



JOINING FORCES

LOCAL ACTIVISTS AND ALLIES ADVANCING TRANS RIGHTS WORLDWIDE

A reflective report by transgender activists and human rights lawyers working together through allyship and partnership

MAY 2022

INCLO
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF
CIVIL LIBERTIES ORGANIZATIONS

PREFACE

This report was developed by the International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO) in partnership with several trans activists and human rights lawyers whose work promotes transgender rights domestically and internationally. It follows directly from transgender rights convenings that INCLO hosted in South Africa, in Argentina and virtually. We hope that it will reflect the impact of the convenings on their organisational work and their individual growth, as well as generally on the promotion of transgender rights.

With this report, we express our commitment to the advancement of transgender rights, and to partnerships and allyship in seeking a fairer, more equal and more inclusive world.

The unity of this report resides in the concordant efforts of its collaborators towards the full enjoyment of trans rights. Its writing, on the other hand, reflects the diversity of the voices it contains.

ABOUT INCLO

INCLO is a network of 15 independent national human rights and civil liberties organisations working to promote fundamental rights and freedoms. We support and reinforce our member organisations’ work in their respective countries and foster bilateral and multilateral collaborations within the network. INCLO is composed of multi-issue, multi-constituency human rights organisations that are domestic in focus and independent of their governments. These organisations defend the rights of all persons on their national soil through a mix of litigation, legislative campaigning, public education and grassroots advocacy.

INCLO’s 15 member organisations are the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI); the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA); the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) in Argentina; Dejusticia in Colombia; the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR); the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) in India; Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) in Australia, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU); the International Human Rights Group Agora (Agora) in Russia; the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL); the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC); KontraS in Indonesia, the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in South Africa; and Liberty in the United Kingdom.



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INCLO takes this opportunity to thank all the authors who have taken time out of their busy schedules to reflect on and share their individual experiences attending the convenings hosted by INCLO. We express our gratitude to Mandivavarira Mudarikwa and Quimey Sol Ramos for compiling and editing the report. We also take this opportunity to thank all the participants in our convenings, who generously shared their knowledge, expertise and experiences.

INCLO hopes that the reflections in this report will live on in future convenings by ensuring that they remain trans-led and focused, fruitful and meaningful for members and attendees. Above all, we hope that the report will positively impact the rights of transgender persons all over the world.

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PROTEST FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE EMPLOYMENT FOR TRANS AND TRAVESTI WORKERS. BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, 2019. PHOTO BY JOSE NICOLINI.



DEMONSTRATORS CELEBRATE THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE 31 ST PLURINATIONAL ENCOUNTER OF WOMEN, LESBIANS, TRAVESTIS, TRANS, BISEXUAL, INTERSEXUAL AND NON-BINARY PERSONS. ROSARIO, ARGENTINA. 2016. PHOTO BY JOSE NICOLINI.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Transgender rights have gained increasing prominence in several domestic contexts and in international human rights discourse. Accordingly, gender identity, gender expression and transgender status have been recognised and accepted as grounds for protection against discrimination. Major legislative and policy advances have been made in several countries regarding legal gender recognition for transgender persons based on self-identification and self-determination; access to integral and affirming health; bans on pathologisation and compulsory processes to achieve legal gender recognition and gender-affirming health; access to inclusive education, facilities and uniforms, and protection relating to violence, among others. However, even in countries with the most significant progress in both advancement and recognition of transgender rights, newly won legal protections and equal access to services are often not yet widely realised in practice, and in some countries, social and political backlash threaten previous advances. For some transgender persons living in countries with extreme exclusions, criminalisation, violence and invisibility, legal recognition and protection against discrimination remain a remote prospect.

Given the uneven advances and the reality that no trans person will be equal until all trans people are equal, it is key to achieve closer international, regional and national collaboration between human rights organisations who use the law to advocate for the realisation of transgender rights on the one hand and trans-led organisations working multidimensionally on the other. Such collaboration fosters partnerships, sharing and camaraderie that can unify efforts globally to advance the rights of transgender persons. With this in mind, INCLO set out to create a unique space that brought its members – who are all human rights organisations – together to share strategies and challenges, and in some way work together with other human rights lawyers, trans-led member organisations and, importantly, transgender activists to promote the advancement of transgender rights all over the world. More detail about the convening is available in the annex at the end of this report.

Having brought together participants from different backgrounds and experiences to share, partner and collaborate, INCLO felt that this was an opportunity to look back and reflect on the convenings. This reflection is intended to help INCLO understand what the space has meant for its members and participants. Critically, INCLO is using this reflection to inform its next steps in holding the convening and ensuring that this space is trans-led, trans-specific and informed by the lived realities of transgender persons and the actors working to advance their rights in very diverse contexts.

Eleven individuals from trans-led organisations and INCLO members from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Hungary, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda and the United States of America, present in one or more convenings, offer reflections on their feelings and experiences of the convenings. The contributors write on solidarity, perseverance, collaboration, strife and loss, all aiming to show how they resist and challenge adversity to bring about transformation for transgender people all over the world.



PHOTO BY [EHIMETALOR AKHERE UNUABONA](#) ON UNSPLASH

CONVENING TO SHARE, VENT, MOURN AND HEAL WITH EACH OTHER

BY PEPE ONZIEMA

SEXUAL MINORITIES UGANDA | UGANDA

Pepe Onziema is the Programme Director at Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an organisation focused on monitoring, coordinating and advocating for the rights of the LGBTIQ community in Uganda. As a longtime advocate for LGBTIQ rights and an out trans man, Pepe is a feminist, community counsellor, paralegal, mentor and community organiser who is personally connected to the population he serves in Uganda, the East African region and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant impact and challenges, particularly for transgender individuals, worsening the prevailing stigma, discrimination and exclusions against them. INCLO's trans convenings provided a space for trans folk to come together to share, vent, mourn and heal with each other. They brought together, virtually, trans persons in a way that fostered learning, well-being and support at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the following months. Trans people's challenges increased in the sense that those who were homeless had to seek "refuge" with their transphobic families or relatives, and some with emotionally unsupportive partners. There was a decline in access to healthcare, especially for those living with HIV; those who contracted COVID-19 were unable to access proper care during their illness, and some died.

The relationships between trans rights organisations and human rights organisations were put to the test during this time of the pandemic. From these convenings, trans people were able to stay afloat through support from their allies and friends. The total lockdown in some countries left both allies and the trans community exposed to vulnerability. For instance, in Uganda, human rights advocates such as lawyers were not regarded as "essential workers." Therefore, when there was a police raid on a gay, bi-men and trans women's shelter, 20 people were arrested and charged with violation of the presidential guidelines on COVID-19, and they were denied access to legal counsel and psychosocial support. Allies such as lawyers, LGBT leaders, friendly politicians and civil liberties organisations were left helpless. For some allies/partners, this period gave them an excuse to avoid associating with trans persons, blatantly exposing their lack of will to come to the aid of trans individuals in need. Trans persons were left to advocate for themselves as they did not receive support from mainstream organisations while the world was trying to figure out how to work in these times.

INCLO's convenings generally created a community, providing safety and joy in virtual times. Because many individuals we know were concerned about being alone at home during the corona outbreak, we launched Zoom gatherings for queer women and trans people. When one is not out, being stuck with one's natal family poses a major threat to one's mental health. Furthermore, the lockdown has cut people off from their chosen support networks, which include coworkers, friends and lovers. Relapses into anxiety and sadness were reported by members of our network. We started using Zoom meetings to deal with this.

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
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In looking at old challenges, we take into account the relationship with local actors as well as with international actors. The restrictions that have come about because of COVID-19 have made it difficult for people to meet and for information to circulate. This added to the isolation of trans people by limiting their access to important messages. The restrictions also increased incidences of violence as people had to stay longer in enclosed spaces with their families and partners, who are also sometimes their abusers.

These situations have been mitigated with alternative sources such as social media and chat apps such as WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram. They help in reaching out to trans individuals. The enhanced use of social media allowed the trans community to connect and reconnect with partners/allies. Self-care, collective care and wellness programs should be a part of initiatives that target trans organisations and their partners and allies. The availability of networks resulted in the provision of safety and security to the trans organisation.

The lockdown had implications on livelihood and access to healthcare, especially for the trans community. It impacted the accessibility of medicines like antiretroviral treatment for persons living with HIV/AIDS and those undergoing the hormone replacement therapy required for gender transitioning. I want to suggest that INCLO consider expanding on its accomplishments by including the work of partners who are focused on combating medical abuses, connecting trans organisations to science materials through allies who have such access and resisting efforts to limit the breadth and reach of human rights that ensure trans persons' right to health. There should also be an awareness of the grim reality revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic: every social movement is based on fault lines of inequality, and if battles for trans people's human rights exclude those who are both socially and economically oppressed, only a few will benefit. Treatment of LGBTIQ individuals, including HIV treatment and testing, hormonal treatment, and gender-affirming therapies for trans people, was halted or deprioritised due to overburdened health systems during the pandemic. Scaling back services should be based on medical evidence and statistics, rather than prejudice against LGBTIQ persons.

INCLO should also consider offering support to diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) organisations and networks that can undertake COVID-19 community-based response, through assistance for needs assessments, relief activities and livelihood recovery, and provide organisational funding to ensure they survive this crisis to resume other community support activities. Further, INCLO should consider supporting diverse SOGIESC civil society organisations to communicate needs and advocate with governments and humanitarian actors, and use this opportunity to encourage relationships to support the longer term inclusion of trans persons.

Resources provided by INCLO included the creation of a platform to build and strengthen relationships to establish a vibrant sense of community that would attend to and address issues pertinent to the organisation and its members. It provided the necessary impetus and voice to enhance the work within a restricted environment and in particular capacity building in areas of weakness for the organisation. The wellness program, which involved psychosocial support and collective care, attended to the mental strain and capacity of the organisation to ensure the holistic health services necessary to respond to the crisis.

More inclusiveness and diversity, and providing tools and resources for a broader reach, would have been beneficial to enhance the work of the organisations when involving allies. There need to be more efforts in advocating for rights-based responses that leave no one behind and do no harm. Also, there could have been better collaboration with allies to challenge human rights violations perpetrated as part of, or under the guise of, COVID-19 responses.

SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT: A DEDICATION TO LEIGH DAVIDS

BY DRU LEVASSEUR (HE/HIM)

DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION FOR THE [NATIONAL LGBTQ+ BAR ASSOCIATION](#) | USA

Dru Levasseur co-founded the Jim Collins Foundation, a trans-led national nonprofit that funds surgeries for transgender people in need, and directed Lambda Legal's Transgender Rights Project for a decade, serving as counsel in landmark impact litigation cases and amicus briefs in federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the INCLO trans convenings since 2017. I had the chance to participate in person for both the Cape Town, South Africa, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, gatherings, and have continued to participate virtually throughout the seemingly unending COVID-19 pandemic.

