. I want to first congratulate you on this discussion. But I also want to say that sex workers have already advanced on some topics. First, the differentiation between sex work and trafficking of people. We say that sex work is for consenting adults of legal age. This is sex work; that’s how we define it. This is different from the trafficking of people, the sexual exploitation of children, and slavery. We also want to differentiate between exploitation and slavery. Obviously we are against slavery. We know what slavery is, and there are many women who exercise prostitution as slaves. Exploitation is something else. All workers suffer exploitation, not only sex workers.

With respect, I tell you that the sex workers movement is being underestimated. Many of us have not attended university, and many times not even primary school. But I tell you that for 30 years we have been standing on a corner or inside a brothel. Those 30 years give us authority and experience to say what we ourselves want. We hope that you don't continue judging us, but fundamentally we hope that you don't continue to talk on our behalf. We have a voice, and we also want to have a vote on these spaces. Thank you very much.

**Participant:** It's a pleasure to be here. I've been a sex worker for 13 years and an activist for my rights and for those of my sisters and brothers in sex work for just as long. I just wanted to say a couple of things. The first is, I think there needs to be recognition that we *do* fight for our rights all the time, everywhere we work. We know what our rights are, and are *actively* fighting to protect not only our own rights but those of our sisters and brothers who we work with. That is often not recognized, the tremendous work we do to improve our working conditions, and to stand up against police violence and state torture. The ways in which we protect each other when we are in prison are often not recognized. The way we protect each other from attacks not only from right-wing politicians but also from anti-sex work feminists is not recognized.

I think there needs to be explicit support from the feminist movement for the sex workers rights movement, because we are in fact a feminist movement. But [instead], we're having to deal with the tremendous harms and human rights violations that have been done in the name of "feminism," perpetrated against us to prove some theoretical point. When I started to work on the street in Montreal in 2001, for example, a number of feminist groups decided that they were going to go on the anti-prostitution rampage, and allied with right-wing people and religious groups to do so, which is not a strange combination. We have seen it in the United States when the powerful alliance between right-wing Christian groups, religious fundamentalists, and a number of mainstream feminist groups [cooperated] to pass aid restrictions to limit HIV funding to sex workers groups, at a tremendous cost to sex workers lives all over the world.

What we saw in 2001 was sex workers [targeted by] vigilante neighbourhood groups, who were trying to chase us out of the neighbourhoods where we'd worked and often lived for sometimes 20, 30 years. They were chasing us out with baseball bats and also, in what I thought was a very unoriginal and biblical way, by throwing stones (laughter). At that time, the major feminist groups were pushing for what was called the Swedish model, which is a supposedly feminist model for dealing with sex work, which was to arrest clients. As a result, [the police] arrested over 600 clients. But this did not stop them from [also] arresting sex workers. People, we end up in jail no matter what! As long as sex work is criminalized, we end up in jail.

The point was to arrest the client, [who] became some sort of folk devil in the feminist narrative. They arrested all these men ... migrant men, poor men, men involved in the streets. Never rich men. That's also how it plays out. [These were] men who we did not consider our enemies. Men who we work with, who we consider our allies against police repression. What happened as a result is that it drove sex work underground, and limited our choice of clients so that in order to keep on living and making our money, [we] had to choose from a smaller pool of clients, sometimes people who were drunk or potentially at more risk of violence. The rates of violence that were reported to the sex center by and for sex workers tripled. The number of violent attacks [tripled] because the cracking down on clients, a supposedly feminist strategy. The number of assaults with a deadly weapon went up fivefold.

I feel that there needs to be an accounting in the feminist movement for the harms caused by anti-sex work stands by feminist groups. There needs to be strong support not only for sex workers rights, but a recognition by the feminist movement of the power of our own organizing, and the terms and the ways in which we have done it.

**Participant:** I'm from the Netherlands, and I want to share with you a dilemma. I come from a country where the government does not have an abolitionist approach, but we still share the same problems. Yes, there are a few sex workers whose position has improved, but there are a lot of sex workers who are out on the streets. There are migrant sex workers, and addict sex workers, who don't get any protection. And at the same time, the issue of the middleman is not resolved, and increasingly, a lot of money from criminal circles is entering the sex work industry with a new range of forms of violence.

**Participant:** I have been working in the Netherlands on this issue for a long time. I just want to fill in a bit more [about] the legalization of prostitution in the Netherlands. We, the anti-trafficking movement, were working very closely with Red Threat, the prostitution rights organization that was organizing at the same time. What we were lobbying for was not just a matter of [establishing] a law that legalizes prostitution. It was about how do you support the women who are working in the industry to set up their own businesses, to be independent, to be in control of their own work. That was what was not allowed. So legalization was still a mechanism of control. It was purportedly to stop trafficking ... [but] it doesn't work that way. It's not so clean, the industry is not so clean, motivations are not so clean. The basic thing is that women cannot control their work, their lives, the way they make money, the way they spend money. That's when the problems start. You cannot protect people. You can just make them stronger, to protect themselves if they need protection, get help when they need help, and to control their own lives and bodies. It's not so simple. Whether you legalize or not, the problems are not going to disappear.



## We Have Wasted our Time Pushing for Women in Decision-Making Positions



**Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Before us we have a motion, which reads, “We have wasted our time pushing for more women in decision-making positions. They have not made a difference.” We have two debate teams here, to argue *for* the motion and *against* the motion.

We have recorded a number of successes in the African women’s movement. A lot of our investments in terms of engaging with state structures and with individual structures have paid off to some extent. Today, for example, we can boast of having more women in parliaments than ever before. Rwanda has broken world records in terms of numbers of women in parliament, over 50 percent. The recently constituted pan-African parliament has a woman as speaker of the parliament. And three years ago, we were delighted to be able to elect the first democratically-elected female president in Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. So we’ve ticked off a number of boxes in terms of our successes in that area.

But every now and then we’ve had complaints and grievances, very lengthy ones, that some of the women we’ve got into positions of decision-making, who got in there off the sweat of our backs – our research, our activism and agency – have not lived up to expectations. So this is why these aggrieved sisters have brought this motion forward.

