EVENT BRIEF

Women's Global Embassy Festival – Women at the Heart of Solutions
Vital Voices Global Headquarters for Women's Leadership
1509 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
Wednesday, October 28th | 8:30am-7pm

Event Overview

The Women's Global Embassy Festival is Vital Voices Global Partnership's fourth annual celebration of women's leadership and impact, taking place on October 28th, 2026, at Vital Voices Global Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Under the theme "Women at the Heart of Solutions," the festival brings together women leaders, advocates, innovators, and changemakers from across sectors and generations to celebrate women-led initiatives and explore solutions to global challenges. Through main-stage panel and networking opportunities, the festival highlights the power of women's leadership in building more equitable and sustainable communities worldwide.

Schedule

8:30 - 9:00am **Unconference Registration – Coffee & Light Pastries**

9:00 - 11:30am **Network Unconference**

11:00 – 11:30am **The Voice of the Network**

In Vital Voices' 2026 "State of the Network" survey, women leaders across 101 countries told Vital Voices what they've built, what stands in their way and what they need next. A first look at what they said, and then three of them take the stage.

11:30 – 12:30pm **Lunch**

12:30 – 12:45pm **Welcome to the Women's Global Embassy**

12:50 – 1:05pm **A Life at the Heart of the Movement: Honoring Gloria Steinem**

Amy Richards, Gloria Steinem's longtime collaborator, reflects on what Gloria taught us and what she asked of us.

1:10 – 1:45pm **I Am Jane Doe: Survivors, the Law, and Ending Sexual Violence**

For too long, the burden of ending sexual violence has fallen on the women who survive it. This fall, women across the country posted four words, "I am Jane Doe,"

to protect one survivor's privacy, and then began telling their own stories. Fatima Goss Graves of the National Women's Law Center on Title IX and where the law falls short. Filmmaker Amy Ziering, whose The Hunting Ground exposed how campuses fail survivors. Alex Prout, who co-founded I Have the Right To after standing beside his daughter when she spoke out. Author Soraya Chemaly, who moderates, leads a conversation on putting that burden where it belongs.

1:50 – 2:20pm **A Conversation on Restoration, Creative Process, and Feminism**

A conversation about making art, reconciling past experience and generational reckoning. Carol Davis and Connie Lim produce two powerful works born from experience. Connie Lim's songs about her family, including "Quiet," about surviving domestic violence, grew with Adrianne Gonzalez and Sam Change into The Family Album, a musical about a daughter facing her immigrant parents and her younger self. Carol Davis brought years among archives and architecture to Restoration, a novel of grief and buried family history, about a young architect who must confront her past relationships in order to move forward. Both artists created new works that wrestle with family trauma, and the difficult relationships between mothers, daughters, and family.

2:25 – 3:00pm **The Heart of the Game: Sport as the Great Uniter**

Women's sport is one of the fastest-growing investment stories in the world, and one of the few places a divided country still cheers together. Building a league, a fan base and a culture, and what it takes to win off the field.

3:00 - 3:30pm **Coffee Break**

3:30 - 4:10pm **Women's Wealth, Health, and Power**

The healthspan gap is a power gap. Women live longer than men almost everywhere on earth, yet spend more of those years in poor health, and the years they lose fall between 25 and 60, the decades when careers compound and leaders are chosen. Just 1% of health research and innovation investment goes to female-specific conditions beyond cancer. Now, for the first time, the capital to close that gap is moving into women's hands. Investors, funders and physicians follow the money from the great wealth transfer to brain health, menopause and midlife care, and ask what healthier women will mean for who leads.

4:15 – 4:50pm **At the Heart of the Storm: Women Leading Through Crisis**

From Sudan to Ukraine, Gaza to Iran and Lebanon, today's crises share a common driver. Authoritarian power is on the rise, and the multilateral system built to prevent and resolve conflict is weakening. Ceasefires go unenforced, humanitarian funding is collapsing, and accountability for atrocities is slipping out

of reach. Women are paying the highest price for this breakdown, and they are also the reason so many communities are still standing. They keep clinics open under bombardment, teach children in shelters, document atrocities so the record survives, run the businesses that keep families fed, and care for survivors when no one else can. Leaders from the Vital Voices network will discuss what it takes to lead when the institutions meant to protect them are failing, and what governments, funders, and allies must do to stand with them.

