



VITAL VOICES
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

LEGAL & ARREST SAFETY PLAN FOR WOMEN LEADERS





This Toolkit was developed by Vital Voices Global Partnership in collaboration with Defend Defenders.

Please do not distribute without written permission from the Vital Voices Crisis Response Team, crisis@vitalvoices.org.



PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Now that you have gone through the entirety of the Crisis Readiness Toolkit, it is time to apply your learnings to a safety plan. Identify an incident, consider the details, and expand upon the following prompts to create a detailed safety plan.

How to use this tool: Women leaders facing crises should use this tool to plan for how to prepare and respond to potential threats to their safety. Leaders should create a security plan for each individual incident/threat they are facing.

INCIDENT

Examples: Arrest, Natural Disaster, Online Threat

Arrest

LIKELIHOOD

High, Medium, Low

Medium-high

IMPACT

High, Medium, Low; Individual, Team, Organization Impact

**Refer to Risk Assessment in Toolkit*

High

WARNING SIGNS

Signs you might be in danger

Tip: Think through scenarios with others, like your team, if a sign occurs what action will we take?

Increased surveillance, threats, or legal notices

RESOURCES

Consider resources you either currently have or need in order to action your plan below. These resources could be training, funding, capabilities or skills.

	RESOURCES I HAVE	RESOURCES I NEED
1	Examples: Legal representation, Secure communication tools, Supportive network of family and colleagues	Examples: Additional legal advice, Emergency funds, mental health support
2		
3		
4		

TRUSTED CONTACTS

Think of dependable people or organizations upon whom you can call during an emergency.

	CONTACT	CONSIDERATIONS
1	Examples: Legal representative, family members, trusted colleague and friend	[Mobile: Insert here] [E-mail: Insert here] [Signal/Whatsapp: Insert here]
2		
3		
4		

ACTION PLAN

Expanding Your Safety Plan

Fill this out with actions you need to take to prepare yourself for potential incidents and respond if they occur. Consider the timeline for each action, as well as considerations. Mark off actions as you complete them.

READY:

Actions to take prior to an incident occurring

	ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
1	Assess the probability of arrest and its potential impact on you and your organization		Immediate	Consider warning signs such as increased surveillance or legal notices
2	Identify and retain a lawyer experienced in handling cases relevant to your situation		Within 1 month	Refer to list of resources below
3	Establish a network of trusted family members, colleagues, and organizations that can provide support during a crisis		Ongoing	Ensure contacts are reliable and aware of their role
4	Use secure communication tools to ensure your discussions about sensitive matters are protected		Immediate	Refer to list of resources below
5	Create a system of code words to discreetly signal distress or the need for immediate help		Immediate	Make sure code words are simple and easy to remember

Ready continued on next page

READY (CONTINUED)

	ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
6	Attend workshops or consult with legal experts to learn about your rights and how to assert them effectively		Within 3 months	Consider working with legal experts trained in cases related to human rights defenders
7	Train your team to ensure they are aware of legal procedures and their roles in supporting you during a legal crisis		Within 2 months	Consider monthly or quarterly simulations
8	Set up a dedicated account for legal fees and other unexpected expenses, ensuring a trusted contact has access if needed		Immediate	Ensure account security and access to designated team member(s)
9	Keep copies of all legal documents, identification, and any relevant paperwork in a secure location, both physically and digitally		Immediate	Ensure storage is secure and accessible
10	Regularly update trusted contacts on your daily schedule to ensure they are aware of your whereabouts		Daily	Use secure channels for updates
11	Define clear steps for your support network to follow if an arrest occurs, including who to contact and what actions to take		Immediate	Ensure protocols are clear and accessible

