



# MADRE

Fall 2021

speaks

20 Years of the  
"War on Terror" —  
What Comes Next





**MADRE**

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Cover: A member of MADRE partner organization, Taller de Vida, looks off into the distance in Colombia.

# Dear Friend,

It's hard to believe it's been 20 years since the attacks of 9/11, when so many people were reeling from the immense loss of life. Since then, my sons have grown up. The first was six months old and nestled against my body in a baby carrier, when I left the subway and turned toward Sixth Avenue only to see the World Trade Center on fire. Like many moms, I still often think of my kids as younger versions of themselves, but they have grown in immeasurable ways, into a world shaped horribly by those attacks and the decisions that followed.

Most devastating was the US decision to respond to the attacks, not through the rule of law, but by launching a so-called "war on terror." That endless war has justified military assaults and given cover to repressive governments worldwide to roll back rights by labeling dissent as terrorism. Successive US administrations have relied on violence to exert their will globally, displacing millions of people in and from places including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and beyond.

Something else has also flourished over the last two decades, despite many dangerous circumstances: grassroots organizing.

That work is led by incredible leaders like our partners: grassroots women and girls, LGBTIQ+, disabled, rural, and Indigenous people worldwide. In Iraq, where the US launched an illegal invasion, MADRE began working with the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) in 2004. Since then, we've supported our partners to establish a network of shelters for women seeking refuge from physical and sexual violence — a kind of "underground railroad" — and saved lives. OWFI has withstood years of retaliation from reactionary militias and their own government against their brave work for democracy, rights, and justice. Each time, with MADRE's support and yours, they prevailed and continue to shine as a beacon of hope.

In Colombia, the so-called US "war on terror" imposed its brutal logic on that country's own decades-long civil war, justifying surges in US military aid and quickly becoming a tool to carry out blatantly undemocratic policies. The conflict worsened, taking a disproportionate toll on Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and women and girls. After decades of oppression, feminists and youth, including MADRE's local partners Proceso de Comunidades Negras and Taller de Vida, are taking the lead in demanding a path forward that centers grassroots democracy and sustainable peace.

This 9/11 marks a somber anniversary, but there is so much reason for hope. I'm in daily contact with visionary, feminist activists around the world, and I can assure you that there is no shortage of inspiration. Our partners are focused on the future while sowing seeds of lasting peace, climate justice, and human rights around the world. We must heal from the decades of devastation wrought by the "war on terror" and reject the ideologies that enabled it. And I know we can do it, if we continue to place our trust in the leadership of those most affected by war, conflict, and harmful US policy — people like those you'll learn about in this newsletter. Thank you for your continuing generosity that makes this work possible!

In solidarity,

Yifat Susskind  
Executive Director



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# We Won't Back Down

## Supporting Our Partners for the Long Haul



Women in Iraq have suffered so much loss during conflict.  
©Daniel Smith



Vivian Stromberg, former MADRE Executive Director, delivers aid during US sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s and reads to children. ©Laura Flanders

### Today, we are still calling for an end to broad-based economic sanctions

and have reignited our Milk and Medicine campaign. Because women and families across the world still need relief from these brutal policies.

- **IN IRAN**, we're supporting a "Breaking Bread" campaign, which works with local bakeries to provide loaves of bread to hundreds of impoverished families.
- **IN VENEZUELA**, we're funding access to health information and affordable contraception to women facing a dire economic crisis and a broken health system — crises worsened by US sanctions.
- **IN NORTH KOREA**, we provided warm winter boots to children in remote villages, where sanctions have deepened poverty.
- **IN CUBA**, under decades of US sanctions that block vital medical supplies, we're sending vaccination syringes to help fight COVID-19.

Meanwhile, President Biden has said that sanctions "will remain a central instrument of US power." So we're keeping the pressure on the Biden administration to roll back economic sanctions.

To join us, visit [MADRE.org/milkandmedicine](https://MADRE.org/milkandmedicine).

**M**ADRE works to support our partners facing war and disaster through flexible feminist grantmaking and by amplifying the voices of our partners in policymaking. In countries hard-hit by the so-called "war on terror," your support helps us partner with grassroots groups protecting their communities and speaking out for justice.

## IRAQ

**F**or decades, the people of Iraq have been targeted with destructive US policies — and MADRE has stood with our grassroots partners to confront that harm. In the 1990s, the US led a sanctions policy purported to weaken the regime of Saddam Hussein — which instead only sickened and starved Iraqi children and families. MADRE mobilized a humanitarian convoy and international campaign called **Milk and Medicine** to save lives and denounce these harmful policies.

Then after 9/11, the Bush Administration began beating the drum for a new war on Iraq. Despite massive anti-war mobilization and global opposition, in March 2003, the US attacked Iraq, with devastating results for women, families, and marginalized groups. A new US-backed regime supported fundamentalist warlords that tore apart women's rights. The country was riven by militia violence, with women and LGBTIQ+ people often the targets.

MADRE has partnered with the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) since 2004 to advocate for human rights and gender justice at one of the epicenters of the "war on terror."