4:55 – 5:30pm **Women at the Heart of Democracy: Leading with Hope and Courage**

Around the world, democracy is under strain, and women's hard-won place in public life is often the first thing at risk. A former head of state, a member of parliament, a government minister and a grassroots organizer speak from every level of power about what it takes to defend democratic institutions, and why women are at the heart of keeping them strong.

5:35 – 5:50pm **Organized Love: The Heart of a Movement**

The movement against women's rights is organized, funded and global. Nika Kovač, who brought My Voice, My Choice to the European Commission, believes the answer is to organize love with the same discipline. Be in the room for the launch of Love Only.

5:05 – 5:55pm **Closing Remarks**

6:00 – 7:00pm **Reception**

SPEAKERS

The Voice of the Network



Maggie Alonzo | Deputy Chair, TODOS Political Party

Margarita Alonzo Argueta is a women's leadership advocate from Guatemala. She supports women's political participation through training on human rights, prevention of violence against women in politics (VAWP), and cross-sector collaboration. As part of Vital Voices' Crisis Readiness Regional Communities of Practice, she will facilitate regional conversations and support women leaders in strengthening preparedness, resilience, and peer networks. She is one of three Regional Crisis Readiness Leads at Vital Voices, where she guides a peer-led community of women leaders across Latin America.



Leah Lizarondo | Vice President, Global Network, Vital Voices

Leah is the Vice President, Global Network at Vital Voices.

Prior to joining Vital Voices, she founded Food Rescue Hero, a technology-enabled, people-powered movement against food waste, hunger and sustainability change. Her work at Food Rescue Hero has been recognized with the WE Empower UN SDG award and the Global Leadership award at Vital Voices. Her career has spanned global experience in technology, consumer goods and nonprofits.



Jessica Minhas | Founder and CEO, I'll Go First

Jessica Minhas is a human rights and mental health advocate, survivor leader, and founder and CEO of I'll Go First, a public health nonprofit using storytelling and technology to strengthen self-advocacy for marginalized communities navigating systems of care, support, and justice with dignity and agency. She is an MIT Solve Supporting Survivors of Modern Slavery Challenge winner for creating Story, a behavioral health app supporting trauma recovery.

For twenty years, Jessica has worked in digital media, producing inspiring content on complex social issues, and in survivor advocacy, crafting economic empowerment programs and supporting investigations on behalf of survivors of gender-based violence.

She challenges audiences to think globally, empowers them to find their purpose, and encourages them to cultivate their unique voices for the common good.

This pursuit is borne from passion– everything Jessica does is colored by a commitment to shed light on issues normally silenced in shame and offer hope to those without it.



Agita Passaribu | Founder, Bullyid App - NMA Foundation

Agita Pasaribu is a lawyer and AI ethics advocate working in technology, gender justice, and online safety. She founded Bullyid App – NMA Foundation, a tech-charity offering confidential psychological and legal support for victims of online harassment and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

Her advocacy helped inspire the inclusion of non-consensual intimate image protections in Indonesia's 2022 Sexual Violence Law. The organisation has benefitted over 2Million+ Indonesians and earned recognition from the UNFPA TFGBV Safety Showcase.

Across the past decade, Agita has shaped global conversations on digital safety and AI-generated sexual content prevention. She has supported G20 and G7 efforts in Indonesia, India, Italy, and Canada. As part of the steering committee, she also helped shape UNESCO's first global Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, which is now adopted by 194 countries.

Certified in AI Ethics by CISI, Agita brings trusted expertise to global safety and governance work. She participates in the AI for Human Reasoning Fellowship by FLF and works with partners like UN Women, UNICEF, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, National Cybercrime Agency, Meta, TikTok and the ITU.

Her achievements include the ITU Innovation Challenge Award, EU Social Award, Global Strategic Leadership Award, and recognition by Tatler's Gen.T. She is also a Vital Voices Fellow, AsiaGlobal Fellow, IRI McCain Fellow, and alumna of multiple leadership programs.