I have been an LGBTQ+ activist since my first coming out as queer in the early 1990s. After completing a Women and Gender Studies degree, I entered law school with the intention of enhancing my social justice activism. I didn't time it this way, but I came out a second time as transgender in a very public way during law school. I am a white, openly transgender, bisexual attorney, and I have done public interest work with a focus on trans rights my entire two-decade legal career. I was originally invited to participate in INCLO when I served as the Transgender Rights Project Director for Lambda Legal, the oldest and largest LGBT legal organization in the United States of America. I have continued my active role in this group since moving over to the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, where I consult with and train legal professionals around the world on LGBTQ+ inclusion with a heavy focus on the experiences of trans and nonbinary people.

I consider the INCLO group to be my global trans family. I have built strong relationships with fellow activists—transgender and cisgender alike. I have utilized the network to strengthen the work I do in the world. The information I have learned from my colleagues in this group has directly informed my impact litigation work, my federal and state policy work, my media and public outreach work, and my educational efforts, which now span the globe. I have leaned on this group as a resource to support and sustain me personally and manage burnout. I support others in this group through our virtual gatherings, and via email and group chats. And, along with my colleagues, I have helped bury people in this group, and I continue to carry on the legacies and memories of those we have lost in my heart and in my everyday work.

It was a powerful experience for me to fly from the U.S. to South Africa in 2017 to be in a room with people from around the world who care deeply about the wellbeing and existence of transgender people. The trip itself did not come easy for me. I sought extra mental health support to make it, including special eye movement desensitization and reprocessing sessions to help me overcome my anxiety about the long flight. But I was determined to be there and could not miss out. I knew this would broaden my horizons, feed my soul, and strengthen my commitment to the trans communities I serve. When I arrived in Cape Town, I met cisgender

KNOWING LEIGH, LIKE SO MANY OTHER TRANS PEOPLE I HAVE LOVED AND BURIED, CHANGED MY LIFE. I CARRY LEIGH AND HER LEGACY WITH ME.



DRU LEVASSEUR AND LEIGH DAVIDS. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

communities, strategizing on policies, creating trans-led organizations and funds, or just surviving unimaginable horrors and speaking out about their existence with dignity and wisdom.

One such activist, Leigh Davids, was leading organizing on behalf of trans sex workers in South Africa. She left me with the greatest impression at our initial meeting because we were close to the same age, yet our lives told completely different stories due to her marginalization as a trans woman of color living in the Global South and my privilege of being a white, transgender man living in the Global North without a need to do sex work to survive. Leigh contributed so powerfully to each panel or workshop by speaking truth to power, bringing her lived experience as a trans sex worker into every context, grounding our conversations with powerful realities, questioning our limited and colonial viewpoints, and modeling a level of pride and self-acceptance that I can only hope to achieve someday.

I ran into Leigh in the lobby of the hotel at our next convening in Buenos Aires the following year. Above is a picture from that moment. She asked me how my flight was. I complained to her about my multiple delays and unexpected layovers. I asked her how her trip was. She told me that when she boarded her flight in Johannesburg, a passenger next to her summoned the flight attendant and said he did not want to sit next to her because she was trans. Per the airline's policy, the flight attendant apologetically asked Leigh to get up to move to another seat to appease the complaining passenger. This happened four more times before someone finally volunteered to allow Leigh to sit near them so the flight could get on its way. Leigh was very upset and told me how humiliated she felt. This story will forever stick out in my mind as speaking to the challenges that trans people face to even attend one of these meetings.

activists who were risking their lives to do trans rights work. Some had lost colleagues directly to violence just for being associated with trans people. Others knew of colleagues who went missing, and lived with the terror that comes with knowing they could be next. It was moving for me to be able to meet these cisgender activists, communicate my gratitude, and remind them how their work matters on a global scale.

It was also incredible to be a trans person in the room, especially one who has the privilege of doing trans rights work for a living. Several brilliant trans people in the room were not formally employed (yet) by human rights organizations because they lacked the formal pathways to educational degrees due to systemic oppression, or because they experienced outright employment discrimination due to bias about their trans status. But every single one of these trans leaders was doing cutting-edge, powerful work, whether it was organizing

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Leigh did not let that challenge stop her from being with us. She presented on a panel alongside other brilliant trans women of color, and at one point she danced in the middle of the room, bringing laughter and release to an otherwise heavy day filled with the realities of our struggles. Just two months later, Leigh sent a picture of herself to our WhatsApp group looking gaunt and ill. Days later, she died. She was two weeks shy of her 40th birthday.

Knowing Leigh, like so many other trans people I have loved and buried, changed my life. I carry Leigh and her legacy with me. We, as a collective group, carry her torch and the torch of so many. Grief is a necessary part of our work.

If you asked me what I think my greatest contribution to this group has been, I would say that it has been my role in naming the importance of centering trans people in the leadership of trans rights work. In spite of my own fear, I raised this issue publicly at our second gathering, calling upon INCLO member organizations to make efforts to bring trans people into paid positions as experts on our own lives. The greatest act our cisgender allies could take is to create a pipeline so that trans people rightly take the helm of leadership in this work. That is the work.

And, to INCLO's credit, I have witnessed an evolution of the way trans people are being discussed, i.e. less as subject matter and more as leaders and empowered actors. As U.S. Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley has said, "The people closest to the pain should be closest to the power." The group also shifted how it interacts, adding an additional facilitator, who is trans-identified, and focusing the ongoing virtual meetings on supporting those of us doing the work. This is not a common experience for many of us, who have experienced tokenization without the voice or power to lead. I appreciate feeling heard and being seen.

I look forward to our ongoing collective work. I am forever changed by allowing this group into my heart, and I thank INCLO for the opportunity.



PHOTO BY [EHIMETALOR AKHERE UNUABONA](#) ON UNSPLASH

ALLIANCES IN TIMES OF COVID-19

BY AMY-LEIGH PAYNE

ATTORNEY, [LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE \(LRC\)](#) | SOUTH AFRICA

Amy-Leigh has been an attorney at the LRC in Cape Town, South Africa since 2018. Her passion for equality and non-discrimination led her to specialize in sexual and reproductive health rights and gender rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only changed the way we live but also impacted the way we work. A pertinent example of the impact of the pandemic in the workplace has been the replacement of in-person convenings with convenings conducted within virtual spaces.

The INCLO trans rights convenings assisted in providing a platform for trans rights organizations and civil liberties organizations to discuss issues related to trans rights and their work within this space. The convening brought together organizations from across the world.

The convening showed all participants that collaboration is key to achieving their goals. Significantly, there were participants from all over the world but everyone shared common goals. The convening importantly allowed different regions to share their experiences and challenges. This provided a platform for engagement and allowed other regions to share ideas, best practices, and support. It also allowed regions to share their successes, which other regions and individual countries could utilize in furthering their work.

The most important lesson to draw from the convenings is that trans rights organizations and civil liberties organizations should not work in isolation but in collaboration. The overwhelming benefits of collaboration – the collective resources, sharing of strategies, and experiences – are essential aids in the fight for trans and civil rights on international, regional, and individual levels. It has also been shown that the best way to advance trans rights is through collaboration and ensuring that trans activists and civil liberties organizations speak with one voice and push governments to protect the rights of the LGBTQI+ community.

The INCLO space has allowed human rights organizations to build resilience in continuing their efforts to realize trans rights. Significantly, this provides a platform that can further strengthen these efforts. Furthermore, this platform has provided essential skills and knowledge that organizations can use to continue their efforts in realizing trans rights.

Trans rights organizations are always faced with funding constraints. These limit the important work of organizations and trans activists and their efforts towards the advancement of trans rights. The COVID-19 pandemic has restricted human rights organizations to exclusively online platforms. In the South African context, human rights organizations would usually engage and interact with community-based organizations and individuals in person to share skills and knowledge to further the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Organizations are now compelled to conduct online training sessions. This proves particularly difficult in some communities as they may not have internet access and thus are not able to benefit from these essential opportunities. The

THE PROLIFERATION OF
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proliferation of online platforms for activism during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a double-edged sword. Despite making it possible to expand on the opportunities for engagement on issues and education – as is evidenced by these INCLO meetings – they have also laid bare the shortcomings in digital access for communities and have consequently left these increasingly vulnerable communities isolated from the benefits of online engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered the essential work of human rights organizations. This was mainly due to restrictive measures put in place by the government, which included lockdowns, curfews, and limited travel. As a result of these restrictions, in-person consultations could not occur. The restrictions also further limited access to the court systems for human rights organizations.

We observed a surge in attacks on the LGBTQI+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa has not passed legislation for the combating of hate crimes, thus perpetrators of these crimes are not always prosecuted or reported. Additionally, court services and access to human rights organizations were limited. The courts provide access to protection orders which ensure that LGBTQI+ persons are protected against abuse. Human rights organizations are a resource for the LGBTQI+ community when their rights are being infringed. The importance of these services to an increasingly vulnerable LGBTQI+ community during the pandemic cannot be overstated. These services provide a crucial function in the protection of these communities.

INCLO has provided a valuable space for organizations to convene and discuss shared issues. As we continue in the COVID-19 world, it would be useful for INCLO to widen the space for trans activists and possibly have broader regional convenings which include the participation of more individuals and community-based organizations. This would assist in facilitating alliances and forming dialogues. Though the convenings were useful, due to scheduling and Zoom fatigue it has been suggested that “less is more”, meaning that people would prefer fewer meetings even though everyone felt that the convenings were useful.

The convenings provide an opportunity for the lived experiences of trans persons in different regions and countries to lead and inform the work that others can do and are doing. They provided insight into the tried and tested methods of human rights organizations in other countries, their successes, and what they would have done differently.



PHOTO BY [EHIMETALOR AKHERE UNUABONA](#) ON UNSPLASH

The convenings also provided workshops on fundraising and burnout, which are both very important topics. Fundraising remains an obstacle to furthering the rights of trans persons. Providing a workshop on this topic assists in educating organizations. Burnout, especially during COVID-19, has become an occurrence for everyone. The effects of burnout have been felt even more so by activists pushing for the rights of marginalized persons. The INCLO space educated participants in this area, and the convenings also provided a space wherein people could share their struggles without fear of judgement. Many participants liked the space, as it helped to motivate them and to show them that there are others who are experiencing similar situations.

The INCLO convenings have truly shown the great work that civil liberties organizations and trans activists are doing around the world. It is a good space, and should continue to exist, as it is very valuable.

