Youth Association DRONI
for and with young people

Non Violent Actions Toolkit

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

Erasmus+

Introduction

This toolkit is the result of five days of shared learning, research, and exchange among young activists from across Europe and the Caucasus. Brought together in Georgia through an Erasmus+ project, participants combined their experiences, perspectives, and hopes for their communities to explore how non-violent action can inspire real change.

Each chapter focuses on a theme chosen directly by the young people involved topics they felt were most urgent and meaningful in their own countries. Through international teamwork, they collected examples of movements, creative actions, and stories of peaceful resistance, transforming them into accessible tools for others.

This toolkit is not just a compilation of practices; it is an invitation. An invitation to learn from each other, to be inspired, and to imagine how non-violent action can shape a more just and compassionate world, starting with the ideas and energy of young people.

DRONI

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Censorship

Belarus Free Theatre, Belarus, since 2005

Blank Paper Protests

Sandro Sulaberidze

The Belarus Free Theatre (BFT) is a Belarusian underground theatre group, which used to perform plays against censorship on behalf of the dictatorial government while being undercover. It is the only theatre in Europe banned in its country on political grounds. When the group was still operating in Belarus, rehearsals and performances were normally held secretly in small private apartments, free of charge for the public. Due to security reasons and the risk of persecution, the locations had to change constantly. On several occasions, performances were given in street cafés, in the countryside or in the woods.

Staff members have repeatedly experienced harassment by the authorities while the stage director and other people even lost their jobs at state-run theatres. Following the wide protests in 2020 and increased repressions by the government, the project was dissolved in Belarus and relocated to London where it still operates today.

Besides performances, BFT provides theatre training and also runs campaigns. With their project "Letters from Lukashenko's Prisoners", a voice is given to political prisoners in Belarus. Letters from Belarusian prisoners sent to their friends and family often do not arrive on time or at all, and are subject to heavy censorship. By translating those letters that make it out into English and publishing them through various channels, BFT amplifies their rare signs of living and raises awareness about their situation among the public. Through creativity, theatre, storytelling and media campaigns, BFT challenges the Belarusian regime and all its attempts to silence the voices that speak up against it.

Censorship

Belarus Free Theatre, Belarus, since 2005

Blank Paper Protests, China 2022

Sandro Sulaberidze

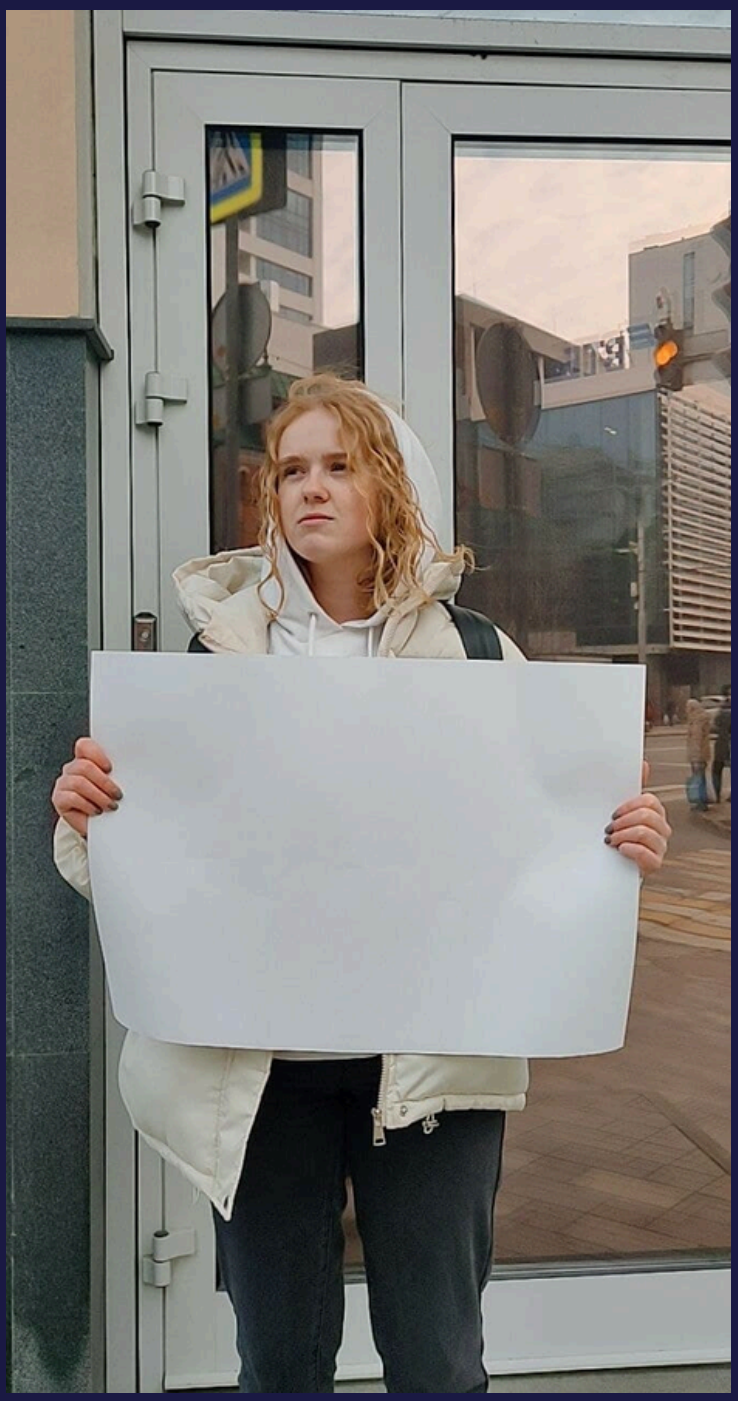
In places and contexts where simply making a statement about a certain issue can already lead to repression due to censorship, people have creatively used blank sheets of paper to protest on behalf of these topics. It is a simple, yet provocative way of demonstrating disagreement about whatever issue is censored, as well as a comment on the censorship itself. This method has been a prevalent form of non-violent resistance in different countries around the world such as Canada, Poland and Russia. The instance that gained the most traction, however, took place in China in 2022.

