

* Sacred Refusal *

Singing through Struggles of Violence, Grief & Calamity

UAF A&P Annual Learning Report 2024



Introduction to the Theme

‘Sacred Refusal *Singing through Struggles of Calamity, Grief & Political Violence*’ is Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific’s Annual Learning Report 2024, where we move through narratives of feminist movements, guided by the mythologies that have shaped our regions for generations.

In folktales and legends across Asia and the Pacific, we find echoes of resistance, care, and collective imagination. From Puteri Gunung Ledang, the legendary Princess of Mount Ophir who set impossible tasks for her suitors, to Nuwa and Fuxi who created humanity from clay, these stories speak to our innate power to shape worlds. Like Pangu who separated heaven and earth to create the universe, or Queen Che Siti Wan Kembang who ruled Kelantan with wisdom and strength, our movements today are creating new mythologies of feminist resistance.

These myths—with their extraordinary protagonists, their moral frameworks, and their symbolic power—serve as more than cultural artifacts. They are archives for understanding our present struggles, and maps for writing our collective futures. Just as local myths have fostered inter-generational community survival throughout history, today’s feminist movements are creating new memories of resistance that challenge dominant narratives and oppressive discourses.

SACRED REFUSAL

UAF A&P's learnings from its feminist participatory grantmaking echoes the ancient wisdom of community care—where resources flow like the mythic rivers that nourish our landscapes, responding to crises not as singular events but as opportunities for collective transformation.

This report, in the words of our dear Board member, Pranom 'Bee' Somwong, is "a love letter to our movements—a living archive of survival, strategy, and sacred refusal." Within these stories, historical and contemporary, you will find legends and lives intertwined.

Ancient narratives—where women like Raden Adjeng Kartini fought for education and liberation, or where Tinaicoboga and Raudalice transformed into sacred turtles becoming guardians of natural places—mirror our present struggles. The goddess Rokobakaniceva with her strategic intelligence, Ino's symbols of fertility and continuation, Ame-no-Uzume's creative disruption that brought light from darkness—all these reflect our movements' resourcefulness and resilience.

Much like how these mythological figures invoke curiosity, play, and joy as they transcend binaries, challenge patriarchy, and forge strong connections with the natural world, so do our movements. Inspired by the stories passed down from our foremothers that are resplendent with superheroes who refused to remain in the margins, this report, as a documentation of collective memory, aims to bring mischief, creativity, and fierce hope against all odds.

Through the visual language of folktales, we curate feminist knowledge of resistance in creative and meaningful ways, transforming traditional symbols into contemporary icons of hope and resilience. Our grantmaking becomes not just a transaction but a ritual of recognition—acknowledging the sacred work of those who stand at the frontlines of justice, often at great personal risk.



Letters of Liberation

Note from the Board

To those who defend, create, and care;
to all women, non-binary, and trans human rights defenders across Asia and the Pacific;
we see you.

SACRED REFUSAL

Reading this year's Annual Learning Report, we are reminded that we are not merely bearing witness to history—we are co-creating it. With every act of resistance, every breath of care, every dream declared under threat, we are reshaping the future together.

As members of the Urgent Action Fund, Asia & Pacific Board—feminist organisers, healers, defenders, and storytellers rooted in our lands and communities—we write this not from a distance, but from within the same struggles and visions that pulse through each chapter of this report. This is not simply a record of a year. It is a constellation of courage. A love letter to our movements. A living archive of survival, strategy, and sacred refusal.

Within these pages, you will find not only data or milestones.

You will find myths and memories.

You will feel the rhythm of oceans and the weight of borders.

You will hear the hush of grief and the roar of collective imagination.

You will meet defenders who continue, not because it is safe, but because it is indispensable.

What stirred us most is the unflinching commitment to audacious care—not as an afterthought, but as the strategy. This report shows that care is not softness. **Care is resistance.** It is how we endure, how we organise, and how we dare to build anew even amidst collapse and destruction.

We are deeply moved by the centring of human rights defenders and UAF A&P's Advisors as movement-rooted wisdom holders. In a world where knowledge is often extracted, this is a bold reorientation—one that honours context, movement culture, and community as sources of expertise. Their poetry and reflections ground this report in truth.

To those encountering this report for the first time—to newcomers in our ecosystem—we want to say this clearly: **You belong here.**

Whether you are a young feminist, an artist, an indigenous or rural community leader, a quiet weaver of care, or someone who wants to share their resources—your presence matters. Your work is movement work. And we are very glad you are here.

SACRED REFUSAL

This report is not just a look back—it is a mirror, an invitation, a map forward.

We hold close three truths as we move ahead:

1. Feminist resistance is not only what we do. It's how we live, how we relate, how we breathe, and how we organise our lives and struggles with care and conviction.
2. Joy, rest, and friendship are not luxuries—they are radical tools of survival and resistance.
3. There can be no true liberation without collective care at the heart of our movements.

To the UAF A&P team—thank you so much for moving with courage, creativity, and unwavering commitment to our region's most urgent dreams.

To our grantee partners and beloved communities—you are not merely recipients of resources.

You are the authors of feminist futures, and the heartbeat of our present. Your struggles inform our strategies. Your brilliance lights our path.

We are proud to walk alongside you—to dream, to resist, and to rise together.

And to echo the words of bell hooks:

“Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.”

With fierce love and shared purpose,

Pranom Somwong

On behalf of the Board of UAF A&P

Rooted in resistance. Rising with care.



Steering the Craft

Reflections from the Co-Leads

What Kind of Times are These?

...is a poem by Adrienne Rich, a spin on an earlier poem by Bertolt Brecht with this same question as provocation.

Both centre the role of politics in poetry and art as a language, a tool, to talk about the times we live in. The title and all that this poem stands for resonated with us for multiple reasons. Given all that transpired in 2024, the question—“*What kind of times are these?*”—was asked in every room we found ourselves in.