For the motion, I’d like to introduce the team to my left. I’ll start with Solome Nakaweezi-Kimbugwe – wave your hand. Solome is a feminist activist and the executive director of Akina Mama wa Africa, who are the convenors of the famous African Women’s Leadership Institute. Next to her is Iheoma Obibi from Nigeria, journalist, activist and executive director of Alliances For Africa. Alliances For Africa has done a lot of work in some parts of Nigeria, getting women into positions of decision-making. Last but not least, to my immediate left is the very famous feminist activist Everjoice Win, who is currently the head of the women’s rights program at ActionAid International. If that position does not exist, I have just promoted you!

To my left, against the motion, I have the beautiful Thelma Ekiyor from Nigeria and based in Ghana. Researcher, peace activist, feminist activist and conflict resolution specialist. She’s currently the executive director of the West Africa Civil Society Institute. Next to her, we have our very own Rose Mensah Kutin, or Dr. Rose as she’s known in many parts of Ghana. Economist, public policy specialist and feminist activist. She’s a founding member of Netright in Ghana and also Abantu for Development. Next to Rose is another famous sister, whose name was invoked this morning, Margaret Dongo

from Zimbabwe. Margaret is a freedom fighter, an opposition independent candidate, and a women’s rights activist. You are all welcome.

**For the motion:** Thank you Madame Chair. Let me start by contextualizing what it is that we have done in terms of investing in women’s political participation, because otherwise [we] will be challenged by those who say we have not done anything. And by “we,” I mean women’s movements in their totality, particularly feminist movements. Firstly, we have advocated for laws and policies to be put into place. We have facilitated women to be put in positions of power. Starting with the suffragette movements globally, the right to the vote, the civil rights movements in many countries: feminist activists have been there. The constitutional reforms in many of our countries, the legal reforms: it [was] the feminists and the women’s movements who have been doing [the] work. We have now got [quotas] into our regional constitutive acts, and regional bodies such as SADC now have a target of 30 percent.

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All of this has come about because of the investment and the work that has been done by feminist and women’s movements. And yet, very often, the first thing that you hear from women when they get into these positions is, “I pulled myself up by my own boot straps. I got here because I worked really hard, and I have nothing to do with these women.” That is one of our biggest problems.

Secondly, if you look at many African countries, it was not women in political parties who were [originally] fighting

for [women's] rights. It was mostly women in civil society, in feminist groups. It was picked up by political parties [only later on].

Another point we wish to make is that we have invested millions of dollars, that cannot even begin to be quantified. Many of our women's organizations have raised money from donors – and all of you know how difficult it is to raise money. We have had to account for this money from donors. And what has this money been used for? Training some of these women who did not know the first thing about how to run for office. We have invested money in terms of funding their campaigns, literally printing their T-shirts, their banners, funding their rallies. We have helped to create media spaces and opportunities for these women. In some of those cases, we have put in money to fund air time for them. When some of these women have been targeted with political violence, it was the feminist movement that was there providing shelter, providing counseling, and providing medical support.

But what have we got for all our pain? They get into office and the first thing they do is disown the whole ideology of feminism and its values. Secondly, they disown women's movements. They will say, "I am not like those ones who are really bad, who have no husbands." We have not seen any new value systems that these women have brought. In many African countries, they have simply become part of the Kleptocracy. They abuse their positions of power. [They have not] practiced leadership in a new way. They have not set a new framework for how leadership should be practiced. I will leave it here for the moment.

**Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (Moderator):** I'll now move to the other team.

**Against the motion:** Thank you Madame Speaker. Let me start by saying no matter how far apart men are, they still remain organized and they support each other. This is why they have maintained power. I have told my fellow colleagues that politics is like a relay. You should know how to handle a stick, how to pass on your stick, and who to pass it on to. And the dos and don'ts are: "Don't blame each other."

We have, as Zimbabwean women, passed a domestic violence bill. We as Zimbabwean women [were historically] not allowed to be signatories to [our] accounts, but today women can sign. And in the Indigenization bill, women can now participate freely in business. That has been done by women that you are claiming have done nothing. I have been in politics from 1990, and I have been a member of parliament from 1992 to 2000. Have you ever knocked on my office to say, "My sister, you were in the struggle. You never had the opportunity to go to school. These are the issues from a learned perspective to bring to parliament."

There are feminists in Zimbabwe, but feminism has been destroyed. We have been fighting about feminism for years. But if you tell today, the gains of the struggle have

been reversed. Why? Because we keep on reducing the numbers. We undermine each other; we don't help each other. We always think we are important in our own way. Yes, you have raised money. I will ask you, where is the money? The last election, my colleague Everjoice Win came to sign and realized that these women needed support. I think she rushed around to find something, a little token for the three women who ran as independents. And I appreciate that.

But you are blaming us today. But look at the changes. There wouldn't be a SADC protocol without us. We have created employment for you girls, professionals. You should be happy. Now you are living in air-conditioned offices, and you look down upon us. You don't recognize the work that we have done, because you are sitting in luxury. We never had luxury offices. The violence that you talk about and get paid for, we are the women who go through the violence. The torture that you talk about, we go through it. Thank you Madame Speaker.

**Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Over to you the team to my left. Who is going next?

**For the motion:** My sisters, I think it's important for us to look at those women in parliament and what they are doing. Because in my own country, one particular woman has got there and proposed a bill about how I am going to dress. In other countries, other women in parliament are doing similar things. She's not doing what we sent her to do. She's not representing us. She is confused. But she's there.

She has refused to go for training. You are complaining that we're not inviting you for training, but [you] don't come. She, like the others, hasn't been on any. [Politicians] want huge per diems. They want to stay in luxury hotels. They want to stay in the Hilton. If you put them in the Ritz in Cape Town, they won't come. But they will stay in a five-star. They collect money from the government, and they come with their personal assistants, and probably their husbands and wives and their kids. So tell me sisters, how have they made a difference in our lives? How? Tell me! You can't tell me. Because in my country, they have not made a difference.