People held up blank papers in order to protest against strict Covid regulations, forming what was thought to be the largest protests since the 1989 pro-democracy Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

On 24 November 2022, at least 10 people died in an apartment fire in the city of Urumqi, northwest China. They were reportedly prevented from escaping due to strict rules to prevent the spread of the Corona Virus. This tragedy sparked an outrage across China, causing people to take to the streets in numbers not seen for decades – many holding up blank sheets of paper to symbolize systematic censorship by the Chinese government – and the 'White Paper' protest movement quickly spread overseas. "The white paper represents everything we want to say but cannot say," one of the participants said.

This act of defiance, now commonly known as the “White Paper Protests”, spread like a wildfire across the country and ended in clashes between demonstrators and police.

But the demonstrations were still effective: Weeks later, the government abruptly ended its “zero-Covid” policy. Few traces of the movement remain in China. Authorities have since censored online reporting of the event and silenced those who dared to document or commemorate it.



Censorship

Belarus Free Theatre, Belarus, since 2005

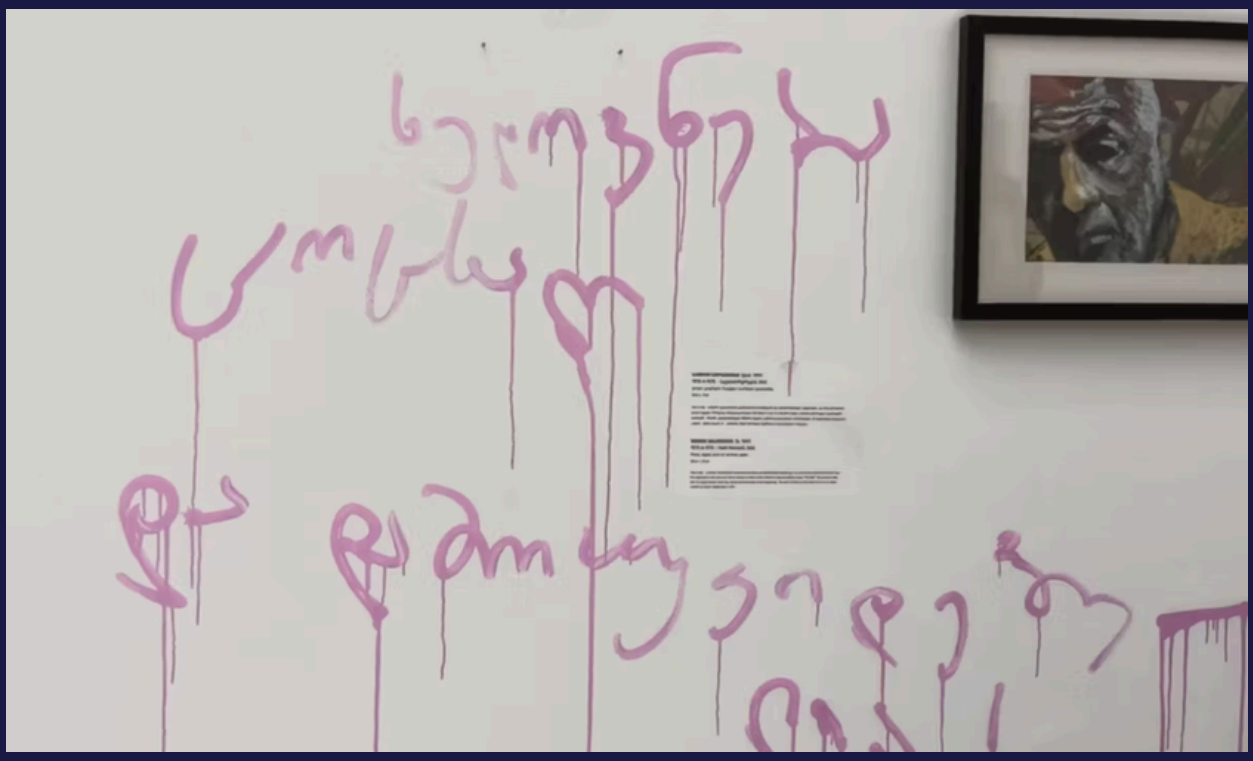
Blank Paper Protests, China 2022

Sandro Sulaberidze, Georgia 2023

On 4 February 2023, Georgian artist Sandro Sulaberidze removed his own painting Self-Portrait by the Mirror from an exhibition in the National Gallery of Georgia in Tbilisi in protest to the censorship he felt his art was facing. He then spray-painted, in Georgian, the words "art is alive and independent" on the gallery's walls. Following this, the graffiti was painted over and Sulaberidze was charged with theft, even though there was no real proof of such a crime. Eight other artists participating in the same exhibition planned to remove their displayed works as well, in solidarity with Sulaberidze. They later protested on Tbilisi's Rustaveli Avenue outside the National Gallery and handed out leaflets. The exhibition got cancelled three weeks before it was supposed to end.

