



MADRE

Winter 2018-19 speaks

Fighting for
Feminist Futures



MADRE

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*Please enjoy
our winter
newsletter
and see what
you make
possible!*

Cover photo: Indigenous girls in Nicaragua prepare for a show featuring traditional dance at an annual gathering held by our partners, Wangki Tangni. ©MADRE

Mothering on the Borders

By Yifat Susskind, Executive Director

When my sons were younger, I remember explaining to them the difference between real and imaginary. Their dreams and nightmares weren't real; you couldn't see or touch them. The stories in their books weren't real; I soothed their worries about monsters coming to life by assuring my boys it was all just imaginary.

Those conversations have surfaced in my mind as I've been thinking about borders; these made-up lines etched across the Earth by the powerful to hold their power in place—lines that are imaginary at first and then all too real.

Over the past year, I've spent time at many of these borders—from the US-Mexico border to Palestine to Korea—with Indigenous women leaders and feminist peace activists. In each place, I listened as mothers told of their responsibility for the survival and peace of mind of their children in these zones of hostility and violence, loss and separation.

To see the world through the eyes of those who are responsible for its most vulnerable people: that's what it means to work from the perspective of mothers. When we do this, we understand anew the issues that drive migration and border brutality—and the solutions needed to address them.

From Central America to Arizona: The Road to Refuge

The violence of colonial borders is well known to Indigenous Peoples around the world, including the Tohono O'odham, whose territory straddles Arizona and Mexico. Their land is ground zero in the resistance to Trump's proposed border wall, projected to loom along 75 miles of these federally recognized tribal lands.

MADRE worked with the US Human Rights Network to facilitate an international delegation of our Indigenous partners to the Tohono O'odham territory and southern Arizona. These women, from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Cameroon, Kenya, and Nepal, have all seen their lands divided by colonial borders created to exclude and control.

And so they came to Arizona, to demonstrate that migration is an Indigenous issue and to lay the groundwork for a global campaign of solidarity with the Tohono O'odham and with the migrants seeking refuge on their land.

Over tacos and iced tea, in the concrete courtyard of the Puente Community Center in Phoenix, we sat in a circle of colorful plastic chairs, talking with families who had risked the treacherous journey across the desert to the US. Each story was unique, but every person hinted at the longstanding US policies that ultimately made their home untenable.



A delegation of our partners in Arizona. (Left to right) Leduvina Guill of Nicaragua, Otilia Lux de Coti of Guatemala, Aehshatou Manu of Cameroon, Executive Director Yifat Susskind, Kamala Thapa of Nepal, and Yasso Bhattachan of Nepal. ©MADRE

Fabiana¹, born in Mexico the year that NAFTA came into effect, spoke of the trade agreements that bankrupted farmers. Ignacio made a wry joke about the US meddling that helped install Honduras' repressive government. Paola described the patrols of vicious armed men that mushroomed across the Salvadoran countryside as Washington waged its "war on drugs." All of this in the wake of the US-backed wars and genocide of the 1980s, with their legacy of displacement and trauma—a burden that weighs heavily on those especially targeted, Indigenous Peoples.

At MADRE, having partnered with grassroots women's organizations throughout the region for 35 years, we've seen how repression and instability have also produced epidemic levels of gender violence. For instance, during Guatemala's 36 years of civil war, tens of thousands of Guatemalan women and girls were raped, tortured and murdered. These attacks were part of a deliberate strategy to traumatize individuals and terrorize entire communities. Since peace accords were signed in 1996, the perpetrators have rarely been brought to justice, further normalizing gender violence.

Guatemala now has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world; the number of women murdered in the country has tripled since 2000, and with rampant impunity, less than four percent of homicide cases result in conviction. With no protection for those at risk and no accountability for the crimes that have been committed, it is no wonder that so many of those fleeing to the US are women with children in their care.

As families shared their stories, one other, often overlooked, reason for leaving home stood out: climate change. "We could no longer grow food," said Magdalena, a young mother from Guatemala. Shifting her four-year-old, Bibi, on her lap, she described the gathering panic of



A mother attends a human rights training in Nicaragua with her child. © Wangki Tangni

watching corn wither on the stalk. "Every morning it's a little worse until you realize all is lost."

In fact, since Bibi's birth in 2014, when the "child migrant crisis" on the southern US border began making headlines, a creeping "Dry Corridor" has cut through the four Central American countries with the highest rates of migration: Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. For all of Trump's racist and self-serving talk of gang violence, many migrants from Guatemala are, like Magdalena and Bibi, fleeing the drought that's been intensified by a century of US carbon pollution.