We have always believed that art and artists are essential in times like these. Artists have always given form, music, and sensorial richness to our imaginations of an alternative, feminist future and subaltern her-stories. Social movements have centred art in their methods of resistance. And, like Adrienne Rich hints, art can become refuge, or a medium to speak in disguised ways (particularly when disguise is needed to subvert), about what's wrong in the world at this moment, and draw more people to tune in.

This is not new. Throughout the history of our one living planet, people—especially women, trans, and non-binary people—have used various forms of art to tell stories, including those that must not be told. It's also not new that those who have the power to subvert have always been trampled upon, silenced, erased. And it is here that art keeps these stories alive, and dedicates itself to never forgetting and never being erased.

Across the Pacific and Asia, stories we have heard from our foremothers, myths, legends, and folklore are resplendent with superheroes who fought to not remain in the margins, and brought joy, mischief, creativity and fierce hope against all odds. Ino, Narina, Ban Devi, the legend of Tinaicoboga and Raudalice, Ame-no-Uzume—these and so many others have invoked curiosity, play, and joy, as they went beyond binaries, against patriarchy, and forged strong connections with the natural world.

As we traverse this world where every day a new benchmark for “unprecedented” is set, we remind ourselves that these emotions—joy, curiosity, mischief, love, desire—are what will take us to our

SACRED REFUSAL

feminist futures. No matter how insurmountable today feels. But we do not kid ourselves, this radical hope is not shallow or un-grounded in today's reality.

As we complete the first year of our strategic plan, we hope to offer the power of feminisms that are **forged in fire**. And simultaneously, calls for the meeting point of hope and history, where what has happened is met by what we make of it. We bring forth learnings from radical action and our practice of audacious care, forged in the fire of feminist friendships. We think of these as our subversive take on scale, which comes to light every time a crisis strikes. For what else is scale if not the power of feminist connections spread across the globe, that moves mountains to keep communities alive and thriving in both moments of peril and opportunity.

A little note on our 2024 annual plan—we unboxed it and tried to offer a feast for your senses! If longform is your jam, then read our individual chapters; they can be read independently and as chapters of an anthology we piece together one Annual Learning Report (ALR) at a time. Our [Tukuni](#) audio series are snippets of hope you can carry in your pocket. And, each year, our ALR gives visual joy, aligned with the semiotics of our learning insights. This year, too, we will share our own take of our visual memory-keeping, and how/why we chose these symbols of hope and resistance.

And finally, in **our mission to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope**, we borrow from, and imbibe these words in our urgent action for repair, regeneration, and joy in 2025:

“— not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges (people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of ‘Everything is gonna be alright.’ But a different, sometimes lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see.”

— [“The Small Work In the Great Work,”](#) essay by Reverend Victoria Safford

In solidarity and co-responsibility,

Vinita Sahasranaman and Virisila Buadromo

Co-Leads, UAF A&P



Mythscales of Freedom

The State of Human Rights in 2024

"When the Bakunawa, the moon-eating dragon, rises from the depths of the sea and swallows the moon whole, the world is thrown into chaos and calamity. Only when we all come together, banging our pots and pans, playing our instruments, will the Bakunawa spit out the moon again."
- Philippine mythology

All over the world, 2024 was a year of escalations: in existing turmoil and crises, in armed conflict, in climate disasters, in shrinking civic spaces, and in the continued displacement of people. It's estimated that one in eight people in the world were exposed to conflict, according to the 2024 Conflict Index.¹ We saw the prolonging of wars in Sudan and Ukraine, and the attacks on Palestine increase.

In the Asia and Pacific regions, conflicts in Myanmar and the crisis in Afghanistan continue. Myanmar (alongside Palestine, Syria, and Mexico) is ranked "Extreme", on the Conflict Index, the highest position, and ranks top for armed group fragmentation. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and the Philippines are ranked "High", while Indonesia is ranked "Turbulent".

"The princess stood at the edge of the cliff, sea churning below. Behind her, a land thrown into chaos. Before her, the unknown. She had no choice. With a final breath, she leapt, choosing the uncertain waves over the violence that awaited her on land. She survived, but she was forever transformed." - The Legend of Putri Mandalika, Indonesia

The shadows of these continued crises fall long and wide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, forced displacement in the Asia and Pacific regions increased by 3 percent by the end of June 2024 compared to the previous year, with the number of displaced or stateless people numbering 15.9 million.²

This is largely due to the escalating armed conflict in Myanmar, which has worsened conditions for the Rohingya who remain in Rakhine, and caused the highest levels of internal displacement. For the one million Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, the situation continues to deteriorate due to underfunding and natural disasters.³

In Afghanistan, recently returned refugees and those still displaced internally are particularly vulnerable. Devastating flash floods in May and July caused destruction and further displacement.⁴

¹ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Conflict Index: December 2024

² UNHCR Regional Update - Asia and the Pacific, October 2024

³ UNHCR Regional Update - Asia and the Pacific, October 2024

⁴ UNHCR Regional Update - Asia and the Pacific, October 2024

SACRED REFUSAL

Meanwhile, the rights and freedoms for girls continued to shrink, particularly with the introduction of a new law that further restricts women, religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ people.

 [Listen to how women defenders in Afghanistan continue to break the silence.](#)

“The boy ate and ate and ate, until there was almost no more food on the island. But he still wanted more, and kept taking more to eat. And he grew bigger and bigger and bigger, until the island he lived on began to sink.” - The Story of Uab, Palau

Climate change challenges continue to be a major factor of displacement and crisis. 2024 saw global temperatures move beyond the critical 1.5C warning limit set in the Paris Agreement, the point at which humanity is expected to experience severe climate damage.

Extreme weather events in 2024 led to the highest number of displaced people since 2008, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.⁵ Typhoon Yagi caused deaths and displacements in Vietnam, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar.