OWFI and MADRE worked together to advocate for US policy change and to expose human rights abuses unleashed by the US occupation and its violent fundamentalist allies. Together, we provided food, care, and shelter to women targeted by abuses like rape and domestic violence, during and after the US occupation.



## Looking Toward the Future

With your help, we will sustain our “underground railroad” through which a network of local activists create safe passage for women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ people fleeing violence. We’re helping our partners build and strengthen the country’s first-ever network of domestic violence shelters and change laws and policies in favor of women’s rights. And we’re amplifying progressive Iraqis’ voices by supporting OWFI in their call for human rights for women, marginalized ethnic and religious groups, and LGBTIQ+ Iraqis through their radio station and newspaper.

*“The catastrophic events of 9/11 claimed the lives of many innocent people and were used to justify starting a war on the Iraqi people. We lost the chance for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous life for decades. The war on Iraq gave rise to a farce of a democracy while oppressing human rights activists and killing youth who demanded an end to corruption and poverty.”*



© Daniel Smith

—Yanar Mohammed, MADRE partner and Co-founder and President of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq



Women in Iraq meet at a workshop run by MADRE partner, OWFI. ©OWFI



MADRE’s partners, OWFI, protest during the Arab Spring in 2011. ©OWFI

## COLOMBIA

The US “war on terror” quickly became a cynical justification for the suppression of dissent and blatantly undemocratic policies around the world. In Colombia, this created a perfect storm. The US allowed the Colombian government to use US military aid directly for operations against the leftist guerrillas it had been battling for 40 years, and a new Colombian “anti-terrorism bill” gave the government a green light to abuse human rights and democratic processes in its counter-terrorism operations. The conflict worsened, taking an even greater and disproportionate toll on Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and women and girls.



Charo Mina-Rojas, from PCN, speaking to the UN on the essential role of Afro-descendant and Indigenous women in the Colombian peace implementation process. ©MADRE

Through all this, MADRE has stood by our Colombian partners, Taller de Vida and Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), who continue to advocate for a peaceful, sustainable resolution to the conflict. Despite a landmark peace agreement signed in 2016, the war has not ended. Communities still face human rights abuses, and activists for peace and social justice have faced violence and death threats.



Activists from PCN take to the streets to hold the Colombian government accountable for the worsening humanitarian situation and its militarized response to protesters. ©PCN

## Looking Toward the Future

Together, with your support, we’re standing up for the rights of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in national and international arenas, ensuring justice for people abused in the armed conflict, and providing care and healing support to young women and girl survivors of gender-based violence and war.





Above left, MADRE partners, Taller de Vida, and MADRE staff speak out for the rights of children forced to become soldiers on International Red Hand Day in Colombia. ©MADRE



Executive Director Yifat Susskind, together with Stella Duque, leader of our Colombian partner organization Taller de Vida.

Recently, Colombians rose up and took to the streets to demand change in a nationwide strike. These massive protests were first triggered by opposition to proposed tax reforms. But people were rapidly galvanized to denounce the discrimination, inequality, and poverty they face, the failed promise of the 2016 Peace Agreement — and their government’s failure to confront these issues. Security forces retaliated violently against these demonstrations, and with your help, we launched an urgent advocacy effort to demand accountability for the Colombian government’s brutal reprisals.

We are generating international pressure to end the violent crackdown and amplifying our partners’ call for a durable, inclusive peace that centers the well-being of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities who have been most affected by decades of armed conflict.

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## AFGHANISTAN

**T**he crisis in Afghanistan has exploded. After 20 years of a failed, destructive US war, the Taliban has seized power over the country. In the provinces they control, women and girls are in grave danger. Together with you, we’re standing with women who have defended human rights and who now face an upsurge in death threats and targeted attacks.

MADRE opposed the bombing of Afghanistan by the US and NATO from the start. We knew more violence was the wrong response to the tragedy of 9/11 and that the primary victims would be Afghan women and their families. We see the failure of so-called “military solutions” today as the country faces widespread turmoil amid the resurgence of a Taliban that disregards the human rights of women and girls.

Our top priority is keeping people safe. We are doing all we can to prevent girls and young women from being assassinated and enslaved by the Taliban. We are working to provide emergency relocation to women who are being targeted. We’re providing our partners with money for travel, fuel, food, medical care, and secure communications technology.

With your help, we’ll continue delivering urgently needed support to local activists and women’s human rights defenders. We’re calling on the US to repair the harm it has caused by ramping up aid, supporting Afghan women in determining their country’s future, and refusing to trade away women’s rights. And we’ll continue to stand firmly beside Afghan women and girls, against all odds, as they pursue their dreams for a future where their communities can thrive. ♦



©Isaak Alexandre Karslian

# MADRE's Ahmed Hanoon: From Pain to Purpose

Ahmed Hanoon is MADRE's Program Coordinator for Iraq and Information Solutions. He works with our partners in Iraq to protect human rights and conduct research and analysis on humanitarian and human rights issues in Iraq.