We said our goodbyes to the families at Puente and headed southeast to the town of Florence. There, we met with exhausted young lawyers from the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project, hard at work trying to reunite families separated by Trump's "zero tolerance" policies. Their clients

included babies as young as one year old and terrified Indigenous children, who speak neither Spanish nor English. No one had told them where their parents were or why they were alone in a strange place.

I climbed back into the van with my colleagues and our partners, and we immediately began to organize: planning a network of Mam, Tz'utujil, and Kaqchikel speakers to translate for people in detention, finding trauma counselors to ease suffering, and continuing our partnership with the Florence Project to hone a national and international legal strategy to fight back against Trump's policies.

On Motherhood and Marginalization

Later, I stood at the border, looking over the fence into Mexico. The hard-baked ground was strewn with discarded plastic water bottles, bits of small pink clothing, used diapers. It

¹ All names in this section have been changed.

was punishing to stand in the sun even for a few minutes, impossible to imagine carrying a baby across that desert.

If we understand refugees and migrants as people, with the same fears and dreams that any one of us has, the drive to seek safety would be obvious. But the Trump Administration has dehumanized migrants to the point where they deem it acceptable to kidnap and cage thousands of children, and take nursing children away from their mothers.

The simple, daily acts of mothering carry immense power. These are the ways we show our children that they are loved and safe, and grow them into compassionate, capable adults. These acts of love are more than private, familial shows of affection: they are the way we help ensure the best potential of human beings. Every public policy should be oriented in support of that work.

Instead, parenting is under assault—at the US border and in so many of our policies and institutions. One of the more wrenching dinner-table conversations I've had with my sons this year was about how Trump's "family separation" policy is only the most recent expression of this country's white supremacy. We talked about enslaved children, sold away from their parents for profit and to sever ties of love that anchor resistance. We talked about Indigenous children, abducted and sent to boarding schools to extinguish their cultures.

The story of systematic and forced separation of families by the state isn't only foundational to US history. It's also the story of millions of incarcerated people in the US right now, disproportionately poor, brown and black people—and increasingly, mothers. Their right to mother and be mothered, to parent and be parented, has long been under attack. Many prison reform and abolition advocates were quick to point this out. During the flashes of public outrage against the Administration's

abuse of immigrant families, they guided people to see common and longstanding policies of mass incarceration in the same light.

So, what comes next? We organize, to sustain that flash and turn it into an enduring, more expansive spotlight. We refuse to turn away. We join together to support mothers and activists who never grew inured to the danger because racist assault has always been a clear-and-present threat in their lives. That's a lesson we can borrow from MADRE's history, too—founded as a vehicle to enable people in the US to act in solidarity with Nicaraguan mothers under siege from wars sponsored by the Reagan Administration—and a lesson that we strengthen and re-commit to continually.

Mothering and Migration as Acts of Hope

The work of mothers to make their families and communities viable and safe, to meet people's basic needs for health care, water, or schooling also serves to build the connections that create resilient, healthy communities able to imagine a new way of living and to demand policy action to achieve it.

This work gives us all a lens to reconsider issues like international trade agreements, development, climate change, national security, geopolitical relations, nuclear weapons proliferation, and the military-prison-industrial complex. These are not only women's issues—as women's human rights activists have long argued—but mothers' issues. You don't have to be a woman or a parent to know this. You only need to understand that the policies that govern the most pressing questions of our time require a fundamental overhaul from serving the powerful to protecting the vulnerable. And that is what mothers have always done.

The morning that Trump announced the deployment of US

soldiers to the southern border, I thought again of Magdalena, who fled the fatal realities of failed harvests in Guatemala. Trump would have us believe that it's not climate change, but Magdalena and her four-year-old who are the threat.

In fact, at borders around the world, black and brown people are trying to escape conditions largely created by the countries that enforce those borders. Public support for militarized border enforcement depends on the demonization of those seeking safety and sustenance: the men are "rapists" and "animals," says Trump; the women are guilty of bringing more black and brown people into the world.

Those of us inside of militarized borders, within zones of relative safety and wealth, have a choice to make. We can choose the fear that Trump foments and seek the way of the "armed lifeboat." That's the choice to hide behind weapons, barbed wire and privilege to deny the rest of the world (at least until time runs out). Or we can build a mothership that carries everyone, understanding, as the poet Alexis De Veaux does, that "Motherhood is not simply the organic process of giving birth... It is understanding the needs of the world."