BETWEEN LOVE, CONFLICT, GRIEF AND HOPE

BY: TOMÁS JAVIER ÁNZOLA RODRIGUEZ

DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL IMPACT AT FUNDACIÓN GAAT | COLOMBIA

Tomás is the Director of Political Impact at the GAAT Foundation – Action and Support Group for Trans People. He is an active member of the Colombian National Transmasculine Coalition and is coordinator of the “Legalmente Trans” project, which seeks the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights for trans people in Colombia.

As the Director of Political Impact at the GAAT Foundation, I can identify the needs, difficulties and obstacles in the access to rights which create friction in a number of settings for people with trans life experiences. In many cases, addressing the ways in which a cis-sexist¹ society operates and discriminates generates tension.

We understand that the “Social LGBTI Movement” has been a form of resistance and coordinated struggle towards the materialisation of public policy, and that in many regions – especially remote or non-urban areas – this type of activist group is the only organiser of collective action. However, within these same spaces, trans organisations and individuals around the world have also been the target of discrimination within their own ranks from LGB cisgender or self-proclaimed “LGBTI” organisations who, financially, materially and symbolically, profit from our life experiences without including any actual participation from trans and intersex people.

For this reason, as trans organisations or collectives, due to technical, human resource and financial limitations, we are virtually forced to form alliances with cisgender LGB organisations in order to design and implement our own social and political agendas. However, tensions arise when we question how it is possible to reconcile narratives such as “love is love” with the forced pathologisation of trans persons to access the right to identity that some defend.

Within this contextual and historical framework, participating in the INCLUSO meetings on trans rights has allowed me to put into perspective the breakthroughs in the legal recognition of the rights of trans people in Colombia and in the region, as well as to understand the social contexts of people from other places in the world through their own narratives. It was enriching to connect with people who, though they may speak different languages, share a similar life experience, vision and political perspective. This was envisioned through the lens of rights, by acknowledging the significance of every trans movement, while stepping away from pathologising and criminalising notions and narratives.

AS TRANS PEOPLE, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, WE HAVE DEVELOPED A FUNDAMENTAL SURVIVAL TOOL: ASSEMBLING THE FAMILIES OF OUR CHOICE.

¹ Understood as the set of systemic practices of domination and violence, whose function responds to a criteria that selects which gender subjectivities are admitted and valued and which are not, based on the dichotomic pattern of exclusion – it follows the category of cisnormativity, which references the “[...] set of expectations that structure the institutional and social practices under the notion that all people are [cis], that is, people who identify with the gender they were assigned, meaning that all people assigned the male sex at birth are men and all who were assigned the female sex are women.” (Radi, 2016 in Losada, 2020, p. 61). For more information: <https://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/bitstream/10644/7271/1/T3155-MEC-Losada-Desmilitarizacion.pdf>

Also, the convenings raised new questions regarding the complexities and discussions of several issues, such as:

- Which criteria define a breakthrough? The gathering held on 26 March 2021 was a preparatory meeting for the upcoming convening in April, where we were to meet with activists from across Latin America. Blas Radi introduced an issue that has certainly driven questions in my daily endeavours, and which came up in two instances: i) when a person in Colombia was granted a “T” for trans as their gender marker, many organisations celebrated the decision. However, it poses a question regarding their everyday life and access to rights; ii) in a subsequent similar case, in order to issue a ruling, the Colombian Constitutional Court asked us to explain the implications of the “X” gender marker. Activists from the Argentinian movement “Todes con DNI” (“IDs for All”) and Quimey Sol Ramos supported us by collaborating their perspectives, experiences and assistance.
- In addition, despite not having been specifically raised during the meetings, a certain issue made its way into the discussion: the limited space awarded to trans issues in everyday human rights advocacy. A case in Thailand put the focus on trans people in sport, while the disappearance of Tehuel de la Torre in Argentina fuelled the conversation on the murder of trans men.

As trans people, both individually and collectively, we have developed a fundamental survival tool: assembling the families of our choice. We put this tool to the test, for example, amid the COVID-19 health crisis. Organisations and activists in the region highlighted how the organised soup kitchens, fundraising, food drives and essential-item donation campaigns emerged as a palliative to the dire reality cast upon us by the pandemic. The INCLO convenings gave us the chance to connect virtually and for each participant to share their interests and thoughts first hand.



ILLUSTRATION OF LAURA WEINSTEIN BY EGOCITY



2021 LGBT PRIDE CELEBRATION IN BOGOTA, COLOMBIA. PHOTO BY PABLO SUAREZ

I remember reflecting with Laura Weinstein on the first session we attended: it was a space dedicated to the memory of an activist. We felt this act was an important symbol to understand the environment that INCLO and its team had created: a healthy, loving place aligned with our struggle. What we didn't know was that Laura would be the next activist to be remembered. I was invited to say a few words in her memory and, as I had become entirely overwhelmed by the new obstacles and challenges caused by her departure, that was probably the only moment in which I truly sat down to think about what she had meant in my life, pointing out her virtues, abilities and ways of relating to others. As a fellow activist and member of the same organisation, it was an opportunity to channel part of my mourning, knowing that I was opening up in a like-minded space.

What better way to continue this text than by quoting Laura, who wisely said “I have met many transmale organisations and they are like ‘gremlins’, you give them a drop of water and an endless number of them start to appear, each with their own banner.” The recognition and active participation of trans men and non-binary people to a degree comparable to trans women was symbolically gratifying, as equal participation was ensured. This underscores the real possibility for coordination and joint effort, which we must continue to embody in our daily endeavours, as well as the recognition of the places, knowledge and experiences that drive the social movement.

On the other hand, I would like to address a certain discomfort coming from a longstanding place of tension, which can present challenges of interpretation. Far from intending to be controversial, it is a reflection that exemplifies the daily injustices we face as trans organisations that cannot access places of power. In contrast to cisgender organisations, the dynamics of power put us at an undeniable disadvantage, exposing who has the legitimacy to express trans experiences in certain spaces and who doesn’t. There can be tension when a certain issue of the trans agenda is debated between human rights organisations with little or no trans representation and trans organisations as such.

We witnessed an example of this in 2021 in Colombia during the discussions on trans men’s military cards, in which many human rights organisations participated. Transmasculine activists – including myself – were put in an uncomfortable situation, feeling little legitimacy to speak even on behalf of a human rights organisation, when in truth our participation in this space was important and necessary. Unquestionably, the power relationship – characteristic of cis-sexism – that is generated in this type of discussion generates fear of symbolic and material reprisals. I understand that this topic can be uncomfortable to talk about explicitly; however, it could be approached in ways similar to the processes used in the INCLO workshop “How to deal with Burnout”. This typically cis-sexist imbalance of power is part of our reality, as are the challenges of sustaining our social movement in the long term.

Based on this, I would find it interesting to know more about the structures of the networks in which we participate along with other human rights organisations, such as INCLO’s trans rights space. I think that in addition to participating, it is important that we seek information about the place that trans people occupy in their organisations’ decisions – in this case, in INCLO member organisations’ decision making. Furthermore, I would like to propose – unless it already exists – that INCLO include a mechanism for the participation of international trans networks that already collaborate as advisers, for example, the International Trans Fund (ITF), which has a long history of international trans agenda planning. I think that by articulating our efforts, we could better consolidate trans social movements around the world.

Lastly, there are many ways in which our collaborations and connections could be better exploited:

- By creating a standardised, accessible ledger of names, gender identities, pronouns, profiles of people or organisations, experience, fields of work, networks, platforms and spaces we participate in.
- By generating a virtual space where recordings of meetings are available for those unable to attend.
- By creating a repository for the degree of rights recognition and international human rights standards in the countries and regions of participants, as well as the areas where changes are expected to be made (e.g. the “X” component, sport, aggravating circumstances in the murder of trans men).
- Systematising the processes of “successful” impact and lessons learned from them.

I am thankful for the opportunity that INCLO has given me to sit down and think, listen and learn from my extraordinary trans siblings and to participate in these spaces with people who wake up every day thinking, working and imagining a more loving and dignified world for trans people through transformation and resistance.

UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITIES, SHARED LEARNING, AND HONEST COMMUNICATION

BY NOA MENDELSON AVIV

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & GENERAL COUNSEL, [CANADIAN CIVIL LIBERTIES ASSOCIATION \(CCLA\)](#) | CANADA

Since joining CCLA, Noa has served as a researcher (2002), Director of CCLA's Freedom of Expression Project (2005) and Director of CCLA's Equality Program (2010). Noa's advocacy and public engagement focus on promoting rights protections for marginalized groups including refugees, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, people with mental disabilities, women, and people living in poverty. Noa has coordinated CCLA litigation in a variety of Canadian courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, and human rights tribunals.

INTRODUCTION

The trans rights convenings hosted by INCLO and partner organizations have had significant and positive implications for CCLA and for me personally. I was the Equality Program Director at CCLA and, as such, attended both the in-person and the online convenings. These gatherings of trans activists and human rights advocates, in particular those held in person, have been illuminating, informative, and in some respects transformative to my work in general, and in particular to CCLA's efforts to advance the equality, inclusion, and fundamental rights of trans individuals. At the convenings, I had unparalleled opportunities to deepen my relationships with trans activists and advocates, enhance my skills and knowledge to work in solidarity with many groups, and enhance CCLA's advocacy in support of rights for trans people.

ALLYSHIP AND BUILDING HONEST RELATIONSHIPS

From the moment we gathered in South Africa in 2017, I understood that this was going to be a special experience. Although I had advocated for trans rights in the past in collaboration with a coalition of legal and trans-led organizations for legislative change in Canada, this was different. For three days in South Africa, we not only shared our knowledge and professional opinions, we also gathered informally, had personal conversations, shared meals, went dancing, and celebrated together as a varied group that included activists and lawyers, Western folk and those from the Global South, trans and cis people.

When delicate issues arose at the convenings, cis human rights lawyers were sometimes called out for talking too much and listening too little, assuming that law provided all the answers, and not giving sufficient value to the lived experiences and knowledge of non-lawyer trans activists, some of whom faced intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, race, class, or profession (sex work). Courageous trans individuals spoke up about the importance of trans-led initiatives and empowerment. I learned a great deal about the need to listen to, learn from, support, and amplify the voices of trans folks. Indeed, the convenings raised wonderful questions

ANOTHER EXTREMELY IMPORTANT OUTGROWTH OF THE CONVENINGS WAS A DESIRE TO IMPROVE OURSELVES AS TRANS ALLIES, LEARN, AND BUILD SOLIDARITY WITHIN OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND WITH OTHER GROUPS.

and deepened my understanding of the role allies can play in human rights endeavours to support marginalized individuals and communities whose rights are at stake.

Through our time spent together, our shared learning, and honest communication, I was able to forge personal relationships and connections that have lasted to this day. At a very practical level, these relationships expanded my networks, internationally and in Canada, with trans individuals, scholars, activists, and groups, which has allowed CCLA to monitor issues and advocate more effectively.