**Against the Motion:** I will tell you how they have made a difference. Because of these women, we now have at least 53 cracks in the glass ceiling that have kept women out. These bad women that you have described – they are not descriptive of all women. They are descriptive of a dysfunctional system that we send these women into. We have been sending foot soldiers into underwater battles. What we need to do is to send special forces, navy seals, women with subversive tactics that will get in there and transform the system. So that those cracks will be opening up for good women, representative women's voices to be heard.

**For the Motion:** Sisters in this room, are we talking about numbers or impact? What is more important to us? OK, the system is flawed. [But] the women who are sent there, the first thing they do is become part of the system. They disown us. They do not push our agenda. When we talk about issues about our own existence – like sexuality, like sexual orientation, like gender identity, like violence – they say, “Oh those feminists are radical. We do not even want to hear anything about them.” They close their offices to us. At the end of the day, they have not added value. For instance, in all these countries that have not ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the biggest resistance we have is women in decision-making positions, because they are uncomfortable with the article on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In Uganda, the biggest resistance to the family law is from women in political spaces. The biggest resistance to the land amendments is from women, because they have land. They do not think [about] of the bulk of women who do not have land. My debating team says we have wasted our time and our resources, and we need to change our strategy.

**Against the Motion:** My dear sisters, a journey of a thousand miles starts with one step. And numbers *do* matter. Numbers matter, because that is where you can get the kind of impact you are talking about. Today, if there is any meeting of the heads of states in Africa, you’ll find one head popping out. That one head is Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. *That* is the difference we are talking about. We are working to getting many more heads into

the meeting rooms of heads of states.

When you invite women to your training, what do you train them on? You train them on grooming, how to use to cutlery, how to make their accounts. You need to give them money, first off. Have you given them the money first off? Have you given them any empowerment tools? You don’t support these women; you look down upon these women. The spaces they are occupying are public spaces, and they are open to you. As for the impact you complain about: we *have* achieved impact. In many of our countries, we now have domestic violence acts. This did not happen by civil society alone. We were there, standing up and voting for those laws to be passed. So that impact is happening. We have economic policies, and we are passing laws that are making these economic policies responsive to our needs and concerns as women. That is how we have to continue working, to make sure that we increase our numbers, because numbers *do* matter.

**Bisi Adelye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Order, order, order! Now, both of you have made damaging, scandalous, libelous allegations against each other. And some have actually hit below the belt. So now, you have an opportunity to respond to these very serious, incriminating allegations, so you can leave this room with your respective reputations intact.

**For the Motion:** Let me respond to some of the issues that our esteemed opponents have raised. “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a small step.” Unfortunately, we have not even gone beyond 30 centimeters. In fact, it

## I saw bits and parcels of my own life

Coming to the AWID forum and South Africa for the first time has been an experience of a lifetime for me. Meeting different people from various cultures and discovering our common experiences has been truly remarkable. I realized that beyond cultural and individual dynamics, our interlocking experiences as women contributed a lot in building a responsive social movement.

Most of the sessions I attended were not just interesting. They also revealed some real story-based learnings, representing historical evidence of women’s resistance. I have to admit that I selected some of these sessions because I saw bits and parcels of my own life as an extension of their own advocacy. The way in which they shared their individual or collective resistance to socially oppressive norms moved and somehow healed me as a woman.

This AWID forum has also supported women’s empowerment through gender-responsive ICT4D (Information and Communications Technologies for

Development) efforts. It facilitated greater understanding in exploring ICTs as a powerful tool to accelerate women’s equal participation in this digital age.

I will be mainstreaming these combined benefits of digital storytelling and social networking with my current practice in using participatory video with deaf women in my country. I hope to provide support in the development of an innovative, gender-focused, participatory documentary of deaf women’s experiences towards inclusive and increased access in this global women’s movement.

Congratulations to AWID organizers and thank you very much for making me a part of AWID forum 2008!

- By Gichelle Cruz, *The Philippines*

is our contention, contrary to what our esteemed colleague says, that you have to start with the foundation. We have built and invested in these foundations. But, in many countries, instead of the foundation being the site where the building is going up, we are going back to the jungle level. Why am I saying this? Because, as my colleague said, some of the women who have entered these spaces have been the first ones to denigrate the feminist issues that women have been raising.

**My esteemed opponents, so what is the alternative? No women in decision-making? When men mess up, we don't tell them they have wasted their time. Why are we always pointing and shining the light on the mistakes women make and never accentuating the progress?**

What are these issues? Let me give examples. It is these women who have been opposed to laws around, for instance, women with HIV. In Sierra Leone today, a law has been passed that actually says, if you as a woman get pregnant, and if you have HIV, and your child comes out with HIV, you will go to prison. Because you have knowingly infected the unborn child. This in a country where, again, we have fought for women to be in [political office]. Where are these women when Sierra Leone is passing such legislation?

The issue for us is, what are the issues that these women [in politics] are choosing [to champion] – and the critical word there is “choosing.” It is our contention that in many cases, they are choosing to not work on any controversial issues. They are choosing to not add any value. That why in many African countries today, after many years, you do not see any positive changes around issues of sexuality, or around issues of abortion. These women, it is our contention, are tending to stay in what we can call safe zones, because they don't want to be kicked out of office come the next election.

I want to finish by [commenting on the] issue of the content of the training that has been raised. My sisters, we can be as feminist as we want, we can be as progressive as we like, but you and I know the famous expression, “you never get a second chance to make a

first impression.” That is why one of the key areas where we train women when they get into political office is [on image], because as we say, “image is important.” How you will sit when you get into office, as we say in my language, is how you will be judged. You and I know that many of the men in power today are not really saying anything. It's all hat and no cowboy. They have simply been trained in the art of politics, and that is why we have been training women in the art of politics.

But if you look at the content [of the trainings], we go beyond grooming and how to hold a fork. We have gone into training around how does the legislative system work, what are the issues that you need to be raising, how do you deal with opponents, how do you deal with the media. We have invested in them, as feminist movements. That's why we have brought some of these women into international spaces at our own expense, to make sure that they have those skills. But again, what have we gotten for our pains? Very little.