If we wish for more than mere survival, our best hope to overcome the crises we face—from climate change to militarism and beyond—lies in the bonds and resilience we build with each other, across borders of all kinds. If we understand that, we defend people's right to have viable homes safe from war and disaster. And we fight with just as much fervor for people's right to seek new lives across borders. Because migration, like motherhood, is an act of hope. ♦

To read an extended version of this essay, including Yifat's reflections on our work around borders in Palestine and Korea, please visit our website at www.madre.org/motheringatborders



Your Support in Action



Our partners in Waspm, Nicaragua travel by boat on the Rio Coco to get from community to community. ©Elizabeth Rappaport

Ending Gender Violence in Nicaragua

Broadcasting Women's Rights

With your support, Indigenous women in rural communities have vital information to protect their rights, thanks to a radio station run by our local partner group, Wangki Tangni. Thriving for two years now, it remains the only women's rights radio broadcasting on Nicaragua's North Atlantic Coast.

Relayed in both Spanish and Miskito, the local Indigenous language, the programs inform

women who have survived abuse about how to reach shelters, medical care and legal services. Your support has also helped provide over 200 solar-powered radios to Indigenous women, so that this life-saving information reaches even the most isolated communities without electricity.

To strengthen this project, MADRE sponsored a gathering of Indigenous radio producers

and activists in Oaxaca, Mexico in September. There, Wangki Tangni's team visited a local Indigenous community radio station and exchanged strategies to use the radio to organize their communities for progressive action. They also received training from a local activist on storytelling and on using radio as a tool to transmit Indigenous oral histories.

"What I liked the most about the trip to Oaxaca was learning new tools and strategies on how to continue strengthening our storytelling on the radio. Now, we want to include more stories; radio programming is done better when we include our own stories and those of our communities."

-Larisa Escobar, Wangki Tangni's Executive Director

Vilma Washington Cruz, left, who attended the training in Oaxaca, and Rose Cunningham, Wangki Tangni's founder. ©MADRE





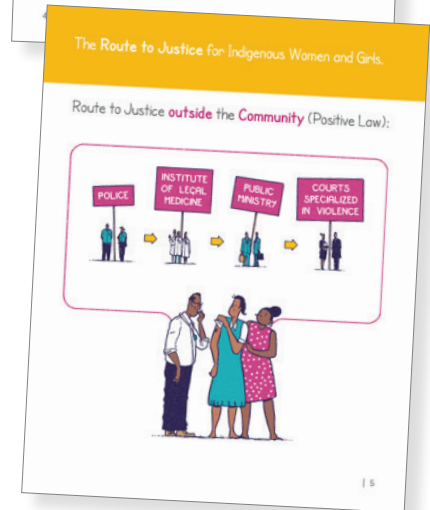
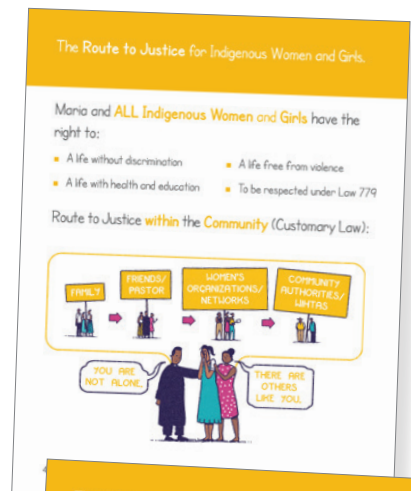
Wangki Tangni members discuss the visual learning guide for Law 779. © Wangki Tangni

Women's Rights in Pictures

In October, over 1000 Indigenous Miskito women attended the annual forum organized by Wangki Tangni, our partner organization in Nicaragua. It's a unique space to celebrate, learn and strategize on progress for Indigenous women's rights. A highlight of the forum was the new visual learning guide MADRE created with Wangki Tangni to spread the word on Law 779, Nicaragua's law against domestic violence. Our guide, in both Spanish and Miskito, enables women to

overcome language, literacy and learning barriers in order to access the legal protections that we and our partners fought for and won.

The idea draws inspiration from our partner on the other side of the world in Iraq, the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). Together, we created visual guides, in Kurdish and Arabic, to educate people about their rights and enable them to access services like legal assistance and shelter.



Snapshots from the visual learning guide MADRE created with Wangki Tangni.