SOLIDARITY

Another extremely important outgrowth of the convenings was a desire to improve ourselves as allies, learn, and build solidarity within our organizations and with other groups.

My INCLC colleagues and I participated in a number of meetings about equity, diversity, and inclusion generally, and about how to make human rights organizations more equitable, diverse, and inclusive with respect to trans applicants and colleagues, candidates, supporters, and community partners. We also sought to learn more about some of the controversial and difficult questions that inevitably arise when human rights advocates get together, regardless of the topic at hand. We participated in a workshop, led by an LGBTQI+ group in the UK, about some myths and stereotypes that purport to pit trans activism and feminism against each other. This workshop showed us how to deconstruct these myths. It provided concrete examples of feminists and trans activists working together in common cause, for example around domestic violence, and about the complementarity of the feminist and trans perspectives. It also showed us in concrete ways how to keep all women visible without excluding men and non-binary. More broadly, it was a lesson in solidarity among human rights activists whose strategies and purposes may differ, but who share a common vision of social justice.

This led me to further interest in this area, and when invited to write a chapter for a book, I leapt at the chance to do some research about solidarity. I ended up writing a chapter about the myths of cancel culture, about feminist and trans rights issues, and about the relationship between solidarity and intersectionality. And I discussed some concrete manifestations of solidarity among human rights advocates – including Canada's leading feminist and 2SLGBTQI+ legal groups.

I also implemented the lessons learned about solidarity – from our trans rights convenings, the workshops that followed, and my own research – into CCLA's equality work. To name just one small example, around a year ago, CCLA commenced legal action challenging a regulation excluding abortions from regular healthcare coverage when done outside approved hospitals. Our communications strategy made sure to address the intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization facing those who have the hardest time obtaining the abortions that are covered, and it named women, girls, and trans individuals as those affected by the lack of access to abortion. This formulation allowed us to recognize the experiences of trans (including non-binary) people, while maintaining the visibility of women and girls in a reproductive justice context.



PHOTO BY [AIDEN CRAVER](#) ON UNSPLASH

SHARED KNOWLEDGE – SUBSTANTIVE, PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

At INCLO's trans rights convenings, we discussed appropriate terminology and deepened our understandings of the legal and non-legal issues, including the lived experiences of trans individuals. At these convenings, I deepened my knowledge about strategies and effective messaging for change and about the anti-trans backlash movement and the rhetoric and strategies it employs. I also developed personal and professional relationships. All these have informed my work on behalf of CCLA since that time.

CCLA and other INCLO partners monitor cases pertaining to equality and other rights of trans individuals. For example, we have been following the Tavistock decisions in the UK (about consent and the capacity of youth to obtain hormone blockers) to determine whether an intervention could be helpful, to learn how anti-rights strategy and rhetoric play out, and to determine which legal arguments in support of equal rights are most effective.

CCLA also recently joined a number of INCLO partners in filing a third-party intervention at the European Court of Human Rights in the Savinovskikh appeal, concerning the equality rights of a trans foster parent. Most recently, a number of individuals connected with me concerning a bill in the province of Quebec that introduced several transphobic measures, including the creation of different ID documents for trans individuals who have not had gender-affirming. I drafted CCLA's submissions against these measures with the benefit of the knowledge I had gained during the convenings, and consistent with messaging by trans activists about the bill. My goal was to support and amplify this messaging. I wrote CCLA's submissions as a broad-based human rights organization supporting trans rights, but did not draft independent CCLA recommendations. Instead, I adopted and appended to CCLA's submission a joint list of recommendations that had been prepared by trans-led groups.

CONCLUSION

INCLO's trans rights convenings, the long-term nature of this initiative, that allows for relationships to strengthen, and the ability to gather in person with people from different backgrounds and types of expertise have been of great value to CCLA's work on trans rights, and to my own growth as an advocate in this area. Given that relationships are dynamic, situations change, and so does the law, extending the convenings into the future, in particular in person, would be of great value to CCLA and to me, and hopefully to the advancement of trans rights in the future.

BUILDING CAPACITY, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO PUSH BACK ON REPRESSION

BY LUA STABILE

ULTRA | BRAZIL

Lua Da Mota Stabile is the International Relations Officer at the Libertarian Union of Trans people and Travestis (ULTRA). Lua is a Brazilian transfeminist who identifies as travesti and bisexual. She has been fighting for LGBTI+ rights in Brazil since 2014. She is a Chevening alumnus, a 2019 OutRight UN Religion Fellow and former LGBTI diversity specialist for the UN in Brazil.

In 2018, Brazil elected Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a far-right, transphobic, homophobic, racist and misogynist president. As a result, we are facing repression and attacks from his supporters, including civilians, police and other public institutions. This repression has intensified over the years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the capital Brasília, where my organisation is based and where I live, we are witnessing the change on the political front and in the increasingly violent climate.

Brazil's response to the pandemic rapidly proved insufficient. Despite declaring a state of a national health emergency, by 23 May 2020, there were more than 335,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 21,215 deaths, unfortunately ranking Brazil second in the world among countries with the most cases of COVID-19. Furthermore, the value of the government's emergency financial aid decreased from the initial monthly 1,200 reais to monthly stipend of a mere 375 reais per household, skipping some months.

The combination of radicalised right-wing ideology and the economic crisis provoked by the pandemic has proven critical for the trans and gender-non-conforming population. Employment and income have always been pressing issues; now they have become more urgent than ever. Access to healthcare, which was already limited, decreased further. Meanwhile, levels of incarceration increased all round, including for trans activists. In this overall hostile context, where acceptance of trans people within society is poor and lawmakers' commitment to the guidelines of trans human rights is weak, my organisation works to enforce trans people's rights. In 2022 we are specifically strategically planning to focus on the importance of trans and gender-non-conforming people's presence in political, public and decision-making spaces.

The outbreak of COVID-19 as a humanitarian public health emergency of international concern has required governments, society and the United Nations to adopt a series of measures to address its potential and direct impacts. In Brazil, between the confirmation of the first case on 25 February 2020, in the city of São Paulo, and 17 December 2021, 617,000 deaths from COVID-19 were recorded.

The Brazilian healthcare system has completely collapsed, especially in Manaus, Amazonas in February 2021. Hospitals were left without drugs and medical

I WAS ABLE TO EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES, ADVOCACY AND OPERATIONALISATION OF OUR DEMANDS WITH TRANS PEOPLE AND LEGAL EXPERTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.

supplies for the treatment of coronavirus in several regions of Brazil. Healthcare professionals have been totally overwhelmed, and many have lost their lives to the disease.

Two years into the pandemic, Bolsonaro's government continues to fail to provide a national humanitarian response capable of containing the virus and improving the economic situation of Brazilians.

Already vulnerable trans and gender-non-conforming people continue to be affected by the pandemic in particular ways, including facing barriers to accessing physical and mental healthcare, social isolation and economic hardship. Trans and gender-non-conforming people often rely on extended chosen family structures, which were disrupted by the pandemic. Many trans people were forced to return to their (biological) family homes, where some were vulnerable to abusive family members. Within the trans population, sex workers and the transmasculine population are more vulnerable – Brazilian civil society organisations estimate that a huge majority of trans and travesti women are sex workers, as this is the only form of income available to them. It is worth mentioning that in Brazil, prostitution, despite not being regularised, is not a crime.

Many trans people work in the informal or sex sectors, where they do not have access to paid sick leave, unemployment insurance or social protection coverage, or to federal and state government emergency aid benefits. Even in 2020, when reasonable assistance was provided, trans people did not benefit from such services due to constant problems with data inconsistencies. These can commonly be related to ineffective bureaucracy, lack of accessibility and lack of unification between service platforms. Also, trans people themselves have the responsibility of changing their own names and genders in the National Register of Social Programs (CADÚnico). The government's failure to provide subsidies and adequate training to trans people on how to do this is yet another obstacle. Such training would have enabled them to understand and make the necessary corrections in the registration systems without experiencing institutional transphobia through these platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic made this situation even more serious, imposing challenges that were previously unimaginable for the trans population. The marginalisation imposed on trans communities makes them extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the biggest challenges for communities and organisations is to ensure that the support measures designed to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of this crisis are focused on the trans population, which is demonstrably more susceptible to unemployment and poverty than the general population. The trans community is increasingly feeling the impacts of social isolation and the lack of support from the federal government on their income.

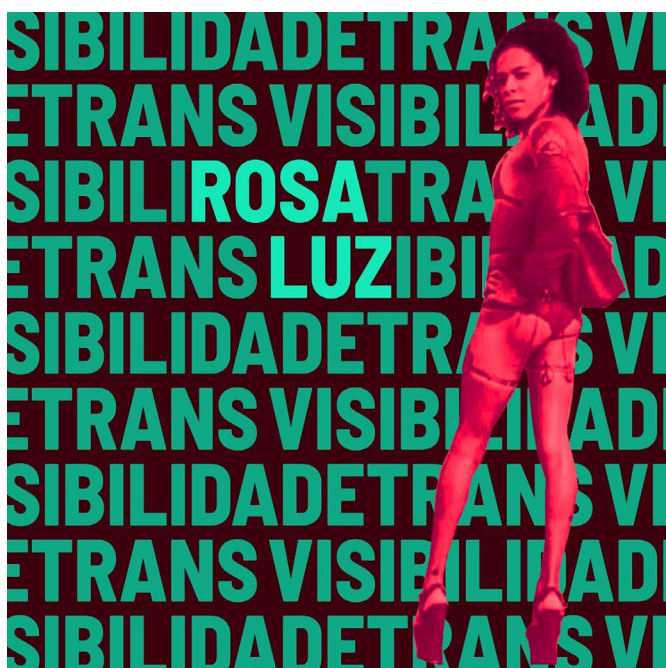


ILLUSTRATION BY @ULTRABR.TRANS / INSTAGRAM

I mention this background so I can give some context to my reflection on the INCLUSO convenings. I believe that my participation in the Buenos Aires convening in November 2018, at the invitation of Blas Radi, has made it possible for me to accomplish the projects and actions carried out by my organisation. It has also been incredible for the development of my personal and community capacities, especially in relation to establishing partnerships with international organisations and applying for international funding for the sustainability of our actions in loco. At the meeting in Buenos Aires, I was able to exchange knowledge and political strategies, advocacy and operationalisation of our demands with trans people and legal experts from all over the world, who became a huge support network.

Some of the work that my organisation (ULTRA) did in 2020 includes the creation of the projects “Addressing socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on trans, non-binary and intersex people in Brasília/Brazil” and “ULTRA Emergency”. The first project was funded by OutRight International and Purposeful and the second by the International Trans Fund (ITF). We aimed to develop actions to limit socioeconomic impacts on the trans and intersex community in the area, by building a donation campaign for money, food and essential personal items.

