

# FEMINIST ACTIVISM WITHOUT FEAR



## MOVEMENT STRATEGIES FOR COLLECTIVE POWER & CARE



**Feminist activists are leading movements for justice and liberation worldwide. Today, they are less and less safe.** From digital surveillance and smear campaigns, to violence that targets the well-being of activists' organizations, loved ones, and communities, feminist activists are being targeted with increased—and increasingly intense—forms of backlash, or “reprisals.”

That's why Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism launched the campaign, **Feminist Activism Without Fear: Facing Risks with Collective Power & Care**. Visit [feministactivismwithoutfear.org](https://feministactivismwithoutfear.org) to read the firsthand stories of feminist activists, or human rights defenders, and their movements—and learn how they're pushing back against backlash.

### HOW CAN MOVEMENTS RESPOND TO BACKLASH WITH COLLECTIVE POWER AND CARE? WHAT DOES COLLECTIVE CARE LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

- **Most crucially, collective protection, care, and safety strategies must be determined by feminist movements themselves**, taking into account that healing and recovery is a non-linear and often long-term process that varies depending on the reprisals activists are facing and the community, geography, and cultures they are rooted in.
- **Promote a feminist, inclusive understanding of backlash, or reprisals. Understanding the full scope of backlash that feminist activists face is key to ensuring the collective, holistic well-being of activists and their organizations, coalitions, networks, and movements.** Most efforts to address activists' security focus narrowly on individuals and immediate threats to their physical and digital security. But we know from feminist activists' [stories](#) that perpetrators also target their mental, emotional, economic, spiritual, and professional security as well as the safety, health, and well-being of activists' organizations, families, loved ones, support networks, and movements. Disabled, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+ and other activists from structurally marginalized groups are even more likely to face violence and threats and be denied access to resources for protection and healing.

**“Care is inherent to how feminists organize. We care about the wellbeing of others and we don't want to see communities continue to suffer. But we must also look at it as core to how our movements will be sustained and for our own survival and wellbeing.”**

— SOMER NOWAK, *Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism*



Illustration Credit: Nafisa Ferdous  
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- **Monitor, document, and take coordinated action to denounce, amplify and make visible the collective impact of backlash and retaliation** against feminist activists, their families and loved ones, support people and networks, organizations, communities, and movements.
- **Promote and support collective care and protection strategies that take into account the myriad, intersecting ways in which activists are targeted** with violence and other forms of retribution. Address the immediate, short-term threats to activists as well as the broader systems, circumstances, and environments in which activists, organizations, and movements are operating.
- **Center collective care in security and protection strategies.** While this will vary across movements, depending on activists' contexts and needs, examples might include:
  - ▶ Providing access to **psychosocial support from politically aligned, culturally relevant, healers.**
  - ▶ Ensuring activists' **basic needs**, such as housing and health care, are met.
  - ▶ **Reclaiming ancestral and other practices** that are Indigenous and meaningful for local communities.
  - ▶ If an activist needs to relocate, asking, **"Are there ways to ensure their family and/or caregivers can join or otherwise ensure that they are also protected?"**
  - ▶ Or asking, **"How do we make sure we're inclusive and attentive to the distinct priorities and needs of activists with disabilities?"**
- **Strengthen and support community-centered and -driven approaches to collective care and protection**, including supporting the capacity and self-determination of feminist activists and their organizations, movements, and communities to develop holistic strategies to address their specific circumstances and protection needs.
- **Promote, cultivate, and build sustainable collective care networks.** Activists know best what they and their movements need, and collective care and protection networks are one of the most effective ways feminist activists keep themselves and each other safe.
- **Advocate for the long-term infrastructure necessary to create and sustain collective care networks, practices, and opportunities** so that feminist movements can build collective power from a position of individual and collective well-being, challenge oppressive systems and **create a just world—safely, freely, and without fear.**

**"Our friends from Guatemala led a collective therapy exercise and I never thought that they would be able to bring out very deep traumatic emotions from all of us. We really need this. Because we try to heal our communities, but we [must] also heal ourselves. And it's beyond self-care. The power of the collective is very, very strong."**

**— ANNA, peacebuilding activist living in exile\***

*Photo Credit: Norma Gabriela Galvan  
Photo Credit: Aghyad Najjar*

*\*Names and other identifying features have been changed*



**For more information and resources, and to read activists' stories, visit [feministactivismwithoutfear.org](https://feministactivismwithoutfear.org) or contact [info@urgentaction.org](mailto:info@urgentaction.org).**