**Bisi Adelye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Okay, so that lays that one to rest, the allegation that they only train women in grooming. Because there has to be something else to go with the nice makeup that doesn't run when you're under the media glare. So now we get it. I am just trying to explain things! Over to you.

**Against the motion:** My sister, you can only measure a snake when the snake is not there. And I happen to be present in this room. I happen to be a test case. [There's] one question that you have never answered. From 1990, can you tell me [of] even one day [when] you knocked [on my] door and said, “these are the issues, my dear colleagues, that I would want you to focus on during your time in office.” The second thing is, can you say that you have invested a lot of money into grooming politicians? Do you have examples of ladies that have been in parliament from 1990-2000 that have gone through your training?

**Against the Motion:** My esteemed opponents, so what is the alternative? No women in decision-making? When men mess up, we don't tell them they have wasted their time. Why are we always pointing and shining the light on the mistakes women make and never accentuating the progress? You talked about women in parliament doing nothing. How many are there? Let me give you facts and figures. In Ghana, we have 25 women out of 230 parliamentarians. Those voices will always be muted if we do not get more women in. We have to get them in so that they can raise the issues. We are all still in the euphoria of the American election. And we saw two types of women. We saw Hillary Clinton and we saw Sarah Palin. Should we say because of Sarah Palin, no more women should go in for vice president? No. We need more women who can represent women the right way. So we will not give up, and we have not wasted our time.



**For the Motion:** What surprises me is that [we use] the same content [or material] to train women in [political] leadership [as we do] to train women in civil society and in the feminist movement – and it produces different results. That means that the women in political spaces are very problematic. We have a vibrant civil society, we have a vibrant movement. But women in political spaces, they're the opposite. Same content, different results.

Another issue is communication. It is a two-way channel. I can't communicate with you, and you're not communicating with me. Once you get there sister, you change. You disown feminism and disown us. So how do we communicate [when] we do not agree on the principles of communication?

Another issue is that when you get [into power], you do not want to mentor other women. You hold the spaces, you're screwed onto those chairs, and whenever we engage, you think we want to take your political spaces!

Another issue is, how do we trust the blind to lead the way? Women in political spaces are blind to the realities of their constituents. They are blind to the realities of our struggles. So why do we entrust you with all that responsibility? I rest my case.

**Bisi Adelye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Now, I am going to invite members of the supporters' clubs of the debate teams to jump in. We do this a number of ways. You can expect some of your supporters to jump up spontaneously to say things, or you can actively recruit certain individuals you think can speak to your cause. Supporters, you have to be willing to speak, otherwise you have no business being supporters and you have wasted our time!

**Supporter, Against the Motion:** Good morning sisters. We've heard a lot. But I think that one thing we are forgetting is that we do not put particular women in office so that they can do particular things for us. It is about the power of example. If we start, and we have people who do not operate according to expectations, we know that after many years, more people will come, and more effective women will join government. I think we are too impatient. Short-termism has become what we always do. We are looking for results immediately. We cannot do that.

We also must always remember that it is the *systems* that are very difficult for most women. Solome was talking about women who are trained in the women's movement [being] effective, but women in government have not been effective. It is not the women. It is not their message. It is the system. How many people can stand against 90 percent of men in parliament? It is very difficult. Secondly, we keep saying that women are free to lose office. If these women lose office, what example are they giving? That women cannot even sustain themselves in power! This is why many women become very careful. Not because they are timid, but because they must stay there to play the game.

Now, there may be a few bad eggs among women in politics. But it is the women's movement that needs to call

them to order. We should not be afraid to do so. We should call them to order and say, "You are not representing us well, and we expect more from you as members of our movement." But instead we badmouth them, we alienate them, and we create such a high wall that they are never able to jump over it and come to us. So let's see women in politics as the power of an example. And eventually, parliaments will have to change when we have the critical mass. And that's what we need now, the critical mass.

**For the Motion:** I am speaking from an experience of 12 years of trying to build the capacity of women. I have travelled to every corner of Uganda to build the capacity of women going into parliament. There are women there who look at me and say, "Thank you for helping me to get here." But when they've got there, what have they done? I call them to ask for an appointment, and they say, "I am going to my constituency, I don't have time to see you." Every time parliament started, we (the Ugandan Women's Network) had a party for the women who had gotten into parliament, first of all to congratulate them for getting there, and secondly to give them our agenda and to say, "As women, this is what we expect. We have issues of land, we have issues of domestic relations, we have a gender-sensitive constitution which has not been realized. Please, when you get there, articulate our issues."

When they got there, we got an appointment, and one of them told us to our faces, "I am not willing to risk my political future for your women's issues." And she had been in my training program to get there! Secondly, we have developed minimum agendas for women. We have developed all sorts of publications to give these women before they get there. If the space or the system is problematic, I have never seen any of those women even walking out in protest. And yet, at least the men sometimes have the courage to walk out, even if they walk back. But these women have to wait until they hear what the president feels about these issues before they say anything. And you expect me to stand here and say that they should remain there? No! Politics is for risk-takers, and if these women are not willing to take the risk, let them come back.

**Bisi Adelye-Fayemi (Moderator):** I see many excited hands, but we will not go for lunch if we continue like this. I would now like to ask the two teams to wrap up. I'm sure you've decided who's going to do what.

**For the Motion:** We want to state categorically is that our position is that we need feminist women in political leadership. But we need to invest in feminist leadership *beyond* the numbers. Why are we always holding up women to a higher standard? It is because in many of our countries the bar in politics is too low. We are trying to raise the bar. And as feminists, that is one of our battle cries. Because already we are seeing how our countries are in crisis because the political bar is too low. So when we ask women to do things differently, when we ask

women to come with a new agenda, when we ask women to go the extra mile, it is because as women, we are saying we are already suffering from very bad systems and from very low political bars, and we are asking our sisters to raise the bar.