They later protested on Tbilisi's Rustaveli Avenue outside the National Gallery and handed out leaflets. The exhibition got cancelled three weeks before it was supposed to end.

This protest started a wider movement and raised awareness about political censorship and independence of art. Sulaberidze's charges were eventually dropped due to the movement's impact. He still had to pay a fine, but citizens fundraised and helped him pay.



Children's rights

Maestri di Strada, Naples since 2003

The Freedom Theater

Inside Out

The Maestri di Strada ("Street Teachers") project was founded in the Eastern districts of Naples Ponticelli, Barra and San Giovanni a Teduccio in the early 2000s by educational psychologist Cesare Moreno and a group of teachers, psychologists, educators, and artists.

It emerged as a non-violent social and pedagogical response to the problem of school dropout and educational marginalization in the city's most vulnerable and crime-affected neighborhoods, which are marked by high dropout rates (over 20% in some areas), educational poverty, youth unemployment, and micro-criminality, which lead to distrust toward institutions and the formal school system.

ITo tackle these issues, the project is grounded in a pedagogy of relationship and active non-violence, built upon principles of welcoming and listening, horizontal and non-authoritarian educational relationships, community involvement, use of more expressive and emotional language, and integration of art, storytelling and the street as an educational space.

These principles are implemented in individual tutoring sessions as well as artistic and theatrical workshops (murals, street art, community theater) and narrative education (writing, video, podcasting). The interdisciplinary teams of teachers, psychologists, and social workers who are conducting this work also mediate between the beneficiaries' families and their schools.