Welcome to the Women's Global Embassy



Alyse Nelson | President and CEO, Vital Voices

Alyse Nelson is a cofounder, president, and CEO of Vital Voices Global Partnership. Under her leadership, Vital Voices has expanded its reach to serve over 20,000 women leaders across 184 countries and territories. Previously, she served as deputy director of the State Department's Vital Voices Global Democracy Initiative and worked with the President's Interagency Council on Women at the White House. Nelson is a regular speaker on leadership and global women's issues. She has spoken before the United Nations General Assembly, the Clinton Global Initiative, Fortune Most Powerful Women, Oxford Student Union, Women in the World, among others.

A Life at the Heart of the Movement: Honoring Gloria Steinem



Amy Richards | President of Soapbox, Inc., Producer, Writer & Activist, Producer of *Gloria Steinem: In Her Own Words*

Amy Richards (she/her) is a producer, writer and activist. Production credits include the Emmy nominated VICELAND series *WOMAN*, *MAKERS: Women Making America*, and for HBO *Dear Ms.* and *Gloria Steinem: In Her Own Words*. Amy's first book *Manifesta: Young Women Feminism & the Future* (co-authored with Jennifer Baumgardner) was published over 25 years ago and is still widely taught today. Other books include *Opting In: Having a Child Without Losing Yourself, Grassroots: A Field Guide to Activism* and *I Still Believe Anita Hill*. The President of Soapbox, Inc. and co-founder of Feminist Camp, Amy's work at the epicenter of feminist activism began after she co-founded the Third Wave Fund in 1992. A graduate of Barnard College, Amy is also a seven-time marathoner.

I Am Jane Doe: Survivors, the Law, and Ending Sexual Violence



Soraya Chemaly | Author and Activist

Soraya Chemaly is an award-winning author and activist. As a cultural critic, she writes and speaks frequently about gender norms, social justice, free speech, sexualized violence, politics, and technology. The former Executive Director of The Representation Project and Director and co-founder of the Women's Media Center Speech Project, she has long been committed to expanding women's civic and political participation.

Soraya's most recently released book, *All We Want Is Everything: How We Dismantle Male Supremacy* , has been called "a potent rallying cry for a beleaguered feminist movement." In it, she challenges dearly held beliefs about gender and equality today, drawing clear lines between the dynamics of intimate inequality and global antifeminist, antidemocratic backlash and macho-fascism.

Her first book, *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*, was recognized as a Best Book of 2018 by *The Washington Post*, *Fast Company*, *Psychology Today*, and NPR and has been translated into multiple languages. She is a contributor to several anthologies, most recently *Free Speech in the Digital Age* and *Believe Me: How Trusting Women Can Change the World*. Soraya is also a co-producer of a WMC #NameItChangeIt PSA highlighting the effects of online harassment on women in politics in America. Her work is featured widely in media, documentaries, books, and academic research.

As an activist, Soraya also spearheaded several successful global campaigns challenging corporations to address online hate and harassment, restrictive content moderation and censorship, and institutional biases that undermine equity and negatively affect free speech.
Prior to 2010, Soraya spent more than 15 years as an executive and consultant in the media and data technology industries.



Fatima Goss Graves | President and CEO, National Women's Law Center

Fatima Goss Graves (she/her) is a nationally recognized leader in the fight for gender justice and an expert in law, policy, and culture change. She is President and CEO of the National Women's Law Center, President of the National Women's Law Center Action Fund, and a co-founder of the TIME'S UP Legal Defense Fund. Fatima has a distinguished track record working across a broad set of issues central to the lives of women and girls – including income security and COVID relief, equal pay, ending sexual harassment and violence, health and reproductive rights, education access, and workplace justice – with a particular focus on outcomes for women and girls of color. She is widely sought after for her effectiveness in the complex public policy arena at both the state and federal levels, and regularly testifies before Congress and federal agencies.

Fatima has received numerous awards and recognitions for her leadership, and currently serves as a member of numerous boards – in both advisory and governance capacities – including Indivisible. She has appeared as a legal and social commentator on CBS, MSNBC, BBC, CNN, PBS, and NPR, and has been published and quoted in numerous outlets, including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post. She is a graduate of UCLA and Yale Law School, and resides with her family in Washington, D.C.



Alex Prout| Co-founder, *I Have the Right To*

Alex Prout is a national leader and advocate against gender-based violence and a victims rights advocate. Following the assault of his daughter at her high school, he has spent the past four years speaking out on behalf of women and girls, encouraging victims to shatter the silence surrounding sexual abuse and holding complicit institutions accountable.