 [Hear how a land rights activist in Papua New Guinea continued their work amidst natural disasters.](#)

Meanwhile, for the Pacific nations, climate change remains the region’s greatest security threat (Pacific Security Report 2023).⁶ Based on the United Nations Development Programme, these nations contribute to just 0.1 percent of global carbon emissions, yet experience some of the largest impacts of the climate crisis.⁷ In 2024, this included destructive floods in Tuvalu and Fiji, severe coastal erosion in Tonga, and a landslide in the Enga Province in Papua New Guinea that killed 2,000 people and displaced 70,000 (East Asia Forum).⁸

 [Learn how the climate crisis intersects with gender issues in the Federated States of Micronesia.](#)

“The boy saved the island from the attacking swordfish, and was hailed a hero by all the people of the land. They called him wise, and brave, and a future leader. Seeing this, the king grew restless. The boy, he decided, must be silenced.” - Singapura Attacked By Swordfish, Singapore/Malaysia

Civic freedoms continue to be restricted. The CIVICUS Monitor indicates that 72.4 percent of people in the world live in countries where civic spaces are rated “Repressed” or “Closed”.

In Asia, seven countries are rated “Closed” (Afghanistan, China, Laos, Myanmar, Hong Kong, North Korea, and Vietnam), while nine (Brunei, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Bangladesh) are rated “Repressed”. Six countries are listed in the “Obstructed” category, while two remain under “Narrowed”. Only two countries, Japan and Taiwan, are rated “Open”, indicating openness to public discourse and civic freedoms.

 [Listen to how gender violence activists in the Philippines face intimidation from those in power.](#)

⁵ State of the Global Climate 2024, World Meteorological Organisation

⁶ Pacific Security Report 2023, Pacific Islands Forum

⁷ 2024 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, UNDP

⁸ Shifting Tides in the Blue Pacific, East Asia Forum

SACRED REFUSAL

The situation is more encouraging among the Pacific countries with seven rated as “Open”. Meanwhile, five are rated “Narrowed”, but two countries - Nauru and Papua New Guinea - remain “Obstructed”.

One of the main violations of civic freedom was the repression of protests, with protesters detained in at least 22 countries; in some cases, excessive force by the authorities led to injuries and even unlawful deaths. This crackdown is particularly strong in South Asia, where authorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India all used excessive force against protesters.

 [Hear how women and LGBTQ+ rights activists in Bangladesh often face restrictions.](#)

Human rights defenders were also detained and prosecuted in at least 15 countries in the region, including China, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Meanwhile, authorities also used their power to censor and silence critical voices - censorship by governments happened in at least 16 countries in the region. This included blocking media, restricting social media access, and targeting journalists, with China and North Korea displaying some of the harshest measures.

“Bhooma Devi is the goddess of the Earth. In one story, she is kidnapped and imprisoned underwater by a demonic king. In a different story, a king promises to be her guardian, and she agrees to nourish all living beings in the world.” - Indian mythology

While crises in our regions have intensified, our ancestors in the Pacific and Asia have withstood crises with courage and resilience time and again—they leave us stories and legends to give us hope and encouragement to get through difficult times.



This Legend called Crises

Embracing its Long and Short Arcs

When people imagine a crisis, they think of it as an emergency. Serious. Unexpected. Urgent. However, through our work over the years, we at UAF A&P know that defining a crisis isn’t that simple. They can take different forms, be of different durations, and require different modalities, speeds of response, and lengths of intervention.

While the long arc of crises implies the broader, long-term, historical trajectory of human rights progress or deterioration, the short arc refers to immediate, acute human rights crises that occur within

SACRED REFUSAL

a shorter time frame. These crises may be caused by specific events, policies, or regimes that violate human rights in ways that are sudden and intense, though the underlying causes of the crisis might be part of a larger, longer-term human rights struggle.

Different kinds of crises over the years have prepared us to respond in different ways, be it in terms of how we mobilise resources or how we redistribute them.

In dealing with a sudden crisis, we appreciate the need to make resources available quickly to those directly impacted—even if it means granting smaller amounts of money over a short span of time. This prevents the situation from escalating further, as we observed in our timely response to activists impacted by the Vanuatu earthquake in December 2024. We helped ensure immediate aid to impacted partner communities. We also supported local women’s groups in resuming their efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change via coastline rehabilitation (mangrove and coral planting), which is critical long-term disaster preparedness for the small Pacific island nations experiencing coastal erosion that threatens their existence.

“The Port Vila Earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.4, struck unexpectedly, leaving the community in disarray. The natural disaster resulted in widespread disruption, including the loss of internet connectivity, electricity, and water supply. Amidst these challenges, [we] required immediate support to continue essential services. With traditional communication channels compromised, UAF A&P swiftly adapted their approach to maintain contact with [us]. Utilising WhatsApp, a platform that remained operational on mobile networks, UAF A&P ensured continuous communication. UAF A&P’s role was pivotal in navigating the logistical and bureaucratic challenges posed by the earthquake. UAF A&P’s expertise in crisis management enabled them to circumvent potential hurdles in the funding process. UAF A&P’s timely intervention ensured that [we] received the necessary funding to sustain operations during the crisis. This financial support was instrumental in providing essential services such as emergency shelter, food distribution, and medical supplies to those impacted by the earthquake. This case underscores the importance of preparedness and flexibility in crisis response, setting a precedent for future emergency interventions.” – Grantee from Vanuatu

“If fast response like this would happen after every disaster, it will be a big relief. Less stress, and can be able to reach out to the needy. We were able to support old people as they are always the victims in times of disaster. We also support single mothers. Your generosity in speeding up the process has proved you have good standing and understanding in situations as such... After the earthquake a lot of families are still picking up, especially those who are not in the workforce. Widows, old people, and single mothers still become all-time victims. Many people with small businesses like roadside markets and home markets lost income. Many people lost their jobs...

SACRED REFUSAL

We did not ask but you approached us, which to me is the culturally right way of doing things... You supported us by helping us write the grant proposal due to less access to communication and internet connection. I rank your response 100-plus. It shows care and responsibility to others.” – Grantee from Vanuatu

We also recognise that short-term, immediate support needs to be followed up with long-term support. For example, our Security and Wellbeing grants have helped activists in Afghanistan relocate to safety, which was their immediate need when the Taliban took over. However, they continue to struggle with livelihood opportunities and supporting those who could not relocate. We have, therefore, extended our support to the Afghan diaspora in other countries to fundraise for their people, accompanying them on their journeys from resistance to resilience. This has carved the way for greater transnational collaborations with the Urgent Action Sister Funds, and other feminist partners and allies operating in countries outside our regions.