The project builds stable networks between schools, families, parishes, associations, and local services, embodying the concept of an "educating community". In this framework, non-violence becomes a collective practice of social repair, aimed at rebuilding trust and agency within marginalized communities

Children's rights

Maestri di Strada, Naples since 2003

The Freedom Theater, West Bank, since 2006

Inside Out

The Freedom Theatre was founded in 2006 in the Jenin refugee camp, in the northern West Bank, Palestine. High youth unemployment and limited opportunities for creative expression, restricted movement and social instability under occupation, and limited access to educational and cultural resources are some of the daily struggles that the inhabitants face. The Freedom Theatre seeks to create a safe, empowering space where young people can express themselves, develop skills, and foster community resilience. It is a center for cultural resistance, where art becomes a tool for non-violent empowerment and social change, offering the youth to navigate and challenge adversity through creative expression rather than confrontation.

As well as short-term theatre and performance workshops, the Freedom Theatre also offers a professional, multi-year acting program teaching global theatre methods and preparing students for a career in the arts. Training in photography, filmmaking, and creative writing is also available, enabling youth to share their experiences through multiple media.

Through drama therapy, young people can explore their social and emotional challenges, discovering methods such as the Theatre of the Oppressed, playback theatre, and psychodrama.

Children's rights- The Freedom Theater, West Bank, since 2006

Not least, these programs integrate the whole community and the global public in the work that the Freedom Theatre is doing, through local and international performances. While the Freedom Theatre has achieved remarkable impact, it faces ongoing challenges since funding can be unreliable and unsustainable, the political constraints limit their access to resources, and the demand often exceeds their capacities

Children's rights

Maestri di Strada, Naples since 2003

The Freedom Theater, West Bank, since 2006

Inside Out, USA / Ukraine, 2023

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, over 19,000 Ukrainian children have been abducted or forcibly deported to Russian-occupied territories or Russia itself. These children are often placed in Russian foster care, given Russian citizenship, and subjected to forced "re-education" programs aimed at erasing their Ukrainian identity.

Ukraine and its international partners have adopted several non-violent strategies to address child abduction, such as diplomatic channels, urging countries and international organizations to condemn child abductions and apply pressure on Russia to cease such practices. Initiatives like "Bring Kids Back UA" aim to raise global awareness about the issue and garner support for the safe return of abducted children.

Launched by the Ukrainian government, this program coordinates efforts to identify, locate, and repatriate abducted children, with the help of international organizations, governments, and NGOs.

Organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations have documented cases of abduction and deportation, providing evidence to support legal actions and advocacy efforts. However, ongoing conflict and restricted access to occupied territories hinder efforts to locate and reunite children with their families. And limited resources as well as logistical challenges impede the effectiveness of repatriation and reintegration programs. Nonetheless, this campaign proves to be an indispensable tool to raise awareness internationally and to motivate the most potent actors for their support.

LGBTQIA+ rights

Unit, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, since 2018

Rainbow Mary

Statues in Rainbow Flags

In-Visible & Queer Media film festivals

Unit is a project by Berlin-based NGO n-ost Network for Border Crossing Journalism, which is mainly collecting articles and stories from journalists and activists about queerness in Central Asia, Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Its goal is to establish a long-lasting network between their contributors in order to strengthen queer resistance and awareness of queer issues in those regions.

Besides collaborations and online-meetings, they also organise in-person events in the project regions, including book presentations, film screenings and workshops. Through their publication series History Unit, they explore the oppression of queer people through a historical lens, also by shifting the focus onto Nazi Germany. It is an example of cross-border collaboration in order to tackle issues that queer people face, especially in those regions, raising awareness among the public but also tightening international cooperation and amplifying the testimonies of marginalized queer people.

LGBTQIA+ rights

Unit, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, since 2018

Rainbow Mary, Poland 2019

Statues in Rainbow Flags

In-Visible & Queer Media film festivals

In April 2019, Polish activist Elzbieta Podlesna performed a very subtle but impactful form of protest in her hometown of Polack. She was upset that the local Catholic church had publicly displayed a list of “sins”, which besides avarice, betrayal and such included “LGBT” and “gender”. In response she made little images of the famous “Black Madonna”, a national icon on display in the Jasna Góra Monastery showing Virgin Mary and baby Jesus, with halos painted in rainbow colours.

Podlesna attached these rainbow icons onto public toilet cubicles and waste bins surrounding the church. In fact, she got arrested for her actions, on account of a Polish law that criminalizes “hurting religious feelings”. However, this sparked a larger wave of protests in the capital Warsaw where people were using the rainbow image to show their support for Podlesna and her cause.

This exemplifies how the action of one brave individual can trigger wider action and participation. Especially the creative usage of simple and harmless, yet powerful, images can be an easy way to make a strong and meaningful statement.