The first project was linked to an initiative we raised called “TCOLETTIVE”, a forum of organisations and trans activists from Brasília, created in solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic to think about articulated response policies for a population that suffers from socioeconomic problems in the Federal District and the surrounding area. Communication pieces were used to publicise the campaign on social media and WhatsApp and to raise funds for the project’s continuation until December 2020.

In September 2021 ULTRA also received incredible support from the Brooklyn Brewery’s #CreateSpace campaign in partnership with The Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative, a platform to share actions and support with those fighting for LGBTQ+ rights throughout the world. Through this partnership, ULTRA has committed to creating space for grassroots activism in every community we serve and supporting extraordinary people who fight for change. With the resources allocated from the campaign, we developed our strategic plan for the year 2022, which enabled us to think about trans people’s occupation of leadership positions and decision-making powers.

In 2022, Brazilians will cast their ballots in the presidential election and for the state and federal parliaments. ULTRA has developed a programme to monitor candidacies for political positions in the legislature and also to mobilise trans voters. This is our chance to remove the current president from power. The 2020 municipal elections had the largest number of trans candidates and the most black trans people ever elected in large cities such as São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Niterói and Aracajú. Erika Hilton in São Paulo obtained 50,000 votes and was elected councillor.

In Buenos Aires, I had the incredible opportunity to meet Sara Ramirez, who put me in touch with the then Executive Director of OutRight International, Jessica Stern, who is currently the focal point for LGBTIQ+ affairs for the Biden government. From this networking, my candidacy for the 2019 OutRight International fellowship was made possible, and I met Sara Ramirez again, along with Chase Strangio of INCLO member organisation ACLU. I was also able to participate in three major UN forums: the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the OutSummit week, the latter organised by OutRight in partnership with the UN Core Group of member states supporting the LGBTIQ+ cause.

Through the OutRight International fellowship, I further improved my skills in political negotiations and advocacy in international high-level political spaces. It was also an opportunity for me to further develop the techniques I had acquired through the workshops on fundraising provided by INCLO during the Buenos Aires convenings. As a result, my organisation and I were able to apply successfully for international funds.

ALLIES IN LIBERATION

BY LOUISE MELLING

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (ACLU) | UNITED STATES

Louise Melling is a Deputy Legal Director at the ACLU and the Director of its Ruth Bader Ginsburg Center for Liberty, which encompasses the ACLU's work on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, reproductive freedom, women's rights, freedom of religion and belief, and disability rights. In this role, she leads the work of the ACLU to address the intersection of religious freedom and equal treatment, among other issues.

"I see commonality, not difference." That was an answer I gave recently to a reporter who was pressing me about whether I'd ever had doubts about speaking of pregnant people. The answer, and my deep conviction about it, were informed by my participation in INCLO's transgender convenings.

When INCLO first conceived of these convenings – bringing together INCLO staff and transgender rights activities from their countries – we had two principal goals: creating alliances between INCLO members and transgender rights activists, and providing a space to share strategies and connections across continents to advance transgender rights worldwide.

When we held our first convening, only one INCLO member had staff who were transgender. Now at least three do. Now INCLO members, in coordination with trans rights groups, have intervened in high-profile trans rights cases before the European Court of Human Rights, CELS is documenting the experiences of transgender rights activists in Argentina, and other members are joining in litigation in their countries. INCLO member groups, and staff, are engaging in a way that is different from the time of our first convening.

That's for lots of reasons. For me, my thickening commitment is about people – the extraordinary people who come to these convenings. People risking everything to have the chance to live, whole. Activists having to put themselves out every day, emotionally, to tell cis people like me about the challenges of being trans.

I remember well a conversation in Johannesburg where, in a small group in which I was a participant, several trans rights activists were voicing frustration – fury really – about feminists. I listened. I came to the ACLU for gender, because of feminism, because of persistent inequities. I thought of women's rights and transgender rights as intertwined struggles, both part of gender justice.

I listened to the joy of connecting, reuniting, celebrating. Of the pain – of isolation, discrimination, violence. I shared meals, strategies, yoga, and tourism outings with new trans and cis colleagues and friends.

There's no way to attend these convenings without leaving transformed. Inspired by the ferocity and love of all the advocates in the room. Outraged by the pain. Wiser in head and soul. Full of gratitude for the shared space and for everyone in the room. And inspired to act.

For me, that means doing the work to foster the links between feminism and trans rights. That's work I, as a cisgender woman, can carry, and should carry. And it is work I can carry with conviction, knowing how it matters to people I love.

FOR ME, MY THICKENING COMMITMENT IS ABOUT PEOPLE – THE EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE WHO COME TO THESE CONVENINGS. PEOPLE RISKING EVERYTHING TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO LIVE, WHOLE.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: COMING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE TRANS RIGHTS

BY SANTIAGO CARVAJAL

DEJUSTICIA | COLOMBIA

Santiago is a lawyer, activist and co-founder of FAUDS, an NGO that supports parents with sexually diverse children. He has taught research and sexual diversity at Envigado University. Until recently, he was a Gender Research Assistant at Dejusticia.

In a challenging global context where trans people and activists face discrimination and violence on a daily basis, the INCLO convenings were a beacon of solidarity and a laboratory of hope. Strict and complex gender norms impede trans people from effectively enjoying their rights by virtue of their gender identities and expressions. The violence may change forms, but it is always severe. The INCLO convenings allowed us to meet those fighting to prevent it and improve the living conditions of trans people around the world. At these gatherings, several emotions converged: the warmth of our colleagues, the feeling of shared concern, the anger against injustice, the memories of those who are no longer with us – such as fierce Colombian activist Laura Weinstein – and the gratitude of knowing that other people share your rallying cry. In 2021, I was fortunate enough to attend five activities coordinated by INCLO.

THE CONVENINGS

The INCLO convenings allowed us to discover the work of other activists from different places around the world and to identify the wins when there only seem to be obstacles and denials of rights. During the INCLO convenings, I understood that it is possible to move the focus from the obstacles by appealing to a sense of community. We are not islands. Activism aimed at improving the living conditions of trans people is happening all over the globe. Of course, there are nuances and different degrees of recognition of rights. These diverse situations require strategies that vary based on the contexts in which activism and strategic litigation are implemented. For this reason, getting to know the experience of other people who have gone through similar challenges not only does away with the feeling of loneliness but also allows us to exchange useful information to apply to our own situation. The meetings are a living example that the world is more interconnected than ever: the events taking place in a given region of the world truly resonate in other geographically distant realities. To avoid focusing on the downsides, it is motivating to think about the larger picture – the defence of trans rights – which unites the INCLO network and connects the thoughts and feelings of each activist and litigator. I remember an activity we did during one of the convenings where we shared experiences not only as activists but also of our personal lives. This event, which later inspired a newsletter, helped us remember how valuable we are and the importance of the work we do.

A FEW REFLECTIONS

I can say without a doubt that the INCLO convenings are transformative spaces. Going down that road of our challenging environments in the company of others allows us to share the burdens and difficulties with those who truly understand our concerns. Externalising emotions and concerns is cathartic, as it brings calmness to whoever is expressing them. The meetings also allowed us to discover tools deployed locally by other activists which could be used in other contexts. Also, I have learned how to find the many resources, people and international institutions

that can assist each person in their mission. This support implies knowledge transfer, the forging of alliances and the conception of joint strategies to act collectively against anti-rights individuals and groups.

Frequently, detractors use similar strategies to hinder rights that have been or are about to be achieved. Collaborating in spaces such as the INCLO convenings informs us on how these strategies have been applied in other places, what has worked and what has not.

There is no question that INCLO has a valuable purpose as a coordinator of the creation of strategies to improve trans rights. The INCLO convenings allow for the first-hand transfer of knowledge from different latitudes, joint creation and active support to improve the living conditions of trans people across the Global North and South. International coordination is key in a world that is increasingly interconnected and where international organisations – especially those that protect human rights – become stronger every day.

While recognising the virtues of these gatherings, I also observed some challenges. The meetings and themes developed were carefully selected to continue to strengthen the work of activists. However, their inescapably virtual nature due to COVID-19 became a problem as the gatherings moved forward. This became clear, for example, in the drop in participation. For that reason, as soon as the situation permits, I recommend resuming in-person convenings, which foster group dynamics that are impossible to recreate virtually. Virtual interactions are increasingly rejected, as they can become awkward and weaken the sessions' objectives by obstructing the transfer of knowledge. Also, long virtual sessions are a challenge, as they demand great effort from attendees, who must maintain focus for long periods of time.

FREQUENTLY, DETRACTORS USE SIMILAR STRATEGIES TO HINDER RIGHTS THAT HAD BEEN OR WERE ABOUT TO BE ACHIEVED. COLLABORATING IN SPACES SUCH AS THE INCLO CONVENINGS INFORMS US ON HOW THESE STRATEGIES WERE APPLIED IN OTHER PLACES.

THE TAKEAWAYS

Despite the difficulties identified in the convenings, these spaces are extremely valuable. They must continue to exist due to their importance. Personally, I believe that these convenings have been highly significant in understanding where Colombia stands in the protection of LGBT rights – with, for example, the protocol guaranteeing trans people's right to vote.

In conclusion, although the progress made towards trans people's rights around the world may be uneven, the INCLO convenings are spaces to share transformative experiences that contribute to the advancement and avoid the regression of trans rights. We learned that threats to existing rights can be neutralised with internationally articulated efforts, while sharing experience and knowledge will help achieve trans rights in countries where they are still unrecognised. Lastly, we also noted that collective catharsis is a lot more powerful when it happens in safe spaces with people who feel and know the fight for trans rights first hand. The INCLO trans convenings are not ordinary meetings: they are specialised workshops for people who are highly trained and sensitive to injustice.

A GROWING NETWORK OF OPPORTUNITIES

BY TINA KOLOS ORBAN

TRANSVANILLA | HUNGARY

Tina Kolos Orban was born and raised in working class Hungary. They have been Vice-President of the Transvanilla Transgender Association, where they manage international relations and advocacy, since 2011. They first joined Transgender Europe's Board in 2014, and have been co-chair there since September 2019.

Sometimes it is difficult to see the positive things around us, especially in such turbulent times. We all experience such days. In the middle of a pandemic that is new to everyone, the rights and specific issues of different marginalised groups – including trans and gender-diverse people – are under attack. Anti-rights movements have been overwhelmingly aggressive.

After a while, I believe all of us have to develop techniques and behaviours which help us to survive and potentially thrive. I am one of those who are now tired of telling the same sad, boring story. I know this sounds dramatic. I don't want others to feel sorry for me, nor do I want to look vulnerable, so I shifted the focus and chose to see the opportunities around me.