“Many women who contact us live in isolation and trauma. These programmes [psychological support sessions, leadership workshops, and safe spaces for women to grow, heal, and organise] are not only necessary—they are urgent.” – Afghan diaspora grantee

We have also learned the importance of nurturing early warning systems, building solidarity networks with grassroots activists and organisations, and supporting activists and defenders to return to normalcy after a crisis. We recognise the need to centre intersectionality and flexibility in crisis resourcing, consider structural oppressions at play, and make space for collective care and healing—to truly be able to support defenders in moments of need.

We have observed a hierarchy between and within different kinds of crises based on their potential impact and urgency, and much of this hierarchy stems from the lack of resources and institutional support available.

The past year has pushed us to reflect on alternate ways of assessing and responding to crises, challenging the hierarchy that exists between and within them. Smaller, slow-burn crises often do not get the necessary support in light of more urgent crises. There is a need to ensure equity in the availability of resources, so that the unspoken and unheard needs of marginalised communities in countries ignored by the international mainstream media are not ignored.

SACRED REFUSAL

This realisation has led us to change our grantmaking approach in places like Afghanistan, where we've innovated our process for verifying applications and leaned on Afghan defenders to advise us on grantmaking decisions, since they understand their context best. This approach has resulted in greater internal capacity to focus on other neglected parts of our regions, such as the Pacific.

We are also seeing that deteriorating human conditions within our regions is a crisis in itself, with an unprecedented rise in activist deaths due to neglect, poor health infrastructure, lack of resources, and prison conditions that violate basic standards.

These are issues that need equal attention as well as adequate, timely support to defenders and communities at risk. We find ourselves introspecting on what it means to offer long-term, holistic support to defenders, and have initiated several experiments and interventions in this regard.

Our **Webs of Safety and Care (WSC) grants** were conceptualised with the aim of supporting the all-round safety, care, and wellbeing of women, trans, and non-binary defenders and activists as they navigate multiple crises on a daily basis. The grant enables them to create their own community-based structures and allocate resources through which they are able to build and strengthen their safety and care needs. This in turn sustains their activism in the long run and reduces risk of burnout.

In 2024, we organised a learning call with our past and current grantees to understand their initiatives, needs, and contexts. The grantees shared that the WSC framework has made them more aware and mindful of their physical and psychological health. They have utilised the grant for a number of purposes, including:

- Launching a community-based policing system to ensure greater gender justice;
- Establishing rapid response focal points;
- Fellowship programmes for young feminists, so there is a culture of passing down knowledge and leadership to sustain the activism;
- Organising peer support groups and psychosocial counselling sessions;
- Building and running safe houses;
- Organising capacity building training for legal awareness, digital security, wellbeing practices, advocacy, and financial literacy.

We're also experimenting with setting up and sustaining **physical infrastructures of care** and refuge in our regions; we disbursed two grants to set up and run resilience centres for activists, and three grants

SACRED REFUSAL

to counsellors providing psychosocial counselling to activists. We are assessing whether supporting artists, writers, journalists, and poets at the frontlines of human rights defense and reportage trigger cultural and narrative shifts, and have supported a few of them with grants when they faced grave threats due to their work.

In 2024, we also held our first **Global Healers Convening** in Bangkok, and set up a Rest and Resist Nest for activists to experience a range of care offerings as part of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Forum. The healers' convening allowed feminist healers to come together in a stigma-free, non-judgemental, and safe place, where they could share their experiences as movement healers, learn different modalities of healing, and engage in their own healing process. Conversations on alternative healing processes are seen as taboo, so the healers appreciated a space where they could openly converse on these topics. They shared how their work is often isolating, even in feminist spaces, and how the convening created for them a sense of community. The relationships forged during this time have been lasting, and continue over digital media, where the healers continue to connect, support, and learn from each others' wisdom and counsel, and from their diverse contexts and modalities. At the **Rest and Resist Nest** curated within the AWID Forum, the healers offered their modalities to conference participants and engaged in discussions to foreground the politics of healing as a critical component of feminist movements. These conversations brought back stories of traditional healing practices and journeys, as well as stories of anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist movements.

Over the last year or so, our engagement with our network of trusted Advisors has evolved and deepened.

From endorsing applications for grants to helping us better understand the contexts we work in and the nuances of human rights issues in different geographies – the role of Advisors in deepening and expanding our work has come a long way. Our Advisors have inspired us to think differently and creatively about how to make resources available to marginalised communities in underserved regions. In 2024, with their support and guidance, our team did in-person outreach in the North Pacific, South Korea, and the Philippines to build networks, solidarity, and understanding, resulting in an increase in grant applications and the redistribution of resources in these regions.

Our network of Advisors have become our guiding stars, and as of today, we engage with more than 100 advisors from Asia and the Pacific who keep us grounded in our work. Our relationship with them is built on the foundation of friendship, solidarity, resistance, and care. It's with their support that we have been able to expand our reach to intersectional communities in remote parts of Asia and the

SACRED REFUSAL

Pacific. For example, our outreach in the North Pacific region, and our presence at the Pacific Human Rights Conference in 2024, helped build networks and respond to the Vanuatu crisis quickly and effectively.