Why do we hold women up to a higher standard? It is because these are spaces and opportunities that as feminists, we have fought for and we have demanded. This is why we want accountability from women when they get in. We do not want to continue the culture of non-accountability, the culture of impunity, the culture of the single big man who is not accountable to the people. We are asking these women to account because some of them, in fact, are beneficiaries of affirmative action policies that have been put in place because the feminist movement demanded those spaces. In some countries, we have seats that are specifically reserved for so-called women's representatives. When you are called a women's representative, you must represent the women! Don't turn around and tell us, "I am representing the whole country. I can't just stand for one sex. I am accountable to everybody." Who is everybody? While you are saying that, the men are accounting to their fellow men. Why is it that for women it is difficult to see women as your constituency?

The point was raised about how difficult it is to change systems. Clearly, as feminists, we know how difficult it is to change systems. Whether it is family systems, whether it is organizational systems in NGOs, whether it is parliamentary or political systems, we know how difficult it is to change them. Why do you think that when you go into parliament, or into a decision-making position, you can pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and change the system by yourself? This is why you need a movement behind you, because the movement will help you to change the systems. You can only change systems when you have collective power behind you.

Those of you who have children of my age are familiar with the movie, *Shrek*. There is a wonderful part in the movie where a little army of small men is sent to arrest Shrek. They turned up at Shrek's bog, and the major general in front holds up this little sheet, and say, "We have been sent by the king to tell you that you have to vacate this place." Now, what the major general didn't realize was that as soon as Shrek stepped out of his hut, the entire army deserted him. Shrek [replied], "You are going to arrest me? You and what army?" The little major general turned around, only to find there was no army. Sadly, my sisters, that will be the reality, and has been the reality, of many women who are in politics and who are not accountable.

**Against the Motion:** I am really amazed. Is Shrek now the symbol of feminism? My sisters who call themselves feminists, what are you doing on the sidelines? Why can't you get into the system and change it from there? You have been patronizing us. Your language is not familiar to us. You come, you don't even argue for the use of local languages in our parliaments. You come with your patronizing voice, and you expect us to make the change that we all need.

Why don't you join politics to strengthen our voices as women? We need to fight from within, not from without.

Your capacity-building programs: they are so limited, because you don't have a political agenda. Where is your political agenda? Without a political agenda, how can you support us in parliament? You have decided to remain in your comfort zones. You know what has been happening? In some countries, women have refused to take vice-presidential positions because they feel they need something better. And this is because of a political agenda women have provided. We need an agenda that recognizes our differences as women, that unites us across our various boundaries, our various differences, our various orientations. We are not one homogenous group. We are made of different categories of people, and [we're talking about] transformational change. It will not occur with women alone. We have to bridge those gaps, we have to make those alliances. And those so-called feminists who are sitting on the fence, in their comfort zones, and telling us how to do politics, we want them inside.

**Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (Moderator):** Ladies, and the few gentlemen who are with us, we now have to bring this exciting, informative, exhilarating, invigorating, interesting debate to a close. I will not attempt to recap all we have heard. I would just like to leave us with some thoughts.

It seems as if a lot of work has gone into this agenda, a lot of really great work. But somewhere along the line, in doing that work, we have not been explicit in our demands and about our expectations of women in decision-making. So, maybe henceforth, as you continue your capacity-building programs, your empowerment programs, your mobilization programs, your grooming programs, [you ensure that] they go hand in hand with explicit demands and explicit expectations of what you would like to see of women once they get into decision-making positions.

And as for women in decision-making positions, we hear your pleas for better communication. We know that you are extremely busy women. You have to juggle your demands with your political office, with your parties, with your constituencies, with your families. [There are many] trips you have to make for official and non-official reasons. But the feminist movement, which has fought so hard for you to get to these positions, has very specific concerns about the rights of women. About women's poverty, about women's access to land, around violence against women, around women's access to abortion, and a whole range of issues that we know are important to you as well. But because you are so busy trying to manipulate a system that you don't know much about, and which is so hostile to you, you don't have time.

We hope that both of you will find some meeting ground as we go forward because we know that this is an ongoing conversation. The debate did not start today; it started many years ago, and it's going to continue for a while to come. I would like to think, from what I've heard from the two parties and the supporters' clubs, we have *not* wasted our time getting women into decision-making!

## Women's Empowerment – What do Men Have to do with it?



**Samia Rahim:** Good morning. Thank you all for being here. Welcome to the discussion on women's empowerment, and what do men have to do with it.

There has been a great resistance on the part of most feminists and men on the issues of gender and development. In fact, there has been a lot of hostility on the part of most feminists to engage men in our struggles, because men are traditionally associated with oppression, and women are victims of this oppression. But so many of us share intimate connections with men in our lives through our relationships with our fathers, our brothers and sons, our sons-in-law, our lovers and our husbands. So it isn't really useful to lump all men together and think of them as the problem, because they often are not.

## So how do we engage men in feminist movements? How does that happen? Why do men question or give up their masculine images? What is needed to mobilize men in feminist and social movements?

So how do we engage men in feminist movements? How does that happen? Why do men question or give up their masculine images? What is needed to mobilize men in feminist [and] social movements? These are the questions that I would pose to our speakers here, and I hope that what they share with us inspires us to engage the men in our lives and in our feminist movements.

I [want to] introduce the speakers. First [is] Henry Armas, human rights lawyer from Peru. Henry is the director of the NGO, GRUPA [and] is studying currently at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Next we have Andrea Cornwall, who is a professorial fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex. She is a social anthropologist by training [and] also the director of Pathways to Women's Empowerment. Finally, we also have Mbuyiselo Botha, General Secretary of the South African Men's Forum. He has been commended by Mbeki Ndiki and the Women's State Celebrations for raising the consciousness in men in the new South Africa.

**Samia Rahim:** If men and boys are privileged by existing gender hierarchies, where is the incentive for men to work towards gender equality?

**Mbuyiselo Botha:** I come from South Africa. I come from a liberation country that arose [after] I [saw] my parents get shot. The ANC has taught us [that] freedom is for all of us. You cannot support freedom and say that you are in a free country [when] the majority of its citizens are not free.

I have a material interest in the work that I do. The material interest is that I am raising two young girls. I have three children: one a boy born 29 September 1979, one girl born 19 February 1990, and one girl born 15 September 1994. I want to raise these girls to understand and appreciate that within their liberation lies my own liberation, and that as long as the majority of the world's population is still oppressed, so am I oppressed. I take [my lessons] from what happened in this country. White people would never be free for long as long as the majority of its people are oppressed.