In March 2021, the court acquitted Podlesna and dropped the charges against her. The judge ruled that her actions were intended to draw attention to issues of LGBTQ+ people rather than hurt any religious feelings.

LGBTQIA+ rights

Unit, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, since 2018

Rainbow Mary, Poland 2019

In-Visible & Queer Media film festivals, Azerbaijan, 2021

The story of the InVisible Festival is deeply intertwined with that of its host, the Salaam Cinema in Baku. Since the beginning of 2019, young activists had rented the space of a former Molokan temple in Azerbaijan's capital to run an independent cinema there. Shortly after, the owner of the property tried to evict them. However, since the activists believed that there were plans to demolish the temple, they occupied it until the authorities agreed to list the building as a protected historical site. Since then, the cinema has kept existing, showing a diverse programme, including many non-mainstream films.

Already in May 2019, the organisers put on a film festival focusing on queer cinema, which they called InVisible. This was a standalone example of showcasing movies with LGBTQ+ themes in a country where queer minorities are facing harsh discrimination and violence while receiving no legal protection, and it aimed at creating visibility through queer films from around the world. Because of Covid, the festival did not happen again in 2020, but in 2021 an online streaming was organised to continue InVisible. A year later it resumed as an in-person event.

In the following years, the format transformed in various ways, involving the wider region. In 2023, the festival was hosted at Untitled Gallery, an alternative exhibition space in Tbilisi, Georgia. The next year it mutated into a collaborative platform for all kinds of queer and feminist art by artists around the Caucasus region, involving different events throughout the year. Again, it involved Salaam Cinema and Untitled Gallery, as well as the queer activist organisation Pink Armenia to complete the regional cooperation. In 2025, the festival returned to its original place in Baku, as a symposium, however, which included panel discussions and a dance event. InVisible is an example of an innovative and flexible platform, focusing on highlighting a marginalised group through creativity and art, as well as cross-border collaboration and sharing of knowledge and inspiration, in a region in which LGBTQ+ people face some of the harshest conditions in Europe and where tensions between nations prevail.

Reconciliation after War

Town Twinnings, Germany, since 1950s

Comfort Women

Saturday Mother

In Germany, the practice of town twinning has become one of the most symbolic expressions of peace and friendship between nations in the postwar era. It emerged after World War II as a way to rebuild trust and foster understanding among European countries that had once been divided by conflict. The town twinning movement gained momentum in Germany during the 1950s, beginning primarily with partnerships between German cities and towns in the United Kingdom and France. Friendships formed between German and French cities, in particular, became powerful symbols of postwar reconciliation and cooperation.

Over time, these partnerships evolved from being merely symbolic gestures into active and meaningful collaborations. Many German towns and cities now engage with their twin cities through student exchanges, cultural festivals, art projects, and environmental initiatives. Through these exchanges, people from different countries have had the chance to learn about each other's cultures, break down prejudices, and develop shared values.

Today, there are more than five thousand town twinning partnerships across Germany. The countries most commonly connected through these relationships include France, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Türkiye. The partnerships between German and Turkish cities have played a significant role in strengthening cultural and historical ties between the two nations. Examples include Berlin's partnership with Istanbul, Cologne's with Beşiktaş, and Bremen's with İzmir. In Germany, town twinning is not merely a municipal agreement — it is a living expression of peace, solidarity, and the spirit of European unity.

Reconciliation after War

Town Twinnings, Germany, since 1950s

Comfort Women, South Korea, 1992

Saturday Mother

The protests related to the “comfort women” issue have become a symbol of a long-standing struggle for justice in South Korea. These demonstrations began in January 1992, in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. At that time, some Korean women who had been forced to work in military brothels by the Japanese army during the Second World War began to speak publicly about their experiences for the first time.

Their testimonies deeply moved society, prompting civil society organizations and human rights activists to come together to demand an apology and compensation from the Japanese government. Since that day, people have been gathering in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul every Wednesday to hold a silent protest. Known as the Wednesday Demonstrations, these gatherings are now considered one of the longest-running continuous protest movements in the world. Among the participants are surviving women, students, activists, and supporters.
Each week, they reaffirm their calls for justice — sometimes through banners, sometimes through songs, and sometimes in solemn silence.