Advancing Climate Justice in Kenya

Indigenous Women Lead the Way

Our partners the Indigenous Information Network (IIN), mobilize women on the frontlines of climate change. Kenya is enduring longer dry months and dwindling water supplies creating burdens that fall heavily on women and girls. They are the ones typically tasked with walking long hours to find and haul scarce water for the household.

Thanks to your contributions, we have installed water storage tanks that collect rainfall and secure clean, easy-to-access water for women and families. IIN was also able to distribute over 100 energy efficient cookstoves, an updated Indigenous design that burns plant waste instead of wood.



Indigenous women receive the water tanks we delivered on our trip in October. ©Poppy Miyonga

Also, we delivered 50,000 tree seedlings to women farmers, which will offset climate change by renewing forests and protect local water sources by preventing erosion.

Voyage with a Vision: An Update from Our Trip to Kenya

In October, we visited IIN in Kenya with a group of dedicated MADRE members. We came together to learn how women are building resilience in the face of climate change.

In workshops and small group discussions, local activists shared their skills and accomplishments. For instance, one woman demonstrated how to make energy-efficient cookstoves from local materials. This workshop created space for her to pass along a valuable skill and show other women how to cook using less firewood.

Thank you to our members who joined us on this voyage!



MADRE members meet with our partners in Kenya. (left to right) Paulina, Selena, Paula, Esther, Jennifer. ©Poppy Miyonga

“For me, this experience was truly phenomenal. The trip of a lifetime: connecting in such an open-hearted way with the Kenyan women, sharing life experience, the unbelievable challenges they endure, uplifted by their joy, their singing, dancing, their generosity, their courage, laughing together. Their commitment to the education of their daughters.” -Paula Pace

Building a Just Peace in Palestine

Announcing a New Partnership

Dalia is a grassroots organization in Palestine that strengthens communities and the rights of women and girls by creating opportunities



With the help of Dalia, this young woman opened the mobile restaurant seen behind her to raise money and boost her economic independence. ©Dalia

to tap into local resources. Israeli occupation policies deprive people of essentials like water, electricity and medical care and keep them trapped behind walls and checkpoints. Dalia invites communities to propose their own initiatives to confront threats and provides resources to bring those projects to life. We're excited to launch this new partnership!

MADRE is supporting Dalia's youth program, offering opportunity and resources for girls to create their own community development projects and step up as leaders.

MADRE also sends Dalia emergency grants when crises erupt. Recently, thanks to the support of MADRE members like you, we provided Dalia funds to help farmers in Gaza rehabilitate their land damaged during Israeli military attacks. ♦



GRANTMAKING SPOTLIGHT:

Mobilizing in Emergencies



When disaster strikes, your support helps us mobilize emergency grants to grassroots women's organizations on the frontlines. ©PMRS

Palestine

MADRE grants provide critical immediate relief, medical care and long-term support.

Throughout 2018, Israeli military forces retaliated against Palestinians protesting the years-long siege of Gaza. Tens of thousands were injured and over 200 killed. Here are some highlights of our emergency grantmaking response.

- MADRE supported the **Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS)** to provide emergency medical assistance, first aid, treatment for tear-gas inhalation, on-the-spot care for injuries, and post-operative care like wound dressing and physiotherapy services.
- MADRE helped send a shipment of humanitarian aid with medicine and emergency supplies to be distributed in Gaza.
- MADRE also supports mobile clinics run by PMRS to distribute medicines, do checkups, and provide in-home trainings for people to care for their injured and disabled family members.



PMRS members deliver vital humanitarian aid to those affected by airstrikes in Gaza. ©PMRS

US-Mexico Border

MADRE mobilized through our **No Borders on Gender Justice Campaign** to confront the Trump Administration's increasingly repressive policies and protect migrants under attack at the US-Mexico border.

- We worked with the Mexican women's fund **Semillas** to help ensure that people making the dangerous trek from Central America to the US have shelter, information about their rights and referrals to service providers on both sides of the borders.
- We partnered with the **Florence Project** in Arizona to offer counseling and legal aid for children separated from their parents at the border.
- We supported the **Black Alliance for Just Immigration** to elevate issues facing black immigrants and refugees in the US, who have been separated from their families.



A woman in Mexico City carries a sign of her sons who disappeared migrating to the US. © MADRE

Helping Hands, Humanitarian Aid

Through our Helping Hands program, MADRE delivers humanitarian aid—such as medicines, health supplies, wheelchairs and other basic necessities—to our partners in communities facing war and disaster, where such items cannot be locally sourced.