Alex, based in New York, is Executive Vice President and Head of International Advisory Services for Nuveen, a leading global asset management firm, and is responsible for developing Nuveen' s business growth outside of the United States. Alex joined Nuveen in 2019 with more than 30 years of financial industry experience and has spent over 20 years living overseas building and running asset management businesses.

Before his appointment, Alex was most recently Head of Asia Pacific for DWS, a branch of Deutsche Bank, responsible for the development and growth of Asia Pacific. Prior to that, he worked at Morgan Stanley Investment Management, Invesco and Merrill Lynch. Alex is a well-respected asset management veteran in the industry with strong global experience.

Alex is also the founding chair of the Vital Voices Solidarity Council.



Amy Ziering | Filmmaker, *The Hunting Ground*

Amy Ziering is a two-time Emmy award-winning and Academy Award-nominated documentary filmmaker known for hard-hitting, truth-to-power exposés that have catalyzed sweeping legal and cultural changes - helping, in part, to usher in the #MeToo movement.

Her projects include ALLEN v. FARROW (HBO), THE INVISIBLE WAR (PBS), THE HUNTING GROUND (CNN), THE BLEEDING EDGE (Netflix), NOT SO PRETTY (HBO Max), and ON THE RECORD (HBO Max). Her work has led to congressional hearings and reforms, corporate policy changes, and national conversations around sexual assault, patient safety, and consumer protection.

Ziering's accolades span two Oscar nominations, two Emmy wins, twelve Emmy nominations, a Peabody, an Independent Spirit Award, the Producers Guild's Stanley Kramer Award, a duPont-Columbia Silver Baton, and a George Polk Award, among others. She has collaborated with Oscar winning composers Ryuichi Sakamoto and Diane Warren and artists including Lady Gaga, Mary J. Blige, and Keke Palmer.

A Conversation on Restoration, Creative Process, and Feminism



Carol Davis | Author, *Restoration*

Carol Davis is a writer, researcher, and archivist whose work explores history, memory, place, and the stories embedded in the built environment. She serves on the boards of McSweeney's Literary Arts Foundation and Synergos Global Philanthropy Network, is a co-founder and former board member of The Brigid Alliance, and is involved in the global movement Mother's Call.

She holds a BA in Art and Architectural History and an MFA in Writing and Literature. Her work has brought her in close collaboration with architects and art conservators in New York, Los Angeles, and London. She and her husband divide their time between New York and The Berkshires. Restoration is her first novel.



MILCK | Singer-Songwriter

MILCK is a Billboard #1, Harper's Bazaar, and Elle UK-honored singer-songwriter whose viral anthems — from "Quiet" to "Sisters of Winter" featured on ACLU— have made her one of the most powerful voices in music today, with her debut musical The Family Album premiering this summer at La Jolla Playhouse.

The Heart of the Game: Sport as the Great Uniter



Arielle Elliott | CEO, The Washington Sun

Arielle Elliott is CEO of The Washington Sun.

Elliott previously worked for Bloomberg where she served in many roles, including working on the launch of Bloomberg Government and serving as its president for six years. She also held senior advertising and subscription roles at National Journal.
Elliott lives in Washington with her family. She is a longtime volunteer for and board member of N Street Village.



Chineze Nwagbo | Director of Player Relations, Connecticut Sun

Chineze “Chinny” Nwagbo is an American former professional basketball player whose 11-year international career included representing Nigeria at the 2006 World Championship Games. A native of Iowa, she began her basketball journey in Maryland at DuVal Senior High School and went on to play at Syracuse University, where she earned a B.S. in Biology.

After retiring in 2016, Chinny worked with the NBA and Jr. NBA programs worldwide, advancing youth development and basketball diplomacy initiatives. As a U.S. Department of State Sports Envoy, she uses the power of sports to bridge cultural divides, promote gender equity, and empower communities.

She has also led youth programs with PeacePlayers International and, most recently, served as Director of Player Programs and Engagement at the NFL Players Association, where she supported athletes in preparing for success beyond their playing careers. Chinny remains 2 deeply passionate about using the transformative power of sports to inspire and uplift the next generation.