Let me nail my colours [to] the mast. I don't do this for any other reason other than for self interest. And if you asked me this morning what is my self interest, I would say [it is] to create an environment where my two girls will live and know that when they walk in through the gate, they don't have to look over their shoulder. They don't have to think twice about going out into the night. I therefore say that it is up to me as a man, 50 years old, living in South Africa, to ensure that this work [is] successful because of one result: I will never claim total freedom if the citizens of this country are not free.

**Samia Rahim:** My next question is to Andrea. What are your frustrations with the way the feminist movement engages with men currently? What changes are needed in the men and masculinities discourse?

**Andrea Cornwall:** Well, I think it is worth looking back. I got involved in all this masculinity stuff in the late 80s when there was a very exciting wave of work, inspired by the work of people like R.W. Connell. There were various books and a lot of discussion. I was a student, and I found this all very exciting, [even though] a lot of my feminist colleagues thought [it was a] real waste of time. This is a diversion of our energy, [they said]. If you are going to study something, study women. Study the stuff that's going on with women. Don't waste time doing stuff with men, or on men.

[Despite the opposition], I got involved in putting together a book, which was one of the first anthropological

core books about men and masculinities, and tried to make an argument about the limiting ways we had been thinking about men and essentializing [them]. It was very exciting. But then I became quite disillusioned.

As things moved on, I found that men did not seem to be at all active or even at all bothered about equal pay. I could not see the men out there in the streets demanding greater political representation for women, to equalize political representation. I did not see men getting particularly agitated about not doing their equal share of housework or childcare, or addressing issues around unpaid reproductive work ... At the same time the men and masculinity discourse focused very much on the intimate. It focused on men as partners, focused on men's sexuality, and it focused on men and violence. But it did not go beyond that – into personal investments men might have in taking advantage of the privileges that they got from society. I felt very frustrated at that as well.

At the same time [that I was] getting frustrated with all of this stuff, I attended what was to me [a] scene-shifting event. We had a launch at IDS of a publication which looked at feminist contributions to research on gender, and what had gone wrong with the gender agenda. There must have been about 70-80 people there. There were five men, and the men spent the entire meeting saying, why are there no men in this book? Why were there not more men invited to this meeting in the first place? We are all working on violence – why don't you take these issues seriously? People were really frustrated. Why didn't we invite men? We had tried. We had really tried. We didn't feel it was our responsibility to try too hard. Where were the men? Why weren't they responding to our invitations? Why weren't they recruiting other men to get involved in these debates? So I disengaged. But that disengagement really unsettled me.

I walked out of that room, and said to a feminist colleague, who had been very critical of me in engaging with this stuff, "You know, you were absolutely right, and I am stopping." But actually, I found that what those frustrations did was make me say, hang on a sec. I either say enough, this is not something I want to engage in, or I go back into it and say, where are these concerns about structural issues? Where are the opportunities and entry points to re-politicize what has become a very de-politicized debate? In re-engaging, I was able to channel some of my frustrations into thinking about some of these questions, questions around structure, around power, around privilege.

**Samia Rahim:** I want to ask Henry, what do you think is needed in order to bring about a transformation in institutions that reinforce and reproduce oppressive gender hierarchies and ideologies?

**Henry Armas:** Well, before I [started] studying [for] my masters degree, I was working [at an organization called] GRUPA. One of the things that we did was something called "Schools for Citizenship" in poor neighbourhoods

with school students, youngsters around 12-16 years old. One of the things that always [came up] in our workshops was their concerns around sexuality ... about personal experiences and how [to] live with their identities. They did not know what label to use to [articulate] those concerns. I [eventually] realized that many of these concerns could fit under the label of gender. There weren't many gender issues [being discussed], so one of the things that we tried to include were additional sessions and additional opportunities to have peer-to-peer conversations about these issues.

However, we realized that the gender discourse phrased as gender, as feminism, could be threatening. [Especially] for male youngsters. One of the things that helped us to talk [to them] about gender, to talk about feminism, was democracy. When we started to talk about democratizing gender relations, things started to work. We [were able to] use some methodologies that were used by feminists, to [explain] the multiple dimensions of exclusion. We used something called "flower power" [for example]. So, it was not only that you, as a young boy, live in a poor area, that you do not have water, that you don't have sanitation. It is also that the fact that your sister or mother or neighbour or even your teacher is a woman. [In other words, there were] additional elements of exclusion that were important to be aware of, and talking about democracy created a bridge that helped us to talk [about gender and feminism]. So I think that [the concept of] democracy is a good tool that could work, and could be used by feminism, to enable a different approach and different work with men.

On the other hand, [there] is the policy framework. Having worked as a lawyer helping people who could not afford to pay a lawyer for alimony cases, one of the things that got my attention was the [existence of] broad norms in Peruvian law that reflected [or] reproduced roles for men. One of [these norms] is [to regard] fathers as a kind of cash machine, especially when couples [are] separated. I realized the law punished men. It was allowed for men to be providers of the money, but it was not allowed for men to be providers of affection for children. To what extent [are] our norms, our family laws, [and] our different policies reflect[ed] [in] this particular construction of what is a man? I do think that we have to pay attention to these policies, because they reflect [and] reproduce these practices.

And the third element I consider important is everyday practices. These little [sexist] jokes that people tend to say in the office, in the workplace, in our universities. These little comments. Somebody has to stand up and say, "Hey, that's not funny" [or] "Why do you say that?" [Somebody] just [has to] question it, and embarrass this person, and create the opportunity at least to discuss things which are taken for granted. I do think that it is important to have this battle, this mini-battle, in everyday practices. I firmly believe in the butterfly effect – that these little changes can lead to other changes, because I have experienced it in my own environment with my



friends in Peru, with my colleagues abroad. These little battles can make a difference.

**Samia Rahim:** Mbuyiselo, in your work in the national context in South Africa, can you share with us what are the challenges you faced in establishing and working to establish more equitable gender relations?