This work stems from MADRE's earliest days, when we brought essentials like powdered milk and baby cereal to communities under siege in Central America, or when former Executive Director Vivian Stromberg helped drive a convoy of trucks with life-saving medicine into Iraq, equipping hospitals threatened by US sanctions after the first Gulf War.

The effort continues today. Most recently, Helping Hands partnered with the grassroots organization **Taller de Salud** in Puerto Rico, a community-based feminist organization that supports girls and women in low-income communities. We sent a shipment of prenatal vitamins sponsored by MADRE members, to ensure that pregnant women have the vitamins they need for healthy pregnancies.

CAPACITY BUILDING SPOTLIGHT:

Progress One Student at a Time

By Adan Obeid, Program Coordinator for Middle East and North Africa, MADRE

Amina is an 18-year-old Syrian refugee who has been living in Lebanon since 2012. Syria's war interrupted her childhood, and she missed out on years of education when her family first fled to Lebanon.

When she was finally able to go back to school, Amina made up for lost time. She began taking English classes offered by the Syrian Women's League (SWL), our local partner. She never misses a class—she is that eager to learn!

She also attends SWL's workshops supported by MADRE about reproductive health, gender equality and women's rights. These have shaped her thinking: she now wants to wait to get married until she is older so she can continue her education, work and become a leader in her community and country.

Now, Amina also holds regular discussion circles with groups of girls and older women. She encourages mothers to support their daughters to finish their education and pushes her



A woman from SWL teaching a political awareness session. ©Syrian Women's League

friends to imagine and pursue new opportunities. She sometimes faces resistance, but she persists. She knows that change is possible and not only because she's seen it in herself—she saw it happen with her mother, too.

The first time Amina came to the SWL community center was with her mother Hamida—who is 34 years old, got married at the age of 13, and has six children. Hamida heard about the activities available for Syrian women at the center from her

neighbor and decided to take a class. She joined literacy classes, and as her ability to read and write grew, so did her self-esteem. Her views on early marriage have also shifted, and now she wants her daughters to wait until they're older before marrying and to continue their educations.

Amina and her mom have both gained so much from the SWL community center. And they're both using that knowledge to help their family and community! ♦

Legal Win In India

The Indian Supreme Court recently struck down a part of the Indian Penal Code that criminalized gay sex. In its decision, the Court quotes a paragraph from a 2013 report that MADRE and allied organizations submitted to the UN on homophobia, transphobia, and women's access to justice. We are proud to have played a part in this landmark ruling!



Why Give to MADRE

Kavita Ramdas Dedicates Her Birthday

Kavita Ramdas, an internationally renowned women's rights advocate, offered us her wisdom and guidance as our strategy advisor for a year and a half. She also graciously dedicated her birthday to MADRE by organizing an online fundraiser! This is a powerful way for MADRE members to amplify their voice, take action and support strong, courageous

women worldwide. We are so grateful that Kavita chose to raise donations on the occasion of her birthday for MADRE!

Why MADRE? Well, because as Kavita says, MADRE "stands with women activists to change policies, protect their rights and build safer, healthier communities." To organize your own fundraiser, email madrespeaks@madre.org today!

LEGAL ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT:

Solidarity Matters



A memorial to Rosemary González. © Bradley Parker

In our work with grassroots local organizations, we know that the change we seek may be years in the making. And with your sustaining support, we keep at it. You see this in our work in Guatemala with Betty González, a mother fighting for justice for the murder of her daughter.

During the country's devastating, 36 year civil war, women and girls were systematically targeted for rape, torture and murder. But the official end of conflict in 1996 did not translate into security for women. In Guatemala today, women are killed at one of the highest rates in the world and their murderers are rarely prosecuted.

Take the case of Rosemary González. Rosemary was 17 years old when she was kidnapped and murdered in 2008. She lived with her mother Betty in the poor neighborhood of Barcenas, on the outskirts of Guatemala City. Betty turned to local police for help, but they dismissed her and refused to launch a real investigation. Betty dedicated her life to bringing justice for her daughter, and with MADRE's help, she garnered both local and international support in the process.