Danita Johnson | President of Business Operations, D.C. United

Danita Johnson is President of Business Operations for D.C. United, leading the club, DC Power FC and Audi Field as one enterprise. In more than 20 years across the WNBA, NBA and MLS, she has helped launch franchises and served as president and COO of the Los Angeles Sparks, the 2019 WNBA Franchise of the Year. She is a member of SBJ’s Forty Under 40 and the ESSENCE Power 40, and a three time Washingtonian Most Powerful Women honoree.



Sarah Jones Simmer | COO, National Women’s Soccer League

Sarah Jones Simmer is the Chief Operating Officer of the National Women’s Soccer League, where she oversees business strategy and league operations, including finance, technology, people and culture, and club business performance. She joined the NWSL in 2024 after serving as CEO of Found and previously as Chief Operating Officer and Chief Strategy Officer at Bumble, where she helped lead the company through its IPO and global growth. A frequent speaker on leadership, innovation, and business growth, Jones Simmer has appeared at SXSW, Dreamforce, TechCrunch Disrupt, and UN events. Outside of her day job and family life, she serves on several boards and is an avid lover of the outdoors and extreme sports.

Women's Wealth, Health, and Power



Jenny Abramson | Founder, Rethink Impact

Jenny Abramson is the Founder & Managing Partner of Rethink Impact, the largest VC fund in the country dedicated to investing in female leaders. She currently sits on the boards of Bold, Candidly, Seven Starling, Wellthy, Parallel Learning, Ellevest, and Winnie, and as a board observer for Nectir. Previously Jenny served as CEO of LiveSafe, a tech security company focused on preventing school shootings and sexual assaults. She also held leadership roles at The Washington Post, Personal (a data tech company), BCG, D.C. Public Schools, and Teach for America.

Jenny is also a board member of the National Venture Capital Association, NFL Players, Inc. and the Jacobs Foundation. Jenny was named a Forbes' Impact 50 in 2020, Entrepreneur Magazine's 100 Powerful Women and a DC Tech Titan. She has been covered in The New York Times, in Forbes, in The Washington Post, and on CNN, interviewed on Squawk Box, featured at the Code Conference, at the United Nations, at the G7, and on Capitol Hill.

She received bachelor's and master's degrees with honors from Stanford University, an MBA with honors and the Dean's Award from Harvard Business School and was a Fulbright Scholar at The London School of Economics.



Sali Christeson | Founder, Argent

Sali Christeson is the CEO and founder of Argent, a brand revolutionizing women's workwear.

Sali always had aspirations of entrepreneurship but chose to gain more experience before pursuing her own venture. Beginning her career in finance and banking, she later transitioned to the tech industry at CISCO. Frustrated by the lack of functional workwear options for women, she toyed with the idea of starting her own company. However, it wasn't until a few years later when she came across a study highlighting the judgment women face based on their appearance that she decided to take action. With everything aligning, Sali finally leaped and founded Argent.

Since 2016, Sali and Argent have been leading the workwear revolution, offering functional, high-quality, and unique pieces designed to empower women in the workplace. Their mission is to arm working women with confidence through their clothing.



Tina Keshani | Co-founder and CEO, Seven Starling

Tina Keshani is co-founder and CEO of Seven Starling, a women's mental health company she has led for nearly six years with a mission to ensure every woman has access to specialized and affordable mental health care. Under her leadership, Seven Starling has developed a specialized clinical model to drive best-in-class outcomes for its patients, expanded its services across 16 states, and partnered with the country's largest health plans to make care more affordable. The company has treated thousands of patients to date, addressing the maternal mental health crisis that affects 1 in 5 new mothers.

Keshani is passionate about leveraging business as a force for doing good in the world, with deep expertise in scaling digital health companies and building patient-centered care experiences. Before founding Seven Starling, she led strategic growth initiatives at Warby Parker for six years, including international expansion, in-network partnerships, and new service offerings.
Keshani holds an MBA from Harvard Business School and a B.A. in Economics from Denison University. She lives in the Washington, DC, area with her husband Arman and their 1-year-old daughter Daria.



Anna Mason | Managing Partner, Ingeborg Investments

Anna is the managing partner at Ingeborg Investments and leads the day-to-day activity of the investing platform, including deal sourcing, portfolio management, investment recommendations and industry relationship management.