**Mbuyiselo Botha:** The work we do at SAMFo (South African Men's Forum) ... it's not just about them and us. The issue extends from men because there is a perception that power is [being lost]. There is a perception that my manhood has been challenged ... The work we do in the program at SAMFo, which is called One Man Can, exists to say it is possible to have an equitable society [and] to allay fears ... [about losing this] power. I need to reclaim the power, and to ask questions such as, "What makes real men? Is it your physique? Are you just a physical human being as a man? Or are there other important things that would make you a man?"

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In the South African context, you have a situation where traditional leaders [claim that] it is tradition to do certain things. In the last three days, I was attending some of the sessions on fundamentalist religions [and thinking about] some of our [struggles] with the same situation in our country. And I say this without any fear of contradiction, as I go to church [myself]. [At my church], one of the pastors came up to say, "Mbuyiselo, what you [do] at the Men's Forum [and at SAMFo], those things are not applicable here. [Here] we are guided by the bible. We are guided by what the scriptures say, [that] the man is the head. You are influenced by this secular type of thinking. You are confused and eccentric in your approach. In the African context, these things don't apply or exist." Which is a lie!

Africans have a saying, "you are because I am; I am because you are." This is the genesis of what this work is all about ... What do you say when your daughter comes back and says I am a lesbian? Would you keep quiet? Or when you wake up tomorrow and read [in the papers] that in Soweto, two lesbians [were] killed for no other reason than their sexual orientation? Are you going to keep quiet?

This is my daughter. This is my son. I love them. If we keep quiet today, what will happen tomorrow? Who will they go for tomorrow? I think it was a German theologian who argued, "I didn't speak out because I was Catholic. I didn't speak out because I was a Protestant. I didn't speak out because I was a Jew." I'm saying that if you look at these barriers and you are quiet ... what will happen when those things happen in your home? For these barriers are not insurmountable. These barriers can be overcome for one simple reason, that there is something in it for us as men.

**Samia Rahim:** What strategies are needed to build synergies [with] the women's movement, and how do we engage men in working for equitable gender relations and social justice. Perhaps Andrea can go first.

**Andrea Cornwall:** For me, there are three things ... I believe we need to really contest and challenge and change and do research about the actual everyday experiences of women and men [in order to] challenge these gender myths that position women as powerless and men as powerful. We need to challenge those essentialisms in a very deep way. I think they very much limit our thinking. They really limit the ways in which men are given images of themselves to identify with.

For example, think about micro-credit and conditional cash transfer programs. The message there is men are irresponsible. There is no point in giving money to men. They cannot provide for their children and families. Women are more responsible. We need to make women the weapon against poverty, one of the agencies said. Women become the motors of the economy; women are the ones who will make development happen. Where does that leave men? What kinds of messages does that give men? [We hear a lot of] messages around men and violence. Men are violent. Women have to be protected from men's violence. What message does that give men?

I was challenged by a male friend of mine to name a single couple, a heterosexual couple, in whom this relationship of power that was portrayed in the GAD discourse obtained, and I couldn't think of a single one in my own personal networks in many countries. And I've got lots of friends in lots of different positions in lots of different places. We have to get away from that. It is not helping us ... We need to get away from [this essentializing] for our sons. There is something very personal about this, thinking [about] what are the messages these boys are getting about what it is to be a man. What might they feel about themselves if they were...represented differently?

My second point is that I think it can be unproductive to label issues as women's issues. A lot of the issues are everybody's issues. When you talk about "gender," people think "women." Actually, this is about unfairness. It's about things that are wrong, and when people mobilize around things that are wrong ... they can [be very effective]. I think this is a very important point. Alan Greig [says that] the

best way to mobilize people is through their identification, not through their identities. Not by showing [that] I am a woman, [and] therefore [this] is a woman's issue.

My third point is [that men] can be allies in our struggle. They can give us solidarity, and also there is work that they can do. There is a lot of work that they can do. They can work to get men to vote differently. They can work to get men to hold men to account when they are in political office, for voting against gender progressive or gender equal legislation. They can do a lot more to hold people to account in their workplaces, in the streets, by urging their employers to value and promote women more. By refusing promotion if they see women around them are not being promoted. By being really aware of their privileges and making this explicit...

I think that this is so important. It's about challenging and changing behaviour. There has been a lot of fantastic work on alternative ways of being a man in sexual relationships and in relation to violence. Let's take that a bit further. Let's take it into the workplace. Let's take it into streets. Let's take it into political institutions, and value and visibilise alternative ways of being a man in parliament. Alternative ways of being a man in a factory. There are other ways of doing things, and I think it is about men having a huge responsibility. We will be their allies, and we will work in solidarity with them. We cannot do their work for them in those arenas. They need themselves to take responsibility and be accountable for this.

**Henry Armas:** I would like to go back to those things that I have previously said. I think I've said enough about what we have to do in everyday spaces. These little battles we have to play in our lives. The importance of democracy. Because I do think that [democracy] not only helps us to have a different relationship [between] men and women. It also helps us to be civilized: who is the ruler, who is illiterate, who is the one who is HIV positive, who is the one who is discriminated against. I think that democratic discourse is a powerful tool that helps us to be civilized overall.

I would like to say that it is important to build bridges [between] feminism [and] other epistemological experiences. Everybody should be talking about civil society. Everybody is taking about [building] movements. Let's create spaces for participation. I do think that feminism has given us enormous lessons about how to build this, and how to fight against exclusion. How to claim full rights. And I do think that this enormously powerful contribution of feminism has to be widely acknowledged. The personal is political, yes. But not only for feminists.

**Mbuyiselo Botha:** I think for me, working with the women's movement is political. It is for us as men to acknowledge the pain that women continue to suffer. We cannot be blind to the reality of how I continue in my own home, to benefit from patriarchy. One day, I will come back home, and my daughter will say to my wife, "You know, mama, from today I will ask papa to actually wash

his socks." Mandela should have been more sympathetic to my disability! But he said, I think we are going to have to have a calendar when you are going to have to wash your socks! For me, it was symbolic. And there is no malice. For me, there is symbolism behind it.