MADRE collaborated with grassroots Guatemalan partners, to launch an initiative to raise international awareness about Rosemary's murder and to spotlight gender violence and impunity in Guatemala. We

reached out to our members, asking for their solidarity with Betty and with women in Guatemala, and we received powerful letters of support like this one:

Dear Betty, I am thinking of you, in the loss of your daughter Rosemary, the violence and the pain of missing her presence in your daily life. Even though I am very far from Guatemala in miles, I am by your side in spirit. I give you my support from the bottom of my soul so that you will have success in your fight for justice. You are an inspiration for the world.

A warm embrace, Sue Greene

Justice may have been delayed, but it was not denied. Finally, after years of pressure, Rosemary's case was reopened. A new police investigation found her killer, who was just found guilty and sentenced to 30 years in jail, marking the first conviction of a woman's killer in this community.

The Guatemalan activists we collaborated with told us that it was their work with MADRE—the activist training, the legal services, the campaigns directed at their government, and the friendship and support they felt from women around the world—that made this victory possible. Thank you for being a part of that change. ♦

Letters to Our Sisters

We recently called on MADRE members, like you, to write letters of support for two of our partners, mother and daughter Tulia Maris Valencia and Sara Quiñonez, two Afro-Colombian women human rights defenders who have been unjustly imprisoned on baseless charges.

Sara and Tulia have dedicated their lives to protecting Afro-Colombian communities and are at the forefront of Colombian movements for environmental, racial and gender justice.

Their arrest and imprisonment comes as Colombia is experiencing a wave of killings of human rights defenders, with at least 322 murdered in less than three years. Instead of jailing human rights advocates, the government must protect them.

Our members responded in force. Here is just one example:

I support you both in your efforts to achieve justice for the Afro-Colombian populations of your country. I admire your courage, protest your unjust imprisonment, and hope you will feel the solidarity of the wider world in your support. You are heroic. -Carol Preston



Sara Quiñonez and Tulia Maris Valencia. © Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN)



Sustaining Our Activism

By Megan Richardson,
Membership Coordinator, MADRE

To sustain progressive movements for human rights, we must nurture and protect the activists who fuel those movements. Their vital work can be exhausting, and they often face backlash and threats. That's why we prioritize finding ways to nourish and replenish activists.

For instance, MADRE organized an international delegation of Indigenous women leaders to Arizona earlier this year, where they joined in a healing session. Led by



Indigenous women from around the world convening at MADRE's Arizona delegation. ©MADRE

an Indigenous woman traditional healer, the group shared stories and discussed strategies to maintain strength while continuing to defend their communities. From this, they also learned ways to keep focused on their purpose and to recognize the need for leadership of Indigenous women in the current crisis at the border.

ACROSS THE WORLD IN IRAQ, MADRE also supported a workshop for our partner, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), on how to address the impact of trauma. These activists learned exercises for practicing wellness, including meditation, breathing exercises and peer-to-peer grief processing. OWFI members reflected on how these techniques can address the effects of the trauma they experience through their work to help women fleeing violence escape and rebuild their lives.

One staff member said, "Despite all my years of doing this work, I never thought of this simple exercise,



Women from OWFI gather to meet and ask visiting MADRE staff questions. ©MADRE

which immediately refreshed me, relieved my headache and made me feel light." Another staff member commented on how they could use these methods in their shelters where women and their families fleeing violence find safety and support. "We can teach this to the women we are helping," she said. "It will relieve them, as well." ♦

Why Give to MADRE

The Chalfants Host an Intimate Gathering

Last spring, longtime activists and dedicated MADRE supporters Kathleen and Henry Chalfant graciously hosted a gathering at their home in Brooklyn for friends and fellow supporters of MADRE.

It was a wonderful evening of conversation and community building, exploring MADRE's history and continued work to advance women's organizing and leadership around the world. Filmmaker Henry Chalfant screened a film he created while traveling in Kenya with MADRE, which captured MADRE's on-the-ground work advancing climate justice with our longtime partner, the Indigenous Information Network (IIN).

The Chalfants' engaging and inspiring gathering was a great way for MADRE members to share stories and learn more about this vital work. To watch Henry's videos from Kenya, please visit: www.madre.org/kenyavideos. If you would like to host an event with MADRE, please contact Catherine Hsieh at chsieh@madre.org.



From left to right, Kathy Engel, founding Executive Director of MADRE; Yifat Susskind, Executive Director; MADRE supporter and event co-host Kathleen Chalfant; and MADRE Board Member Elz Cuya Jones. ©MADRE

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DATED MATERIAL



Feedback Corner

Let us know how you think MADRE is doing and what you would like us to cover in our newsletter. You could be featured in our next newsletter!

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