Prior to joining Ingeborg, Anna was a managing partner at Revolution's Rise of the Rest Seed Fund. While there, Anna helped lead the transformation of Rise of the Rest from a startup-community bus tour initiative to a fund with $300M in AUM and nearly 200 early-stage investments across 75+ cities.

Anna's passion for innovation and entrepreneurship comes from more than eighteen years of experience in finance, startup operations and venture community programming. Anna was named to *Fortune*'s 40 Under 40 in 2020, *Business Insider*'s list of 100 People Transforming Business in 2019 and a *Washingtonian* Tech Titan in 2017 and 2018. Anna is also a 2022 Presidential Leadership Fellow. Anna earned her undergraduate degree from Harvard College and her master's degree from the NYU Stern School of Business. Anna lives in the Washington, D.C. area with her husband John, and their two daughters.



Dr. Vonda Wright | Orthopedic Sports Surgeon

Dr. Vonda Wright, MD is a pioneering orthopedic sports surgeon, researcher, an expert in human performance, longevity, and an authority in women's health. The creator of the Skeletal Longevity paradigm and the Musculoskeletal Syndrome of Menopause, she is widely recognized for her innovative thought leadership and is committed to redefining aging globally. Dr Wright is a frequent media and conference expert, and her science-based approach is changing the lives of millions in mid-life. Dr Wright's compelling messages and no-nonsense delivery not only informs but inspires action, encouraging athletes and active people of all ages and skill levels to reclaim their health and thrive at every stage of life. Over the next two years, she is using her digital platform and 79 mile mountain endurance races, to raise awareness of the overwhelming lack of research and funds for women's health research, with a goal of raising $79 million stimulate ovarian aging, musculoskeletal syndrome of menopause and female sexual health research for women's in partnership with the Buck Aging Institute. This campaign "Move the Mountain," calls upon women in her digital community, female founders and philanthropists to step forward and fill this research gap. Dr Wright was trained at the prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, served as an academic surgeon, team doctor and Medical Director of the UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex at the University of Pittsburgh for 20 years and currently practices in Lake Nona Florida where she is the founder and CEO of Skeletal Longevity. She is the author of NYT bestseller- UNBREAKABLE: A Women's Guide to Aging with Power and will release her next book, PEAK in August of 2027.

At the Heart of the Storm: Women Leading Through Crisis



Hanin Ahmed | Partnership and External Relations Officer, Emergency Response Rooms

Hanin Ahmed initiated the Old Omdurman Emergency Response Room, which helps Sudanese with food supplies, medication, GBV, and evacuation centers. Additionally, she founded a youth network in Sudan to serve civilians' various needs and is a member of Peace for Sudan, a women's group advocating for peace. She has served as General Secretary for the African Union Youth Assembly. She is a member of Engaging Women in Post-Conflict Economic and Political Decision-Making by UNDP and the North African youth group for peace and security by the African Union. She also belongs to Women Advance Security in Sudan (WASS) and presented research on women and youth political participation in Sudan at Oxford University in 2019.



Oksana Horbunova | Human Rights Activist

Oksana Horbunova is a pioneering human rights activist in Ukraine. In the 1990s, she was working for the government when she discovered that an alarming number of women were disappearing. Oksana demanded that officials take notice and investigate. Her efforts ended up exposing human trafficking and she went on to create Ukraine's first counter-trafficking NGO.

Today, Oksana leads her country's counter-trafficking efforts with the International Organization for Migration. She opened a hotline that gives voice to silenced women and facilitates their rescue. In 2014, Oksana was on the frontlines when pro-democracy protests broke out in Kiev. She says she was proud to risk her life to demonstrate for human rights, justice and peace.



Sally Maforchi Mbmouien | Executive Director, Common Action for Gender Development (COMAGEND)

Sally Maforchi Mboumien is a transformational leader and scholar dedicated to removing systemic barriers to women's leadership. As Executive Director of Common Action for Gender Development (COMAGEND), she bridges grassroots activism with international policy.

Sally serves as the West Africa Hub Leader for the Crisis Readiness Community—a role building on her Vital Voices trainer certification to equip women leaders with essential crisis response and resilience strategies across the region. She is one of three Regional Crisis Readiness Leads at Vital Voices, where she guides a peer-led community of women leaders across West Africa.