When the public discourse on trans issues is put into the spotlight by actors to whom we cannot measure ourselves in terms of power, influence and confidence, what can we do? We can decide to be helpless and hopeless or to help and hope. Do you know what you can do if life surprises you with a lemon? Yes, make lemonade. So if you get all these sour things, try to use them for something good. Make a sweet lemonade!

My lemonade recipe was the following: I had no idea I needed a strategic approach to address all the bad things happening regarding trans rights in Hungary. But I realised that once an issue is widely discussed in society, it cannot be made invisible any more, and will never be swept under the carpet again. I got so busy and enthusiastic once I had a plan (and a funder), I could not concentrate on the negative aspects any more. If the issue was beyond the realm of my intervention, I would try to make allies and get partners on our side, inform them, connect them and capacitate them. Now, I am not "fighting against", I am "working for". This was my way of making lemonade; you might have to find your own.

The context of Hungary remains – to put it lightly – quite challenging. Actually, it is devastating. What we do at Transvanilla is stick together as a team, share the burden and support each other. We encourage one another to keep our workload reasonable, to try not to worry too much or to feel depressed, and we recharge energy in any way we can. Supporting each other in these ways connects us in ways that strengthen us individually and as a team. It enables us to heal our wounds, avoid burnout and create opportunities to thrive.

We realise that we are not alone in this struggle, and this takes a lot of weight off our shoulders. Allies such as INCLO do play a great role. They help us connect with other trans rights defenders who also make up the amazing diversity and power of our movement. They give us hope in times of hopelessness with their support. They defend us when we need defence, be it in courts, advocacy meetings or anywhere else. They assist us financially when we need money and they can spare

I REALISED THAT ONCE AN ISSUE IS WIDELY DISCUSSED IN SOCIETY, IT CANNOT BE INVISIBILIZED ANYMORE AND IT WILL NEVER BE SWEEPED UNDER THE CARPET AGAIN.

their resources. They provide their expertise when we lack skills or experience and they pull us out of situations we cannot fix on our own. They amplify our voices when we are silenced so we are heard. They speak out when we cannot and their voice opens doors that we could never push without them.

We must all unite around these issues – we need to work together for everyone who faces violence and discrimination. There is no distinction: the issues of migrants, refugees, people of colour, persons with disabilities, women, sex workers, Roma people and poor people are ours as well. Those of us who face multidimensional exclusion do suffer the most. Our rights to lead a decent life – or to have a life – are most often denied. Just as we need allies, others need us to be their allies.

When the INCLO convenings were held in person I did not have the opportunity to travel to the countries where they were hosted. I joined the convenings and engaged with the group for the first time online. The team of trans professionals and allies offered a safe place that felt like home for me. These interconnections in times when we could not engage with anyone in person were invaluable. Shared emotions and dreams around the globe held us together again and again. In some cases, civil liberty organisations invited both cis and trans people. Some allies attended every meeting, and I found that to be heartwarming.

In other cases, there were allies who just did not take the time to attend any more. This stirred many questions: did these people consider online meetings less important than those in person? Are trans issues only important if you can talk about them in faraway places? Are trans people important enough for these allies to learn about their situation? Maybe they lacked time, resources or a mandate, or perhaps they were ill – who knows? This highlights how critical communication is when working together to support the work of others, to prevent people from making assumptions.

Every time I had to make time to attend a meeting, it filled me with energy.

We all need to be energised and we all deserve to attend meetings that are good for our health. We can all learn something from each other; for me these meetings worked quite well. Despite COVID-19 having sent us online, I would love to meet participants in person. Knowing that I could have welcomed all of them to my country hurts. I missed the personal connection during breaks and in the evenings. I missed the excitement of welcoming others after their trip. I missed the organising of an offline event. Still, I feel I gained new friends whom I hope to meet in the future to discuss the good things that happen to us!

Sometimes it is difficult to see the positive things around us, but together we can achieve it.

ALLIANCES IN TIMES OF COVID-19 AMONG TRANSGENDER PERSONS IN ASIA

BY KATH KHANGPIBOON

FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE [THAI TRANSGENDER ALLIANCE](#) | THAILAND

Kath is a founding member of the Thai Transgender Alliance and a former board member of the Asia Pacific Transgender Network, and specifically focuses on education and health for transgender youth. In addition to being an activist, Kath is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Asian alliances have reported shocking allegations of governments using the pandemic to further suppress and limit transgender people's rights. In Indonesia, partner Gaya Warna Lentera Indonesia Network (GWL-INA) reported that the government was attempting to impose new criminal codes restricting access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, and expanding the punitive laws that limit LGBTI people's freedoms and sexual rights. Also, by expanding blasphemy laws, the government wishes to legalise the imposition of lockdowns and restrictions on movement. If passed, this legislation will severely restrict women's, religious minorities' and LGBT people's rights, especially their freedoms of expression and association.

Gender-recognition laws and rules have been debated and ratified in both Vietnam and India's parliaments since 2020. According to the law passed in India and the draft law under consideration in Vietnam, legal gender recognition is only possible if trans people undergo gender-affirmation surgery. On 13 July 2020, the Indian government passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and then drafted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020. Stakeholders had 30 days to respond with any recommendations or complaints before the rules became binding. Under these rules, trans persons must register with the government to be officially recognised.

Civil society and rights activists protested, and contested important features of the laws in the run-up to their drafting and passage. The trans movement's strategies and policy advocacy in the US and Western countries provided us with a model to build on. The personal experiences shared in the INCLO convenings gave us an understanding of the legal advances and struggles faced by trans persons in multiple countries. In this sense, INCLO's role as a global linkage on legal support is very valuable for transgender networks in Asia.

TRANS RIGHTS AND COVID-19 IN ASIA

COVID-19 has hampered the trans community's ability to engage in further activism. Curfews and restrictions on movement limit activists' rights to participate, protest and associate, sometimes putting them at risk of arrest and criminal fines.



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOGI RIGHTS, BANGKOK, THAILAND 2014. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE THAI TRANSGENDER ALLIANCE

Transgender people are frequently denied access to healthcare services and face stigma and discrimination from medical professionals and other patients. Trans persons receive lower-quality healthcare that is frequently inadequate due to a lack of medical competence in transgender health. Trans persons delay obtaining medical care for a variety of reasons, including prejudice. Instead, they turn to the internet, community elders, peers and friends for medical advice. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our partners have stated that their communities are concerned about COVID-19 risks and exposure and that they need assistance with non-COVID-19-related health issues as well.

People living with HIV (PLHIV) are suffering from antiretroviral (ARV) drug stock-outs in Indonesia, according to colleagues from the community. Prior to COVID-19, PLHIV were given a month's worth of ARV medicine; now, PLHIV are only given a week's worth of this medication. This means that immunocompromised persons must travel to their dispensing hospitals, which are also COVID-19 treatment facilities, increasing the health hazards to an already vulnerable population. Almost all our alliances in the region reported that the community's mental health was deteriorating. Loneliness, stress and despair have increased because of isolation from friends and classmates. According to the findings of the community, trans people were depressed or anxious because of COVID-19. Our alliances reported that this, combined with fear of COVID-19 exposure, led to the loss of income or employment. This in turn, combined with reduced access to gender-affirming care, has resulted in an increase in the number of trans people committing suicide as well as increases in anxiety, sadness and suicidal ideation.

Online individual and group counselling support sessions for the community have been established by partner organisations in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Some partners, such as in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have been able to secure the services of psychologists and psychotherapists to provide

professional individual and group counselling. However, because many of these nations lack trans-competent mental health specialists, many of the organisations are forced to provide informal, peer-based psychosocial assistance and therapy. Peer-based mental health and counselling support is extremely beneficial in helping people gain confidence and heal, but most partners lack the requisite training and abilities to provide it. For some employees in these organisations, this has resulted in heightened trauma and burnout. The decreasing availability of gender-affirming care and therapy has been one of the most stressful factors for trans people who are medically transitioning.

Gender-affirming procedures have been postponed or cancelled in Sri Lanka, according to our alliances, and affected trans persons have not received information from healthcare professionals about when gender-affirming surgeries will resume. Hormone therapy access has been disrupted in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Tonga,



ASIA PACIFIC TRANSGENDER NETWORK MEETING, BALI, INDONESIA 2019. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

PARTNERS INDICATED THAT DESPITE CURFEWS, LOCKDOWNS, AND INTERRUPTED WORK ENVIRONMENTS, DONORS EXPECTED THEIR ORGANISATION TO PRODUCE DESIRED RESULTS.

according to our partners. Disrupted supply chains from India reduced the availability of hormones, particularly testosterone, in Nepal and Sri Lanka, limiting trans people's access to gender-affirming hormone therapy regimes. Because hormone therapy is not available in Tonga, many people who need it rely on friends who have travelled from other countries to bring it to them.

Many people are now unable to travel internationally due to flight and travel disruptions. Gender-affirming procedures and hormone-level monitoring are normally available in the Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka, but hormone-level monitoring and follow-up appointments were put on hold while healthcare providers focused on responding to COVID-19 cases.

All transgender networks were left to respond to the community's vast demands with low or no support due to a lack of government support and limited national and international financing allocated to transgender individuals and organisations. Partner organisations had to make difficult decisions regarding who would receive support due to limited resources and high needs.

Many organisations were unable to reprogramme their funding to the COVID-19 response due to restrictive administrative and financial donor requirements for those administering donor funds and grants. Furthermore, some partners indicated that despite curfews, lockdowns and interrupted work environments, donors expected their organisation to produce desired results. Many employees from our partner organisations have not received wages because of disrupted and/or cancelled funds, but many continue to work on a volunteer basis.

Our alliances have been working relentlessly to serve the transgender community across Asia and the Pacific over the past year. It's heartening to know that the trans community wasn't always on its own. Partners in Fiji, India, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines were able to give help by collaborating with a variety of stakeholders, including local, state and national governments, supportive nongovernmental organisations and the corporate sector.

Our partners faced both obstacles and benefits as they transitioned to online work. There were certain challenges in terms of organisational administration, such as the requirement for physical signatures on financial reports and physical meetings to discuss grant applications. This was worst in places like Papua New Guinea, where the telecommunications infrastructure is outdated and costly. Access to mobile phones, as well as digital literacy and security, provided some challenges for partners, emphasising the need for community-based digital skills training.

Online spaces, on the other hand, allowed some of our partners and their beneficiaries to connect with others in the community and saw higher participation in workshops than when they were held in person. In addition, partners reported a huge increase in new members joining their networks and organisations, as well as increased community knowledge of the importance and value of networks in their communities, as a result of their significant outreach efforts.