“The opportunity to engage as an advisor has been an incredibly rewarding experience for me, and I’m grateful for the trust, support, and encouragement that the Urgent Action Fund, Asia and Pacific has shown. The space we’ve created together through deep conversations and revolutionary thinking is a testament to the strength and creativity of feminist solidarity. I’m proud to be part of such a committed and caring community of activists, and I look forward to the continued collaboration and innovation that our collective work will surely inspire.” – Advisor from Nepal



Healing Spells

Unpacking Audacious Care

2024 marked the first year of our new five-year strategic plan titled [Feminist Futures. Forged in Fire](#). Our vision and commitment is to put “*Defenders first, always*” in all that we do. We listen to them, and learn from them, as we accompany them on their journeys of resistance and resilience in the Pacific and Asia. We constantly ask ourselves: “*What would it take to boldly resource and power women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and activists in their critical defence of people and the planet?*”

In addition to resourcing and powering their resistance and resilience as they confront the fundamental democratic, gender, climate, and humanitarian crises of our times, we intend to meet defenders with audacious care. The women, trans, and non-binary defenders we work with are forging feminist futures from the fiery damage of late-model capitalism, the violence of patriarchy, and the legacies of racist colonisation. We work to ensure that our offerings are greater than the sum of their parts—and it is here that our ways of **centering care, audaciously**, take form. We have often been asked what “audacious care” really means, and recognise the curiosity in unpacking it. We answer this question and offer the following insights:

We embrace risk as inherent to our work.

As in the [field of investments](#), philanthropy’s relationship with risk lies in how we avoid, manage, and leverage risk. A subversive relationship to risk visibilises ways in which we embrace risk as inherent to our work.

We take bold risks with courage and willingness in all aspects of our work—be it grantmaking, fundraising, communications, or internal organisational practices. Moving money across national borders every day is one of the primary examples of navigating and embracing risk. Our finance team has gone above and beyond this past year, to ensure grantees are able to receive money—despite highly restrictive financial laws, government hurdles, and close surveillance of human rights activists and defenders by state authorities across our regions. This is a testament to our ability and commitment to find ways to circumvent risks and limitations, in order to support defenders in their moments of need. In some contexts, our powerful allies at the national level have partnered with us to

SACRED REFUSAL

ensure activists and activism have the support they need, proving that the audaciousness of care is often actualised through radical, feminist friendships (elaborated later in this report).

We practice audacious care through small, everyday actions.

Rapid response grantmakers need to show up every day. We need to ensure we ground the “everydayness” of our work in caring for our team, for which we rely on each other’s support. We practice audacious care through small, everyday actions—whether it’s stepping in for a team member who is ill, or accompanying defenders as they face challenging contexts. In most cases of sudden crises, we are often the first ones to reach out to our advisors and grantees to check on their wellbeing and understand how we can support them and their communities. In doing so, we know that these simple acts of care are essential to our work, and go a long way in sustaining relationships premised on trust.

“For me personally, connecting with UAF A&P has been a huge blessing from God. I never imagined or planned for this opportunity, yet you came into my life at a time when I needed support and healing the most. You took me in, helped me through my personal healing journey, you took my hands and raised me up, and now I walk with an open heart, healed, and empowered. I am also working to support others as I was supported. Being part of this circle has been incredibly encouraging—it has made me stronger, more confident, and allowed me to see the world from a different perspective.” – Advisor from West Papua

Our embodiment of audacious care is also reflected in our timely response to unprecedented and natural disasters, such as the devastating earthquake in Vanuatu in December 2024. We raised and disbursed funds at record speed despite being on our annual organisational pause; thus, staying committed to putting “*Defenders first, always.*” Our belief in the principle of audacious care also shines through our collective investments in the capital market with the Urgent Action Sister Funds, our collaborations with peer donors in various consortiums, and creative thinking in where and how money can be solicited. By believing in abundance and decolonising grantmaking through the sharing of resources and power, we are able to make audacious moves without fear.

We convene to restore and regenerate.

We recognise that there is a lot to unlearn on how we convene. We have been in meetings that stretch for hours, and don’t offer any substantive ways of contributing to discussions. We have also realised that most of our relationships in such spaces are built during coffee breaks and casual outings post-meetings. We learn from these experiences, and try to design our convenings with our grantees and advisors differently. We work with creative facilitators who prioritise [play](#) and rest. We keep

SACRED REFUSAL

meetings short, and ensure participants have time to mingle and nurture friendships. We have institutionalised childcare support for our participants, thereby ensuring that they can participate fully while being there for their children.

Our Oasis of Reflection convening has become our flagship annual event and space for rest, reflection, and joy—and is an extension of our endeavour to prioritise collective care. Cross-team collaborations shape the oasis, where deep connections are formed and solidified with activists and movements, and we enquire and practise what it means to care for each other and ourselves. Our 2024 convening in Sri Lanka brought together our Advisors from across Asia and the Pacific. It served as an opportunity to express our deep gratitude and appreciation for them, discuss our evolving grantmaking strategies, and reflect on the future of feminist movements across our regions. We delved deeper into the root causes of the burnout and exhaustion faced by many women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and activists in our regions, and how we can better support them. Equally, it was a space for dream-weaving and practising care for, with, and within each other.

“Our ancestors didn’t separate work and joy the way we often do today. They sang while planting rice, danced during harvests, and played games like patintero or sungka to build community. Play wasn’t just leisure; it was a form of resistance, healing, and survival.” – Filipino psychologist Dr. Marinette Asuncion, The Hilom Collective

Convening with care extends to our own team huddles as well, and in January 2024, we organised our first Rest and Resist Retreat with the Urgent Action Sister Funds in Chiang Mai, Thailand. All team members of the four funds participated in the retreat, and the time spent together solidified our collaboration, collective values, and strategies.



Chants of Solidarity

Feminist Friendships Sustain Movements

“Divide and conquer, in our world, must become define and empower.” – Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

Feminist friendship—as a strategy of political resistance that focuses on creating bonds that are based on understanding, solidarity, and support across our differences—is necessary if we are all to be liberated.

This is particularly relevant in current times when racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and nationalism are rife in the world. Creating bonds in times of crisis, coming together to unleash the strength of collective power, and supporting one another, are particularly important right now. In nature, nothing thrives alone, and all living beings are part of an interconnected and interdependent system through which they share resources to ensure collective care and survival; likewise, feminist movements too, are sustained through collaboration, mutual aid, and support.

We believe that we can better support women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and activists by deepening relationships with our grantees, advisors, peer donors, partners, funders, and feminist allies. This will not only help us reach marginalised communities and underserved geographies, but also solidify feminist funding networks and leverage our collective strengths to resource, advocate, and respond to crises quickly and effectively.