Linda Robinson | Senior Fellow, Women and Foreign Policy, Council on Foreign Relations

Linda Robinson is senior fellow for women and foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) where she writes about women's political and economic leadership, the relationship between gender equality and democracy, technology-facilitated violence, and current international affairs. Her latest book, *Women in Power: Fighting for Democracy in an Age of Authoritarianism*, spotlights the current cohort of women political leaders and tells the powerful stories of the women on the frontlines of the battle between democracy and authoritarianism.

Women at the Heart of Democracy: Leading with Hope and Courage



Huma Abedin Soros | Vital Voices Board Chair

Huma Abedin Soros is an author, speaker, producer and activist. She is currently an MSNOW contributor, a consulting producer for HiddenLight Productions and advisor to the Hillary Rodham Clinton Leadership Institute. She also serves as Vice Chair of the *Know Your Value* platform which includes the Forbes 30/50 Mentorship Summit in Abu Dhabi. She sits on the board of Vital Voices Global Partnership.

Huma began her three-decade career in public service as a White House intern in 1996. After four years in the White House as Special Assistant to the First Lady and Trip Director, she worked in the U.S. Senate as Senior Advisor to Senator Hillary Clinton and then went on to be Traveling Chief of Staff for the Clinton 2008 presidential campaign. In 2009, she was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of State under President Obama, where she oversaw long-term strategic planning and operations for the Secretary of State. She then served as Vice Chair of Hillary for America in 2016, a historic campaign that resulted in the first woman to be nominated for president by a major political party.

In addition to her long career in public service, Huma's passion for storytelling led her to write her *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *Both/And*, in 2021. The memoir has been optioned by Freida Pinto for a scripted series currently in development at Netflix. She also contributed a chapter to the book *Listening in the Dark: Women Listening to Their Intuition*, edited by Amber Tamblyn and published in 2022. As a consulting producer for HiddenLight Productions, Huma helps bring untold stories from diverse voices to a global audience.

Huma's role as a weekly MSNOW contributor and recent co-host of *Morning Mika* has allowed her to draw on her expertise in government, politics and women's leadership to provide unique insights into current domestic and global developments. As Vice Chair of the annual Forbes 30/50 Summit, for five consecutive years, she has helped convene influential female voices across industries to share their experiences with rooms filled with icons from Forbes' 50 Over 50 List and barrier-breakers from the 30 Under 30 List, providing an important framework for long-term mentoring and networking partnerships.

Through Huma's work on the board of Vital Voices Global Partnership, an NGO that has invested in women leaders for 25 years, she continues to support women addressing the world's greatest challenges. Huma's public service led to her being named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum and to her inclusion on TIME's 40 Under 40 list. She has also served on the Host Committee of the Met Gala, most recently in 2020, helping support and celebrate one of New York's foremost cultural and historic institutions. In 2022, Huma received the Golden Heart Award for Outstanding Leadership from God's Love We Deliver, an organization dedicated to

fighting hunger and malnutrition. In 2023, she was awarded the Celebrating Women Award from the New York Women's Foundation. In 2024, Huma also received the Pro-Choice Champion Award from Eleanor's Legacy, an organization that recruits, trains, and supports pro-choice Democratic women to run for state and local office throughout New York.

Huma graduated from George Washington University with a B.A. in Journalism and Political Science. Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and raised in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Huma lives in New York with her husband Alex and son Jordan.



Dalia Grybauskaitė | Former President of Lithuania

Dalia Grybauskaitė served as President of Lithuania from 2009 to 2019, becoming the country's first female president and the only one in post-Soviet Lithuania to serve two consecutive terms.

In 2000, Grybauskaitė was appointed Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister and took a leadership role within the delegation responsible for negotiating Lithuania's accession to the European Union. She then served as Finance Minister (2001–2004), advocating for privatization and liberalization reforms. From 2004 to 2009, she was the European Union Commissioner for Financial Programming and Budgets, earning the title of "Commissioner of the Year" in 2005.

She also served as Minister Plenipotentiary in Lithuania's missions to both the EU and the United States, as well as leading economic diplomacy efforts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She also played a crucial role as Chief Negotiator for Lithuania's Free Trade Agreement with the EU.