STOP TRANS PATHOLOGIZATION EVENT, BANGKOK, THAILAND 2016. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

RESISTANCE AS A WAY TO MOVE FORWARD WITH OUR LIVES, RIGHTS AND AGENDA

BY QUIMEY SOL RAMOS

CELS | ARGENTINA

Quimey is a deeply committed travesti* and sudaca* activist. Since 2018, she has been actively involved at the Mocha Celis high school, a safe space for the continued education of TLGBQNB+ people. Since 2020, she has doubled as Trans Rights project assistant for INCLO and feminist agenda team member at the Center for Social and Legal Studies (CELS) in Argentina.

*The word "travesti" in Spanish is not a literal translation of the word "transvestite"; on the contrary, it refers to a specific Latin American political identity, adopted in general by people that were assigned the masculine gender at birth, and reclaimed as an alternative to the gender binary. In the words of Lohana Berkins, a historical travesti activist, it has a political connotation linked to "struggle, resistance, dignity and happiness".

*Sudaca is a pejorative term originally used in Spain to describe South-American migrants. It has been reclaimed and used to proudly describe that identity.

*I think that every instant survived while walking
every second of uncertainty
Every moment of not knowing
Are the exact key to this tissue
That I always carry under my skin
In this way I protect you, you remain inside*

*Pienso que cada instante sobrevivido al caminar
cada segundo de incertidumbre
Cada momento de no saber
Son la clave exacta de este tejido
Que ando cargando bajo la piel
Así te protejo, aquí sigues dentro*

-LYRICS OF "HASTA LA RAÍZ" BY NATALIA LAFOURCADE.

Among anti-rights groups as well as conservative and far-right movements, there is a palpable rhetoric that insists on returning to a supposedly better past. For the nascent trans memory, this sets off an alarm. Not only are we aware that we rarely exist in this rhetoric, but, in light of recent anthropological work tasked with recovering the stories that do include us, we also know that academic, scientific and legal literature and the mainstream media depict trans existence as something abject, inverted or undesirable. So the question is: **how can we use the individual and collective past not as an endless source of recurring trauma, but rather to empower us to imagine other liveable presents?**

When my trans grandmother – an older friend who adopted me as I adopted her as family by virtue of affection – entered a state of dementia resulting from a series of minor strokes, I learned something about memory that would stay with me for the rest of my life. At a certain stage of the disease, she no longer remembered names, she couldn't even speak. There was no evidence that she knew who I, or anyone else, was. However, the nurses – she got to spend her final days in a retirement home, unusual among the trans community – would tell us how, when her loved ones and I visited her, she would spend the rest of the day with a slight smile, notably content. When she didn't have visitors, she was cranky. When we saw her, she didn't know who we were. Nevertheless, she smiled. **Thanks to that, I learned that the last vestige of our memory lives in our feelings and emotions.**



FIRST NATIONAL TRANS TEACHERS MEETING. BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA. 2018. PHOTO BY VIOLETA FONTENLA.

Memory is living tissue. In it, emotions we felt at a given time interlace with new sensations every time we return to them. The act of revisiting a memory we share with someone who is no longer present, or of a moment or place that no longer exists, can make facing that memory painful, as it connects us with absence, loss and hurt. But if the memory is strong, if we can instead recall the sensory tissue of that moment as tinged not with absence but with the deep emotion that filled the original experience and made it imperishable in our remembrance, then we will uncover the most intimate reason behind what we remember: joyful passion.

Memory can serve as a life force.

EQUALITY IN RIGHTS IS NOT EQUALITY IN LIFE

Laws can be interpreted as an X-ray of people's rights at a given time and place, the image of a historical moment

in a given political system. In this sense, the history of a movement, its gains and losses, can be partly reflected in a law. This brings us to ask ourselves: what do laws truly reflect about our lives?

When considering public policy and regulation, even those commonly regarded as cutting edge, my sense is that frequently the terms used do not reflect our actual lives. It is common for public policies to speak in terms that reflect more accurately the collective imagination created around them than the real outcomes and solutions – and sometimes obstacles – these policies and regulations serve to the trans community. We speak in certain terms and concepts that have created a world around themselves. But when we shift our focus elsewhere – towards our community – we begin to see how all these discussions seem to operate almost in an alternate dimension disconnected from the one where we endure our day-to-day lives, our world. **We find ourselves debating the progressiveness of certain rights when most of us don't enjoy the most basic fundamental rights.**

This is one of the ways in which we end up placing ourselves in a social imaginary and in a public memory that aren't consistent with our actual lived experience, either intimate or collective. The complexity of this lies in acknowledging one's minority status against the vast machinery that mass produces the official narrative, in which trans people's experience is an ultra-processed story of which we are rarely the author. This injustice is part of the price we pay for the boldness of wanting to be part of mainstream history. But we trans people know that *even this injustice can be transgressed*:* we do this by cultivating small defiances that allow our own vital impulse to seep into the narratives we have received about ourselves.

*Translator's note: the Spanish version says "poner la traba" instead of transgress. It's a play on words on "poner la traba", to stick out one's foot to trip someone. Argentinian trans resistance has adapted this expression to the homonymous "poner la traba", where "traba" is slang for travesti.

FAKING ONE'S OWN DEATH AS A WAY TO STAY ALIVE NOT ONLY SHOWS THE CRUELTY OF UNSCRUPULOUS POLICE VIOLENCE AGAINST OUR BODIES. IT ALSO PROVES OUR BOUNDLESS ACTIVE DESIRE TO LIVE, TO SURVIVE.

Those narratives don't assure us of anything other than a story in which we will never be able to in which we will never be able to see ourselves in a role other than that of victims. Although this doesn't negate the fact that we have in reality been victims: the oppressive regimes we live in have permanently made sure of that. But no one's existence should be reduced to a single role, a single aspect of who they have been during their time here. The certainty within our memory that we have felt enjoyment both alone and in the community is proof of that. Despite everything, they haven't reduced us to just pain, loss, reluctance and individual experience. The alienation in this world is so great that they even try to rob us of the emotional colour that arises and condenses from our most powerful memories. We can't give that up so easily. It is not true to affirm that all times past were neither worse nor better; we must cherish and infuse our present with the warmth of the memories that interweave with it, every time they attack us unsuspectingly. Memory is not a closed book sitting on our bookshelf that we only revisit on a whim. **Whether from a ray of sunlight, a spider on a mirror, a droplet sliding down the stem of a plant or a smile in a crowd, memory has the audacity to surface.** Thus, our memory constantly intertwines with our present.

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE MOVEMENT

I believe that in all of this, the existence of the trans convening group is crucial, because this international gathering offers an opportunity to share among fellow activists whose socio-cultural universes are intersected by different historical frameworks, and by bonds with other regional social movements.

Because of this and the diversity of legal, cultural and economic contexts, the strategies for conceiving an international movement are highly complex. Sometimes this requires engaging in dialogue with trans advocates who may be in so much better economic and political conditions that they cannot even imagine our battles. Other times, we exchange with activists who resort to harmful strategies, such as victimising and even pathologising narratives, as a means to survive. The recent history of countless LGBT+ movements is proof of this. It isn't unfathomable that this type of emergency mechanism could recur in countries where political trans expressions have not yet emerged from the basement of social representation. We cannot judge those who blindly grasp in the darkness of a prison cell for a name, an idea or a story to defend themselves with. Nor can we condemn this strategy on the grounds of damage reduction: the damage has already been done and is ongoing, and we were not responsible for it in the first place.

The teachings of self-defence advise us against passing judgement on the ways others face their aggressors and the episodes of violence they experience. Such condemnation burdens the victims with additional moral pressure, rather than helping them identify the actions they could take towards their emancipation. Saying that their defence was not up to par reinforces feelings of blame and victimhood. Rather, we should insist on providing the support the victims need to see everything they have accomplished to escape from the situation they were trapped in. International spaces such as the INCLO convenings are a very rare opportunity for us to support each other among activists by sharing our experiences and advice.



TRAVESTI ACTIVIST LOHANA BERKINS IN A WORKSHOP IN MAR DEL PLATA, 2015. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSE NICOLINI.

I have friends who have feigned death after a police shooting to save themselves from their aggressors, and are currently political refugees in Argentina. Faking one's own death as a way to stay alive not only shows the cruelty of unscrupulous police violence against our bodies, but also proves our boundless active desire to live, to survive. Even in the face of that discrimination which, in the words of Lohana Berkins, when it goes beyond mere words, becomes fatal.

Our group includes fellow trans activists whose mere participation puts them at even higher risk. Being aware of this doesn't mean that we should treat them as fragile crystals, but rather the contrary: we should celebrate their rebellious decision while making ourselves available for support and assistance. We must do this so that the conviction that fuels our desire for a different kind of life continues to pulsate, even in the most trying settings, when we feel there is no way to keep going forward other than accepting subjugation. Still not having found a way to escape oppression should not become an additional pressure point. This search for the way out exposes that living in these conditions is no more than survival, and that we refuse to reduce life to this. This quest is part of acknowledging that we are on a path. We haven't given up; we are figuring out the strategy.

For major transformations to occur there must be enough space for intense emotions to channel individual experiences into collective learnings. And I think this happens during our convenings. For example, during the last meeting in 2021, Leigh Ann, a trans woman and South African feminist activist, expressed with emotional clarity her discomfort with the expectation of resilience placed on black trans women that was promoted at a conference on women's rights. Leigh Ann explained clearly how that expectation became a way of concealing the intention that black trans women should endure the multiple oppressions cast upon them time and time again. She decried the fact that this resilience in fact hides an expectation of subordination to perpetuate models of patriarchy.

Her experience resonates with the political collective travesti memory we have woven here in Argentina, even though her life experience is on another continent. Her discomfort reflects ours, and this bright realisation indicates a joint direction. Our political learnings on common challenges go beyond borders.

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The exchanges that take place in the convenings become entwined with our political memories. They drive the creation of collective imaginations where the stories of others become everyone's building blocks.

In Argentina, for some time now, we have bid farewell to our travesti and trans activists through celebration, as many of them began to express that this is how they wished to be remembered. The 2021 march against "travesticides" – held each year for the past eight years on 28 June, thus rechristening International Pride Day – was themed "Cumbia, copeteo y rabia: bailamos con nuestras muertas" ("Cumbia, drinks and rage: a dance with those we have lost"). This ritual blends the pain of their unfair departures with dance and remembrance as we mourn together. The celebration and tears come together, as a way to prevent their memories from becoming entrapped in muted sadness: even in death, our existence will not be stained with sorrow.