In December 2024, at a time when many organisations and communities were starting to wind down, a 7.3-magnitude earthquake shook Vanuatu—and life as they knew it changed overnight. But the people of the Pacific island state didn't lose hope. Inspired by ni-Vanuatu's courage, resilience, and strong sense of community, we mobilised and disbursed over USD 30,000 worth of grants to LGBTQIA+ communities, widows, youth, rural women, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities, who were in need of psychosocial support, basic amenities, privacy, and safety from gender-based violence.

What facilitated our speedy response, was the intimate bonds of trust, connection, understanding, and feminist solidarity cultivated through years of individual friendships between our team members and different allies and accomplices within the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This proved invaluable when we sought humanitarian rapid response funding from them for our grantee partners in the affected areas. Within three days, we received approval for an additional grant of AUD 200,000. While our friendship with individuals at bilateral donor agencies may be viewed as “potential conflict” by some, in our experience, it has been a brave space where donors and feminist funds like ourselves are able to question power, resources, accountability, and compliance with humility, care, and compassion.

SACRED REFUSAL

The Urgent Action Sister Funds are another embodiment of feminist friendship. As individual, autonomous organisations representing different regions, cultures, and languages that shape our worldviews, we are still able to build and sustain relationships that embody a commitment to seeing and understanding one another as who we really are. Our differences are our strength, and our synonymy our superpower. Together, we leverage these assets to fundraise, establish and nurture new partnerships, deepen relationships, support each other during times of crisis and political upheaval, and interrogate our own thinking, values, and strategies. Our collective thinking and analysis culminated in the co-development of our Feminist Crisis Response Framework, our [Strategic Framework on Crisis and Care](#), and our shared vision to strengthen our work on environment and climate justice. Our sisterhood model is unique, empowering, and makes a strong case for greater collaboration, flexibility, and mutual aid in the philanthropic world.

The ResourceFULL Collective is another endeavour with the International Women's Development Agency and the Pacific Feminist Fund, where we hope to leverage our collective strength to mobilise resources from the region for the region, specifically for the Pacific Islands. Similarly, our Amplify-Invest-Reach (AIR) partnership with Women's Fund Asia, Women's Fund Fiji, the Pacific Feminist Fund, and funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) promotes human rights outcomes and contributes to sustainable change towards gender equality—by building and connecting movements, sustaining organisations that address marginalisation and exclusion, and providing grants to women's rights organisations and human rights defenders to lead the social change agenda.

Trust, then, is reflected in the friendship, solidarity, and collective action that makes our work possible. It helps us operate from a mindset of abundance rather than scarcity. It inspires us to think of [philanthropy as sharing](#), as reparations from the Global North to the majority world, and grantmaking as redistribution of resources.

Feminist friendships are sacred and keep movements alive, because they help us connect at a human level. We fight for and with each other, care for ourselves and others, and inspire hope even when the world looks grim.

SACRED REFUSAL

The Urgent Action Sister Funds Community Gathering in Bangkok during the AWID Forum reiterated this, and affirmed that making space for joy, rest, and connection is a core part of how we build and nurture feminist solidarity, commitment, and reciprocity. This act of being together affirms our humanity and increases serotonin and oxytocin, the bonding hormones that play a role in establishing trust between people. In stressful moments—like shrinking civic spaces and the crackdown on progressive values—knowing we have a tribe that unconditionally supports us can lift us out of paralysis, unleash group creativity, and supercharge innovation that opens up different solutions to challenges and catalyses realistic hope.

As elaborated before, our relationship with our Advisors too, is built on the foundation of friendship, solidarity, resistance, and care. It's with their support that we have been able to expand our reach to intersectional communities in remote parts of Asia and the Pacific, and respond quickly in moments of need. Our Oasis of Reflection Convening in 2024 was for our Advisors, and meant to provide a space for them to bond, rest, and strategise together.

*For Urgent Action Fund, my gratitude sings,
A melody of hope, on helping wings.*

*Each application, a cry, a whispered plea,
From sisters in struggle, for liberty.*

*I sort, I sift, with a heart that knows,
The weight of threats, the fear that grows.
For I, too, have walked that shadowed line,
Where truth is punished, and voices decline.*

*Remember last year, the venom spewed,
My work, my name, unjustly subdued?
The mob's dark shadow, a looming threat,
Forced to flee, a life I'd met.*

*Urgent Action Fund, a lifeline thrown,
To Colombo's safety, a haven known.
Funds arrived swiftly, a shield so bright,
Guiding me gently, from the darkest night.*

*Your courage, your action, a beacon clear,
Dispelling the darkness, calming the fear.*

*You empower the silenced, the brave and the bold,
Stories of resilience, waiting to be told.*

*So here I stand, an advisor true,
Dedicated service, I offer to you.
In any way I can, I'll give my best,
To pay forward the kindness, I was blessed.
With UAF, I am ever ready to give support rest.*

– Poem by an Advisor from Sri Lanka

This extends to our team as well, where we recognise that deepening team collaborations and making space for experimentation and play ensures we're constantly innovating and growing. Our iterative and ongoing effort to create a [feminist organisational culture](#), rooted in care, is an exercise in being true to our values and guided by the question: *"What does the practice of sharing power and audacious care look like in a feminist organisation?"*⁹



Carving Storyboards

Grantmaking at a Glance

In 2024, we surpassed USD 10 million in total grantmaking since 2018—a milestone worth celebrating for a young fund like ours. Aligned with our feminist vision and values, in 2024 we distributed 625 grants totaling USD 2,923,541 to women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and activists across 34 countries in Asia and the Pacific. Our grantmaking total in 2024 was the highest in our history, and is indicative of the increasing levels of far-right pushback and crises in our regions.