I want to go back to my point, that [it] is important to work with the women's movement, and also to begin to listen, to hear as men. There is a big problem with men, in that we want to lead, and in doing so, we recreate those nefarious forms of patriarchy. So it's important to be led, because it's important also to humble ourselves, to [recognize] that the complaints and anger [from women] are not displaced. There is a history to that. It is important to acknowledge [women], and not acknowledge them behind closed doors, but publicly. I will give an example. I work in the Limpopo Province with a grant from DFID... I have been doing this work for the past 15 years, but I sit there learning [from] women from that province [who have] no resources [about] the work they do. For me, listening to them inspires me [and] encourages me. I am saying that it is very important, the experiences for us to understand, to listen, to appreciate, to acknowledge, but also to verbalize [our appreciation], and mobilize other men.

But [it's] also [important] to ask the women's groups, who are workers themselves, what are the ways [in which] we can change this society? It always bothers me as to why [there are always] men in the most important positions. The general secretary of Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) is male, but the majority of members are women. Why is it that other women vote men in? This year, we are celebrating Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday. The ANC is the largest liberation movement on the continent. Why is it that in this day and age that the ANC has not found it in its heart to elect a woman as president? Why? The majority – and I am dictated by logic – the majority [of the] members in the African National Congress are women. Why is it that even women themselves cannot find it in their hearts to [do] that?

The trainings we do, the workshops we do in the churches, in the movement, in the universities – these are small but important steps. This [work] is difficult. I don't know how many of you know [about] the work that we do in the men's movement. It is a lonely road. You sometimes feel, is it worth it? Do you want to go on? What makes it lonely is that you are labeled for doing the work you do. Is there something wrong with you? Can't you do some important, constructive work? Can't you find something substantive to do? They say you do the work because you have some disability! The sad part for me is that it says a lot about [what men] think about masculinity.

Let me close by saying that in this country – [in] another week – we'll be celebrating 16 Days [of Activism against Gender Violence] throughout the world. For me, it is important. This is the beginning. I am with a colleague of mine, [and] I am encouraged by him. He has been labelled a young men, [and] he would say, it is possible. It can happen.

## The global women's movement can learn a lot from the Indigenous movement

The participation of Indigenous representatives from Latin America, Africa and Asia was an integral component of raising the voices of Indigenous women at the AWID forum. Upon arrival, each participant received a bag containing programmatic information and details regarding the city of Cape Town, in addition to a report prepared by IIWF/FIMI with a calendar of activities (recommended) and contact information.

The designated AWID representative chosen to address the specific needs of Indigenous women was Zazil Canto of the AWID office in Mexico. Women during their stay had the opportunity to choose from the following activities:

- Leadership Transformation: Feminism from the Ground Up
- Women against Fundamentalist Movements
- Dialogue for the Construction of the Indigenous Afro Movement
- Dialogue with donors
- Tour of the city and nearby tourist cities

Delegates, regarding their experience at AWID and feminism and Indigenous women, reflected upon the creation of a global space where attendees were able to break through cultural barriers and open themselves to other aspects of the movement.

### Jennifer Tauli Corpuz, Kankana-ey Peoples, Philippines

From her experiences in the Philippines, Ms. Corpuz was quite wary about attending the AWID forum. "I never perceived myself as a feminist," states Ms. Corpuz, but after her positive interactions with different feminists and ideas of feminism from around the world at the AWID forum, she found that different concepts of feminism could fit with her work in international Indigenous human rights.

"I think that the global women's movement can learn a lot from the Indigenous movement," Ms. Corpuz states as she emphasizes the necessity for increased dialogue between the two movements. The feminist movement must understand culture and communities. However, it is likewise important for Indigenous peoples to learn from the feminist sense of duty and practice. Indigenous peoples have begun to articulate issues, but haven't achieved the level of duty, according to Ms. Corpuz.

At the AWID forum, Ms. Corpuz had the opportunity to interact with other Indigenous women who shared many of the same feelings and learned that many Indigenous women across the globe face similar issues. She noted that it was important for her to interact with other Filipino attendees, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

After the forum, Ms. Corpuz reflected that it is very important for young women to have the opportunity to attend global forums such as AWID. The partnerships and perspectives gained during the forum continue to influence her work and drive to participate more fully in the next AWID forum.

### Anneta Bok, Khomani San Peoples, South Africa

"This was my first time attending a large international women's conference. At the beginning, I was confused about feminism and the meaning of power in the women's movement...But in the end, the forum made me feel stronger, really important and confident that the power of women is finally being recognized around the world."

Ms. Bok emphasized that attending the AWID forum pushed her to expand her international participation and raise her voice at other conferences such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which will take place at the UN headquarters in New York from 18–29 May 2009.

Immediately upon returning to her community after the AWID forum, Ms. Bok organized a training session on financial management with tools and ideas that she gained during her interactions in Cape Town. Fifty-five participants, young women in her community, were very excited to become involved and use these training ideas, especially in HIV/AIDS prevention. Despite facing some dissonance from elders in the community, Ms. Bok was able to balance the traditional knowledge of her peoples with her ideas cultivated at AWID.

"It is always so nice to meet people from different countries," explains Ms. Bok. "Sometimes you feel that you are the only one facing problems in your community, but then you begin to speak with other ladies and realized that many things are the same, and we can exchange ideas for resolution."

*- Representatives from the International Indigenous Women's Forum*



## AWID Donors

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... and many other generous contributors to AWID's "Send a Sister" fund. **Thank you!!**



about the portraits

The portraits shown above come from the “Defending our Futures” exhibition that was created onsite at the forum by artist-activists Gabrielle Le Roux and Sipho Mthathi, in collaboration with forum participants. The exhibit celebrated and recognized brave social movement builders from around the world, and included the above images, as well as different types of text written by the participants about themselves and their experiences. For a closer look at the exhibition, and to read participants’ writeups, visit [www.awid.org/eng/Forum-08/Defending-our-Futures-Exhibition](http://www.awid.org/eng/Forum-08/Defending-our-Futures-Exhibition).