In 2009, following the global economic crisis, Grybauskaitė left her EU post to run as an independent candidate in Lithuania's presidential election. During her presidency, she prioritized economic recovery, military readiness, and Lithuania's security, notably supporting NATO's enhanced forward presence in the country.



Alexia Leclercq | Founder and Director, Land Justice Community School

Alexia Leclercq is an environmental justice organizer, scholar and artist. As the founder and Executive Director of Land Justice Community School, her climate education curriculum has reached over 120,000 students. In 2021, she launched the first climate organizing fellowship designed by and for Gen Z youth of color. She has also led campaigns securing clean water protections, regulating aggregate mining, stopping petrochemical projects, and strengthening international climate mechanisms.

Her leadership has been recognized by Forbes, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Guardian. Honors include Forbes 30 Under 30, the Brower Youth Award, Jericho Activism Prize, WE ACT Environmental Justice Award, Harvard AOCC Award, and WWF Conservation Award. She served as a 2022 UN Youth Assembly Ambassador and graduated summa cum laude from New York University and Harvard Graduate School of Education.



Laura Golakeh | Deputy Minister for Gender, Liberia

Hon. Laura Golakeh is the Deputy Minister for Gender at the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, a position she has held since February 2024. She is a passionate advocate for gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion in Liberia. In her role, she provides strategic leadership and technical oversight for national programs and policies that advance the rights and well-being of women, girls and vulnerable populations.

With extensive experience in gender programming, policy development and stakeholder engagement, Laura has represented Liberia at national, regional and international forums, including the Commission on the Status of Women and high-level discussions on Women, Peace and Security. She is committed to promoting inclusive development, strengthening protection systems and advancing women's leadership in peace building and governance.

Also a lawyer and faith leader, Laura continues to champion initiatives that foster equity, empowerment and sustainable social transformation across Liberia.



Fatoumatta Njai |Member of Parliament, The Gambia

Fatoumatta Njai is a Gambian parliamentarian, Pan African leader and champion of women's political leadership, democratic governance and inclusive development. She is serving her second term as an elected Member of the National Assembly in the Gambia, having first been elected in 2017 and re-elected as an Independent candidate in 2022.

For more than two decades, Hon. Njai has worked across politics, governance, banking, public relations and institutional leadership. In The Gambia's National Assembly, she serves as Chairperson of the Select Committee on Gender, Children and Social Welfare and has served on several other key committees. She has been a strong advocate for reforms to increase women's representation and participation in political decision making.

Her leadership extends across Africa. She is a Member of the Pan-African Parliament, where she serves as Second Vice President of the PAP Women's Caucus. Previously, she served in the ECOWAS Parliament, including as Secretary General of the ECOWAS Female Parliamentary Association, advancing regional cooperation, women's leadership, peacebuilding and democratic governance across West Africa.

Hon Njai is deeply committed to creating pathways for women and girls to move from participation to leadership. She founded the Yayi Denton Programme for Youth, Women and Vulnerable People, which focuses on leadership development, economic empowerment and civic participation. She is an Amujae Initiative leader of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center and has received continental recognition for her leadership and social impact, including recognition among Africa's 100 Most Impactful Voices.

Fatoumatta holds a Ba Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Politics and International Relations and a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Through her national, regional and continental leadership, Hon Njai continues to champion a future in which women and girls are not simply represented, but are empowered to lead, shape institutions and influence the decisions that affect their communities and societies.

Organized Love: The Heart of a Movement



Nika Kovač | Director, The Research Institute of 8th March | Coordinator, My Voice, My Choice | Executive Director, Democracy Hub

Nika Kovač is a Slovenian anthropologist, sociologist, and campaigner. She leads the Institute of 8th of March, a movement-building organisation advancing democracy, social justice, and gender equality, and Democracy Hub, which develops campaigning strategies and trains activists internationally.

Under her leadership, the Institute has changed 15 laws and led two successful referendum campaigns in Slovenia, including securing the "yes means yes" consent model and free school lunches.

She also coordinates My Voice, My Choice, one of Europe's largest feminist movements, whose European Citizens' Initiative collected over one million verified signatures and received a positive response from the European Commission. The movement received the 2026 Vigdis Prize for Women's Empowerment, as well as other recognitions.

Nika is an Obama Scholar, Obama Foundation Leader Europe, and Vital Voices Global Leadership Honoree, and has received numerous national and international recognitions.