### **How did the US "war on terror" impact you and your family? How does it still?**

I remember that day, Wednesday, March 19, 2003, vividly. The US bombing on Baghdad started early that morning. My family and I fled Baghdad and moved from our apartment with only some clothing to my aunt's house, located in a village 60 miles away, and stayed for a month. When we returned to our house, we saw that the military operations had destroyed our entire residential complex. A week after our return, my family and I awoke to the sounds of heavy explosions, and we took shelter at a local school. Rockets flew above our heads, and our house that we had just fixed was damaged again, forcing us to make more repairs. Sadly, we lost neighbors during the bombings.

Shortly after the invasion, sectarian violence exploded, shaking the confidence of all Iraqis. In addition, there was an ethnic cleansing of

Sunnis and Shiites in several cities, including my hometown of Baghdad. More than four million people were displaced, including my family and me. We lived in Karbala, about 60 miles south of Baghdad, at my grandmother's house for two years until the end of the conflict.

In 2006, my uncle left home for work and didn't return. Days later, Al-Qaeda members called my dad asking for a huge ransom for him. We couldn't come up with the money and never learned of my uncle's fate. Some months later, my aunt was shot by the US army while on her way to work. While doctors were able to save her life, she was left with a long term disability, a fracture in the lower jaw.

In 2009, the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) opened an office in Baghdad. I hoped they would help us find my uncle. I reached out to ICMP, offering my help in their mission in Iraq. Later that year, I was hired as ICMP's Database Software Developer. During my tenure, my colleagues and I helped develop the first missing persons database in Iraq, which the Iraqi government later used to register missing persons data around the country. I hope one day this helps give us closure about the fate of my uncle

and the many other Iraqis who disappeared due to the war.

In 2014, due to heightened insecurity for international organization employees and a colleague's assassination, I left Baghdad and moved to Iraq's Kurdistan region. Months later, ISIS took over large parts of Syria and Iraq. I worked with an organization to help Syrian refugees and displaced Iraqis that came to Kurdistan fleeing the ISIS-occupied cities by providing primary health care and medical clinics for thousands of them. Unfortunately, by mid-2015, I had to flee Iraq due to the worsened security situation and a threat to my safety. So I came to the US seeking asylum.



Above, A recent photo of Ahmed, who says he's proud to work at MADRE. All images on this page and next are courtesy of Ahmed.



Ahmed in 1988 as an infant, in Karbala, Iraq, being held by his now missing Uncle Haider.



Bushra Hanoon, Ahmed's aunt who was shot by the US Army on her way to work.





Ahmed's first time in NYC.

### **How did you come to work at MADRE?**

I first worked as a teacher in the US, but I wanted to return to the international human rights field and continue helping people in my home country. In 2018, a friend told me that MADRE was looking for someone to support their work in Iraq. I was intrigued by its work with women worldwide. What resonated with me was that MADRE partners with Yanar Mohammed, co-founder and president of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). I consider Yanar a hero. She has always been an inspiration for our generation.

### **What is most important to you now?**

I firmly believe women should play a significant role in resolving the current situation in Iraq and lead the efforts to promote peace and security. Working with MADRE has taught me the importance of providing local partners with the training, funding, and tools needed to mobilize movements at the local and international levels and create demands to change laws and policies.

I admire the grassroots-driven approach MADRE uses, enabling local people to define their own goals and ways to achieve them. This model is an excellent recipe for forging community ownership and success stories. For example, as part of my work with MADRE, I saw how women who were survivors of violence could help other community women and lead change movements.



Ahmed and his family (left to right): Dad Kareem Hanoon; Mom Sedeeqah Ali; Ahmed; and brothers Mustafa and Ibrahim Hanoon.

### **What gives you hope?**

What gives me hope is watching MADRE partner OWFI doing admirable work to protect women and LGBTIQ+ people and the vital services they provide women who have been targeted by violence. They work to advocate for the most marginalized people in Iraq and are creating peace there. I see this in their everyday work, and it is an inspiration. ♦



Vivian Stromberg, MADRE's former Executive Director, delivering aid to Iraq as part of MADRE's Milk and Medicine campaign. ©Laura Flanders



**MADRE**  
GENERAL FEDERATION  
OF JORDANIAN WOMEN  
ارفعوا العقوبات  
LIFT THE SANCTIONS  
MILK & MEDICINE FOR IRAQI CHILDREN

## Your Gift to MADRE...

- **Unleashes a powerful force for good.** Your gift sustains the work of grassroots women, our on-the-ground partners. You fuel worldwide programs that meet urgent needs in communities and create lasting change.
- **Gets emergency aid where no one else can.** When disaster strikes, your support enables us to partner with local women activists who know the lay of the land, where even the largest aid agencies can't reach. You bring crucial resources — like food, water, medical care, and shelter — directly to those most in need.
- **Stops at nothing to dismantle injustice and create social change.** You help us provide human rights training and the space for women to organize. Thanks to you, women build new skills, step up as leaders, and mobilize for rights-based policies.



MADRE partner, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq. ©OWFI

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