

Feminist voices and experiences opening spaces for civil society

July 3, 4 and 5 - Naivasha, Kenya



During the first week of July in Naivasha, Kenya, the three Urgent Action Funds (**Urgent Action Fund**; UAF-Africa, and UAF-LA) carried out the meeting entitled *“Closing Civil Society: feminist organizing, resistance and resilience”*, in order to discuss with over 30 FEMALE ADVOCATES and activists from Africa, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East the challenges they face, how they resist and move forward in the face of the closing of spaces for civil society.

Since their creation, the Urgent Action Funds have contributed to the sustainability of the women’s movement and the feminist movement in the world, through their **Rapid Response Grant** Programs. The analysis of those grants over the last years has led us to start a research with over 100 interviews across the globe. This to face the worrying closing or blocking of the participation of civil society on behalf of state, economic and political powers.



This is how we convened in **Kenya**, to present the preliminary results of this research being conducted by the three Funds. A research pointed at asking ourselves about the impact that the closing of these spaces has and, specifically, the situation of female advocates, activists and women’s organizations. There we identified the strategies used to limit

women's participation spaces and restrict freedoms of expression, association and social protest, among others. The analysis was carried out from a gender and feminist perspective.

This research and encounter were possible thanks to the support of the Open Society Foundations (OSF). Both allowed us to socialize and delve deep into the violent modes of repression against female activists and organizations that advocate women's human rights, girls and trans people, as well as the attacks against female advocates for the land and shared resources, who have become targets for fundamentalists and repressive governments.

Advocates also shared their critical thoughts on the differential impacts that this global phenomenon has on their lives and organizational processes. Likewise, they analyzed different strengthening and resistance strategies for their initiatives, such as:



- Solidarity networks on an international, regional or local scale
- Creative strategies for fundraising
- Use of ICTs for the advocacy and promotion of rights
- Development of practices for self-care, mutual care and healing
- Recommendations for donors and the philanthropic community to increase support for these initiatives

These were some of the impressions that Latin American participants in this encounter had:

"Discussing the closing of spaces for civil society was a new and structural topic for me. It had an intercontinental vision that allowed me to listen to the experiences of women in the flesh and bone. Women who do real work for other women. This made me feel part of a global resistance that is worth to continue, building in order to push forward the fight for our rights."

Verónica Cruz. Centro Las Libres, Mexico.

"On a personal level, getting to know and knowing myself in this group of women invited to the encounter in Kenya has been inspiring as has been the rescue of shared challenges. This space has also been clarifying in order to acknowledge the difficult scenario we face of conservatism and fundamentalism. A scenario that charges at feminist fights. For me, it is a reaffirmation that, in the face of these scenarios, we need self-care, well-being and comprehensive protection."

Jessenia Casani. Demus, Peru.

"I'm grateful for the space to share the situation in Nicaragua, the exchange of experiences, the opportunity to continue coordinating efforts. In the reports, common situations in Latin America

and in countries in other continents are identifiable. For example, antidemocratic government institutions that affect the work of female advocates to the point of putting their lives at risk. Even in these complex contexts, we as feminists are innovating resistance mechanisms.”

Evelyn Flores Mayorga. Fundación Puntos de Encuentro y Red de mujeres contra la violencia, Nicaragua.

On behalf of **the Urgent Action Fund (UAF-LA)**, we thank all Latin American participants who, with their smiles, enthusiasm and critical spirit, contributed to this space of collective exchange and learning. Likewise, we thank the teams from sister Funds, who brought to life an unprecedented idea and turned this encounter into an opportunity to continue working for the world for which we dream.