RESPOND

Actions to take once an incident occurs

	INDIVIDUAL ACTION	TEAM ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
INITIAL STAGE OF ARREST					
1	Ask neutral questions, including identification and reasons for questioning	Stay attentive to updates via secure channels and verify the legitimacy of the arresting authority and document details		Immediate	Ensure the questioning authority is legitimate to prevent misinformation or unlawful actions
2	Avoid escalation by not reacting and remaining neutral	If notified, begin to reach out to pre-identified contacts, such as lawyer or emergency contacts, to remain on standby for immediate assistance		Immediate	Arresting authorities are often under stress, and a calm demeanor may work in your favor
3	Determine whether to draw attention to your situation if in a public place	Use tracking tools or live location sharing to assess location and surroundings		Immediate	Bystanders may witness, or video the incident, posting on social media, but use best judgement as this
COMMUNICATION AND NOTIFICATION					
4	Immediately inform your lawyer if and when you are able to do so of the situation using secure communication methods	Monitor communication channels for updates. If no confirmation is received within 15 minutes, begin reaching out to additional contacts for assistance		Immediate	Have a pre-prepared message template to quickly convey essential details
5	Use pre-established code words to inform your trusted contacts about the arrest	Verify receipt of code word and initiate pre-defined support actions, such as contacting the lawyer and notifying family members		Immediate	Ensure contacts know their roles, such as notifying additional support or taking specific actions

Respond continued on next page

RESPOND (CONTINUED)

	INDIVIDUAL ACTION	TEAM ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
COMPLIANCE AND OBSERVATION					
6	Follow legal advice and avoid escalation by remaining calm and cooperative. If possible, record details of the arrest and the authorities involved	Document all communications and updates		Immediate	Practice mindfulness techniques to manage stress and maintain composure
TRANSPORTATION					
7	If possible, notify your team of any movements. Remember landmarks if transferred to a new location	Track location updates via secure tools. If no further contact is made within 30 minutes, prepare to escalate the situation		Immediate	Use a secure method to store this information and share it with your legal representative as soon as possible
ESCALATION					
8	N/A	Notify all emergency contacts listed in the preparedness plan, including family members, legal representatives, and trusted colleagues		Immediate	Ensure that each contact understands their role and the urgency of the situation
9	N/A	Reach out to the detained individual's lawyer to inform them of the situation and seek immediate legal intervention		Within 30 minutes of lost contact	Provide the lawyer with all known details of the arrest and any updates received prior to losing contact. Ensure they are prepared to take legal action

Respond continued on next page

RESPOND (CONTINUED)

	INDIVIDUAL ACTION	TEAM ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
10	N/A	Inform local authorities or embassies (if applicable) about the situation, providing them with the individual's last known location and any identifying details		Within 1 hour of lost contact	Ensure that communication is clear and concise to facilitate a prompt response
11	N/A	Use social media platforms to raise public awareness about the arrest if deemed necessary. Share factual information about the situation, including the individual's identity and last known whereabouts		Within 2 hours of lost contact	Avoid compromising the individual's safety or legal standing
12	N/A	Contact media to report the arrest if necessary		Within 3 hours of lost contact	Have a predetermined list of trustworthy media professionals
13	N/A	Keep a detailed log of all steps taken and communications made. Regularly update all stakeholders as new information arises		Ongoing	Use secure channels to maintain confidentiality and ensure that updates are consistent and timely

RECOVER

Actions to take after an incident occurs

	ACTION	STATUS	TIMELINE	CONSIDERATIONS
1	Work with your lawyer to address any charges or legal proceedings		Post-incident	Schedule regular meetings to review case progress and adjust strategies as needed
2	Discuss the incident with trusted contacts to plan next steps and gather feedback		Within 1 month	Use these discussions to identify areas for improvement in your response plan
3	Seek counseling or support groups to manage stress and trauma		Within 1 month	Choose reputable providers and ensure confidentiality, scheduling regular sessions for ongoing support
4	Assess the effectiveness of the plan and make necessary adjustments based on experiences and feedback		Ongoing	Regularly update the plan to incorporate new insights and ensure all stakeholders are informed of changes