⁹ [The Serious Matter of Play](#)

SACRED REFUSAL

Of these grants, 274 (i.e. 44% of total grants) supported our key emergency locations: Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. The average grant amount disbursed was USD 4,678, and the total number of grants equated to 52 (worth USD 243,628) on average per month. The Year on Year (YoY) increase in grant numbers was 39%, while the YoY increase in disbursement value was 22%. Furthermore, our grants to the Pacific region have increased significantly in the past couple of years, from approximately 3% to now 12% of grants— this represents a significant growing shift, and proves that our targeted regional strategy is bearing results.

For the first time, through our new Shifting Narratives program, we also offered eleven Fellowships to artists and cultural rights workers from eight countries, to advance their artistic resistance against harmful narratives affecting their communities. Our Shifting Narratives programme has resulted in an expansion of our interconnected networks of human rights defenders and their communities, with artist-activists who have traditionally never been identified (or self identified as) human rights defenders. But in these times of shrinking civic spaces, and limited opportunities to express freely, artistic expression has been a crucial lever in influencing public narratives and perspectives, on critical work being done to hold the line on human rights defence. We continue building relationships of trust and reciprocity within our core ecosystem of activists and advisors by organising collective gatherings that centre care and regeneration. These gatherings provide opportunities to exchange experiences and lived realities, fostering solidarity and new forms of resistance and resilience.

Grant Categories in 2024

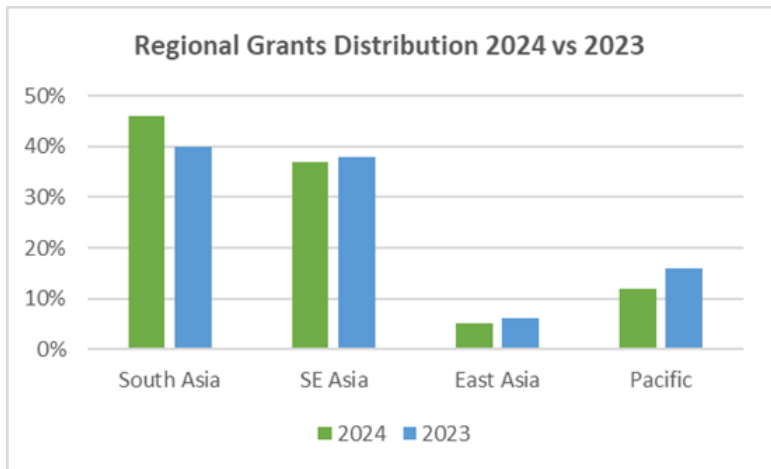
	Numbers	USD
Security and Well-being	446 (71%)	\$1,968,328 (67%)
Resourcing Resilience	107 (17%)	\$456,282 (16%)
Resourcing Resilience - Special Grants	25 (4%)	\$132,675 (5%)
Webs of Safety and Care	43 (7%)	\$301,256 (10%)
COVID Response Grants	1 (0.2%)	\$5,000 (0.2%)
Flexible Grants for Resilience	3 (0.5%)	\$60,000 (2%)

Regional Distribution of Grants in 2024

Numbers USD

SACRED REFUSAL

South Asia:	46%	41%
Southeast Asia	37%	41%
East Asia	5%	5%
Pacific	12%	13%



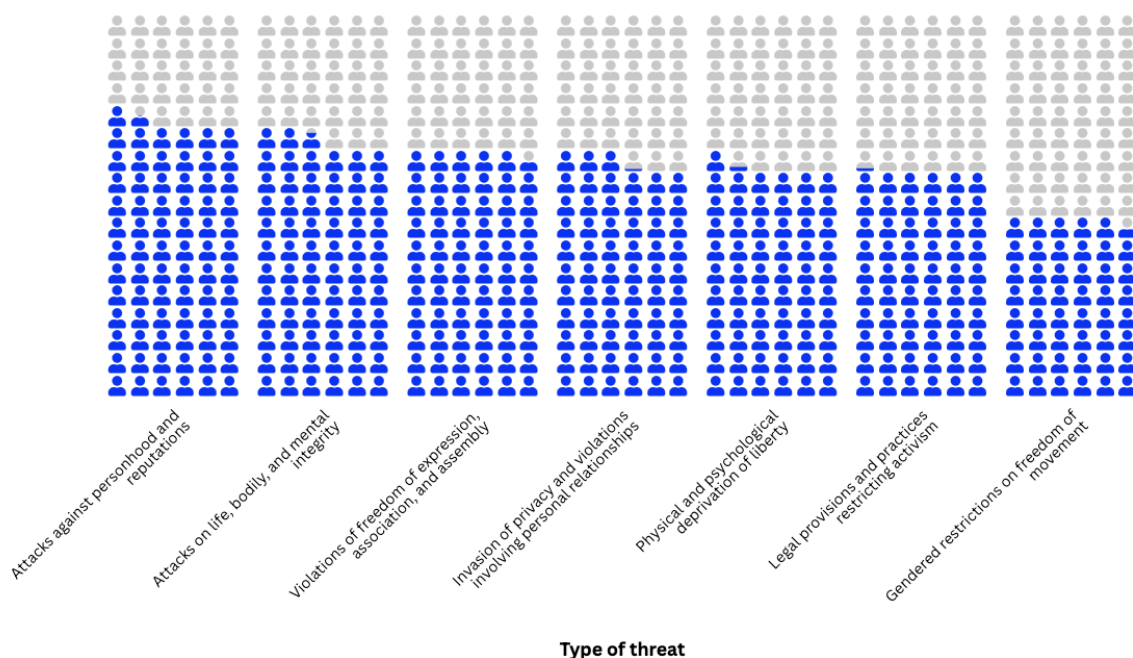
Key Thematic Areas Covered in 2024

A whopping 69% of total grant applications in 2024 reported life-threatening attacks, including torture, forced disappearance, rape, sexual assault and abuse, domestic violence, and excessive use of force. Torture was the most frequently reported attack (43%), followed by killing or attempted killing (37%).

When we classified our 2024 grant applications by type of threat stated by the applicant, it was insightful to learn that individual threats—such as attacks on personhood and reputation, physical attacks, mental harassment, violation of freedom of expression and assembly, and invasion of privacy—are more common than systemic, communal attacks that tend to dominate the news and public narratives.