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During the first virtual convening, in 2020, still largely unfamiliar with this format, we found ourselves honouring the life of Leigh Davis, a fellow activist of previous gatherings who had passed away the previous year. We held a moment of silence; it was a profound and solemn act. The memory of Leigh Davis drove us to remember other fellow activists who are no longer with us, and so I shared a memory of my friend Shirley Bombón. Life was extremely tough on Shirley. But nonetheless, I chose to remember her life choices, her Buddhist faith, the worldly travels she would always share, that smile in her eyes and how the raindrops sprinkled her deep cleavage in her last carnival. I also recalled her decision, despite illness, to go to the carnival, which in South America, for several generations, was the only socially acceptable moment for travesti and trans women to show themselves publicly. Similarly, Tomás Ánzola of Colombia shared with us a joyfully vivid memory of Laura Weinstein, a member of the group and of his organisation, who passed away in January of 2021.

Joy and rage add vivacity to our collective memory and charge it with political meaning: our struggle will not end until we do justice to the intensity of these emotions/memories. Our memory does not live in the past, it is not made of isolated events: our memory reshapes the vision of the life we project. We must protect and nurture it, and carry it with us while we build a more sustainable reality that will outlive us. Our memory is a sensitive and political manifesto.

In Latin America, the phrase “they buried us without knowing we were seeds” is often heard in homage to the victims of crimes against oppressed peoples. Following the murder of Mapuche trans activist Emilia Baucis by police forces in southern Chile, fellow activists began to warn: “We won’t be seeds forever.” This is proof that an active critical memory modifies the language with which we understand and modify our present lives.

Our active critical memory is our necessary irreverence, our transgression of injustice. Our insurgent memory is available to nourish the lives of others with the flow of our rebellious reminiscences, as a resource not for the future, but for a present that can no longer be taken from them. That way, memory doesn’t languish. History is not a photograph that fades over time. It is the moment captured by that photograph brought into the present to continue making history.



FIRST NATIONAL TRANS TEACHERS MEETING. BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA. 2018. PHOTO BY VIOLETA FONTENLA.

CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM INCLO

INCLO is painfully aware that lockdowns left the trans community exposed and its allies vulnerable in many regions. In some countries, trans persons were unable to obtain legal counsel in several contexts – namely when they came into conflict with the law – because human rights advocates such as lawyers were not regarded as essential workers. Other allies such as LGBT leaders, friendly politicians and civil liberties organisations were left impotent as they too were locked down in their homes. The isolation that trans persons faced during the pandemic was sometimes compounded by the absence of allies and partners, because some opportunistically used this period as an excuse to escape their commitments and/or associations with trans communities. The virtual convenings held during this time were, therefore, a valuable way to sustain a continuing presence and exchange between trans persons, trans activists and legal allies. As expressed by some attendees, these convenings created a community, and provided safety and joy in virtual times, confirming our firm view that there is a need for spaces where the relationships between advocates for human rights, and for trans rights in particular, can thrive.

INCLO recognises that, with activists and their allies overloaded and exhausted, offering a space to connect and share can be powerful, inspiring and uplifting. INCLO has indeed witnessed how solidarity and connectivity are essential in pulling through social isolation and the lockdowns instituted by governments as part of their pandemic responses.

Beyond the pandemic, we are convinced that we are building a valuable space for trans activists and legal allies around the world to come together not only to gain inspiration, information and strategies, but also to share the lessons learned and strengthen trans justice across the globe. There is power in bringing activists and advocates together to exchange information, create contacts and build networks. Better connected trans activists and human rights advocates are a more effective combination to deliver wins on the ground while pushing back against regressive attacks in every country. We are convinced that as right-wing and anti-rights groups collaborate, so should human rights and trans rights advocates from different countries in the Global North

and South. INCLO is committed to having this trans-led space with participation not centred only around trans activists from our INCLO member countries but also around those from broader domestic contexts.

In parallel, INCLO endeavours to make its members better allies to their local trans organisations and activists. Since the first convening, our members have attended workshops on diversity, equity and inclusion run by the trans partner organisations in their countries, adopted better diversity and equity policies and increased and reinforced their capacity to take up trans rights work in collaboration with trans organisations. Most significantly, some of our members now have trans activists as part of their teams. Undoubtedly, INCLO is clear that supporting our members to undertake trans rights work is a key component of this project.

In conclusion, all this cumulatively encourages INCLO to continue to pursue a horizon that's not built on the



34TH PLURINATIONAL ENCOUNTER OF WOMEN, LESBIANS, TRAVESTIS, TRANS, BISEXUAL, INTERSEXUAL AND NON-BINARY PERSONS. LA PLATA, 2019. PHOTO BY JOSE NICOLINI.

conception of an ideal, universal, abstract subject of law, but rather on the lived realities of persons whose most fundamental rights and freedoms are violated on a daily basis. A horizon made of the possibilities and conditions that, even in the most challenging contexts, elevate all our diverse existences, here and now.

ANNEX: INCLO TRANS CONVENINGS

2017 CONVENING – FEBRUARY, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Hosted by INCLO's South African member, the LRC, this initial meeting was titled "Advancing Transgender Rights: An International Convening". It brought together 45 advocates for transgender rights from 15 countries in the Global South and North: Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States. Participants included members of INCLO organisations and transgender, LGBTI and sexual minority organisations, as well as members of other human rights organisations, universities, government institutions and private law firms.

The four goals identified at the outset of the "Advancing Transgender Rights" convening were the following: (1) exchanging and developing litigation and advocacy strategies and practices that INCLO members and colleague organisations currently use to challenge discrimination against transgender persons; (2) fostering connections within countries and across borders to strengthen alliances necessary to advance transgender equality; (3) developing a collaborative report or other methods for memorialising conversations and plans to implement strategies among participant groups and allies; and (4) setting up ongoing exchanges through list servers or other methods to maintain contact about best practices and strategies for transgender advocacy.

The Cape Town convening held sessions, panels and activities, including:

- A transgender timeline exercise, which sought to create a shared understanding of the histories of transgender advocacy and moments in different country contexts.
- Plenary panel discussions, addressing (1) legal gender recognition, (2) violence and criminalisation and (3) litigation strategies.
- Learning stations, providing smaller, intimate discussions on healthcare, access to education, single-sex spaces and access to work.
- A science fair aimed at offering opportunities for different countries to share tools, burning questions and issues on which they wanted to connect with others.
- Open spaces, providing opportunities for participants to hold informal conversations with each other on topics of their choosing, including an advocacy matrix for determining strategies suitable to different country contexts, further work on the transgender advocacy timeline project, alternative justice, safety issues, trans community diversity, media-related issues and connecting with broader social movements.

A more thorough narrative of the Cape Town convening has been articulated in the INCLO report titled **Report on the Advancing Transgender Rights International Convening**, drafted by Estian Smith. This summary of the Cape Town convening is based on this report.

2018 CONVENING – NOVEMBER, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

INCLO's second transgender rights convening was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in November 2018 and was hosted by CELS, INCLO's Argentine member organisation. The overall goal of this convening was to build on the already identified goal of expanding legal protections and interventions to advance the realisation of transgender equality and rights generally. The convening had the following specific objectives: (1) build connections between the different organisations, activists and allies participating in the convening; (2) share litigation and advocacy strategies and practices that are being used successfully; and (3) explore possible avenues for working in an articulated way.

The Argentine convening focused on:

- "Centring the most marginalised", which was done in three stages starting with a panel discussion and focus group discussions.
- "Fundraising for transgender work" in response to the needs identified during the first convening.
- "Looking towards the future", a session envisioning transformative change where participants had to draft a proposal that sought to answer the question, "What does the group need from INCLO?"
- "Gender recognition fishbowl", an interactive discussion format with five panellists and an open chair where anyone who wanted to participate could take a seat. This discussion focused on gender-recognition mechanisms and experiences in different contexts.
- A science fair, which was an opportunity for participants to showcase their work.
- "Emerging conversations", an expert analysis that celebrated the triumphs and positive advances in transgender rights and focused on some areas that need more attention – namely prison housing and employment.

The complete summary of the Buenos Aires convening can be found in INCLO's **Report on the Second Transgender Rights Convening**, drafted by Blas Radi.

2021 VIRTUAL CONVENINGS

The third convening of INCLO was going to be held in 2020 in Budapest, Hungary, but the COVID-19 pandemic made a third in-person convening impossible. To maintain the connections and gains made during the first and second transgender convenings, INCLO opted to hold a series of virtual convenings in 2020 and 2021. INCLO held three virtual meetings in 2020, and six more virtual meetings between March and December 2021. In efforts to avoid "Zoom fatigue", INCLO adopted multiple approaches to the meetings. (1) Two meetings focused on substantive issues faced by transgender persons that were of interest to participants, namely legal gender recognition and access to health; (2) two meetings afforded participants an opportunity to meet and share their unique experiences from their own country contexts; and (3) two meetings were workshops on wellbeing and fundraising.

- The first of these meetings, held in April, focused on regions and focused on the successful gains and challenges of trans communities in Colombia, Brazil, Chile and Argentina. This presentation, which addressed legal gender recognition, compulsory military service for trans men, migrations, health issues and a project to achieve the right to vote in Colombia, was used as a framework for breakout room discussions among participants, organised regionally to facilitate exchanges and connections among activists belonging to the same regions.

- The second meeting, held in June, was a workshop titled “Wellness: How to deal with Burnout”. This topic was framed by the interests expressed by participants during a survey conducted in 2020. Two external experts were convened to present on the issue; they emphasised the need to acknowledge that we are all going to experience sadness, anger, frustration, pleasure and conflict, and in doing so, we must be aware of our own wisdom and strength, our own needs and rhythms, be compassionate with ourselves and continue to breathe. The experts also pointed out how the state of survival that trans people often have to navigate forces them to oppose otherness, which has the consequence of making the “other” or the “different” into an enemy.
- The third meeting, held in August, was designed as an opportunity for participants to check in and socialise. Participants were asked to share victories and persistent challenges in their advocacy work in 2021.
- The fourth meeting, in September, sought to look at anti-rights actors across jurisdictions, with four speakers from Hungary and Colombia who spoke about anti-rights actors in their countries and regions.
- The fifth meeting, in October, was a workshop on fundraising, which was again a common interest of participants. For this session participants took a deep dive into trends, gaps and opportunities in funding and resources for trans attendees, as well as INCLO member organisations. External presenters were invited to engage in a conversation about obstacles to resources and identifying possible solutions within foundations and grassroots giving. This concluded with small group discussions to enable brainstorming and further engagements on the issues discussed.
- The final meeting, in December, was a round of breakout sessions in groups of two (or “speed dating”, as it was called) to offer participants a last chance to connect with each other individually. This was followed by a joint session on trans futures, with the idea of closing the virtual meetings on a positive note that hopefully left participants feeling inspired and uplifted for the next year, given the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. Participants had to answer the following questions:
 - What are your predictions for the trans future based on your daily work?
 - What is a protest slogan/chant/message that you use that informs your advocacy work/campaign/action? (You can use examples you would use in a protest, chants in demonstrations, or a comms campaign slogan)
 - What would the future look like if you succeeded in your work today? What groundwork are you laying for future generations?