SACRED REFUSAL

Proportion of applicants reporting threats



- **LGBTQI+:** 90 grants to 21 countries (USD 446,840) - year on year increase of 23% in grant numbers. Regional distribution for LGBTQI+ partners: Southeast Asia 46%, South Asia 33%, Pacific 17% & East Asia 4%.
- **Environment and Climate Justice (ECJ):** 44 grants to 18 countries (USD 222,958) - this decreased by 33% compared to last year. Most of the ECJ grants again went to Southeast Asia (61%) and the Pacific (25%). Only 9% went to South Asia & 5% to East Asia.
- **Disability Justice:** 11 grants to 7 countries (USD 69,000) - increase of 120% compared to last year which was just 5 grants. Regional distribution of disability grants: South Asia 45%, Southeast Asia 27%, Pacific 18% & East Asia 9%.
- **Sex Workers Rights:** 12 grants to 8 countries (USD 64,145). Regional distribution of SW grants: South Asia 42%, Southeast Asia 33%, Pacific 8% & East Asia 17%). The decrease seen by almost 70% is because of the open call that we did last year, which was a targeted outreach to support the most marginalized. The 12 grants this year reflects the stronger relationships we have been able to forge across both regions.
- **Forced Migration/Refugees:** 13 grants to 6 countries (USD 56,313). Regional distribution of SW grants: South Asia 15%, Southeast Asia 77%, Pacific 8% & East Asia 0%).

Unmet Needs

Last year, 37% of total denied requests were identified as unmet or unresourced needs of defenders and organisations. The bulk of these 493 cases occurred in the third quarter of 2024, when it became evident that needs in our regions far outstripped the resources we had to meet them. Most of the declined requests were applications from partners in Myanmar or Afghanistan. It was an unfortunate position where we had to screen applications, prioritising urgency, risk levels, or whether the request was for follow-up funding. For instance, in situations where Afghan defenders had relocated to Pakistan, requests for support with living expenses and accommodation were deemed “no imminent threat”, as the relocation had already been funded and taken place. Our approach had to adapt to these constraints, focusing on providing funds to defenders and organisations facing immediate risks and urgent needs.

Of the declined requests, 32% were for regular programmatic work, which falls outside the criteria of our Rapid Response grant and Webs of Safety and Care grants. Of these, 6% were referred to peer donor organisations who cover organisational capacity building. Additionally, approximately 17% of total declined applications were due to non-verification or lack of endorsement during the due diligence process. The remaining 14% of denied requests were due to the following reasons: they fell outside our geographical scope, were submitted by cis male-led organisations, were suspected of potential fraud, or were ineligible for follow-up grants due to not having submitted required reports.

Grantee Testimonials

"It is an understatement to say our understanding of care has evolved. There were days we would travel to six villages on the same day, we will do this and have to do that. We would have literally killed ourselves. Since the grant, we have taken care very seriously. It can be said that we are setting the ground for collective care in Pakistan. No one has taken collective pause before. We have a mental health allowance for our staff. I have personally taken therapy religiously. And we will do a strategic workshop for the next five years in which safety and wellbeing will be a core part of it. In our work with district governments developing the district climate plan, we also added safety and care to the plan, especially focusing on defenders, trying to bring that into the policies." – Grantee from Pakistan

A regional organisation received a Resourcing Resilience grant to support the participation of 15 women, trans and non-binary activists and defenders in the 2024 [Asia Pacific Feminist Forum](#) (APFF) in Thailand. The grant allowed the frontline group of human rights defenders to be part of a space of cross-learning and feminist solidarity building in an effort to increase the participation and inclusion of

SACRED REFUSAL

under-represented groups, such as grassroots and indigenous activists, queer activists, young feminists and Pacific feminists.

“APFF created a space of solidarity and learning that brought together a diverse array of voices and experiences. It was a powerful reminder of how interconnected our struggles are and how much we can achieve by working together. The Asia and Pacific cross-regional exchange marked a significant achievement in fostering collaboration and solidarity. Many participants from Asia expressed the importance of engaging with feminists from the Pacific, highlighting the value of firsthand exchanges and the rich learning that emerged from these interactions.

Similarly, Pacific participants shared how the experience allowed them to connect with individuals from the broader Asia and Pacific regions, providing an invaluable opportunity to hear personal stories and accounts from those they would not often get the opportunity to engage with. Time away from everything else, connecting with each other in Feminism, and being part of this group truly exemplified solidarity—reminding us that the Pacific is not alone.

While the Pacific group is usually dominated by Fiji, the whole Pacific delegation agreed that this time around the delegation was fairly well represented by other countries. Great to have participants from the North Pacific, including Guam, Palau, Marshall Islands. This meant getting new people in this space.”

– Grantees from the Pacific



Instruments of Archiving

Financial Summary

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Rights, Asia and Pacific				
1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024				
Financial Summary Report 2024				
United States Dollar				
Income & Expenditure Statement				2024
Income			5,282,481	
Expenditure				
	Grantmaking & Resilience Programmes	4,094,914		72%
	Other Programmes	1,130,163		20%
	Administration	460,036		8%
Surplus (Deficit)			(402,632)	
Statement of Financial Position				
Assets				
	Bank Accounts		1,562,680	
	Current Assets		134,442	

SACRED REFUSAL

	Fixed Assets		5,373,579	7,070,701
Liabilities				
	Current Liabilities		306,676	
	Donations in Advance for 2024		1,217,760	
	Non Current Liabilities		33,921	1,558,357
Net Assets				5,512,344
Equity				
	Accumulated Surplus (losses)			4,037,884
	Reserve - Deferred Income			-
	Reserve - Statutory Accounts			1,474,460
				5,512,344



Credits

SACRED REFUSAL

Co-Leads Virisila Buadromo and Vinita Sahasranaman

Written by Ila Reddy and Sharmilla Ganesan

Contributors Virisila Buadromo, Vinita Sahasranaman, Noelene Powell, Deepthy Menon, Chae Yeon Kim, and Fareen Jalal

Art Direction Twisha Mehta