At the protest site stands the “Statue of Peace”, a sculpture depicting a young Korean girl sitting barefoot on a chair. The empty chair beside her symbolizes those who have passed away and the justice that has yet to be achieved. The calm yet determined expression on her face reflects the spirit of the movement — a quiet but persistent pursuit of justice. These demonstrations have grown beyond a diplomatic dispute between Japan and South Korea, becoming a global human rights movement defending the dignity of women who were subjected to sexual slavery during wartime. Today, similar statues are erected and solidarity events are held in cities around the world. The Wednesday Demonstrations in Seoul remain at the heart of this enduring call for justice and remembrance.

Reconciliation after War

Town Twinnings, Germany, since 1950s

Comfort Women, South Korea, 1992

Saturday Mother, Türkiye, since 1995

On May 27, 1995, a group of mothers and human rights advocates gathered at Galatasaray Square in Istanbul. Their purpose was to uncover the fate of those who were forcibly disappeared while in custody, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s when the Turkish government declared a state of emergency in certain regions, mainly to crack down on Kurdish independence movements. This gave the authorities the possibility to detain people without trial and what followed was a wave of forced disappearances. Most victims have been missing until today. That gathering in Istanbul in 1995 turned into a weekly protest, dubbed Saturday Mothers, inspired by Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Every Saturday at 12:00 p.m., they hold a silent vigil at Galatasaray Square.

These peaceful demonstrations continued regularly for years, becoming a powerful form of civil resistance. In 1999, due to increasing police pressure, the gatherings were suspended until they finally resumed ten years later.

During the 700th week of protest in 2018, the police intervened again and detained several participants. Following that, the group was not allowed to gather in the square for a long period. However, in 2023, the Constitutional Court of Türkiye ruled that the ban on their gatherings constituted a violation of their rights, reaffirming the legitimacy of their peaceful protest. Today, the Saturday Mothers are recognized as one of the most powerful symbols of human rights, justice, and collective memory in Türkiye. Their quiet perseverance continues to serve as a voice for countless families still searching for truth and justice.

Women's Rights

Day without women, Mexico, 2020

Fearless Song

Dolle Mina

On March 9, 2020, the feminist collective Brujas del Mar spearheaded an unprecedented protest in Mexico City and beyond, in response to a national crisis of gender-based violence and femicides. Following large-scale International Women's Day marches on March 8, the movement launched "Un Día Sin Nosotras" ("A Day Without Us"), a 24-hour nationwide women's strike. On this day, women were encouraged to withdraw from all spheres of public life, work, school, shopping, and social media to make their absence visible and felt, both economically and socially. The protest's slogan, "El nueve ninguna se mueve" ("On the 9th, nobody moves"), captured the essence of the strike's goal: to reveal the extent of women's indispensable contributions.

The strike emerged in response to growing outrage over gender violence, especially after two particularly gruesome femicide cases that shocked the country in early 2020. Brujas del Mar utilized social media as a mobilization tool, rapidly turning a grassroots initiative into a national movement. The impact was profound: government offices, schools, and businesses across Mexico saw significantly reduced attendance, with some organizations supporting the protest by offering paid leave to female employees, while others resisted, even threatening penalties. The protest marked a historic moment in Mexican feminism, spotlighting both the power of collective action and the deep societal fractures regarding gender justice.

Women's Rights

Day without women, Mexico, 2020

Fearless Song, Mexico, 2020

Dolle Mina

In response to the ongoing epidemic of femicides in Mexico, In 2020, Mexican singer-songwriter and activist Vivir Quintana wrote “Canción sin miedo” ("Song Without Fear"). Commissioned by Chilean artist Mon Laferte for an International Women’s Day performance at the Zócalo in Mexico City, the song was born out of grief, anger, and frustration. Quintana composed it as a tribute to the mothers of murdered daughters and as a direct protest against the Mexican state's failure to prevent gender-based violence. With powerful lyrics and emotional resonance, it quickly evolved into a unifying anthem, performed at feminist marches, demonstrations, and public events, and widely shared on social media as a rallying cry against femicide.

The song's message struck a national and global chord, particularly during the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, under whose term femicide and child femicide rates rose further. However, Quintana emphasizes that the problem is systemic and long-standing, ignored by successive governments. "Canción sin miedo" has since become a vital tool in the fight for justice, offering women a way to express mourning, rage, and solidarity. Vivir Quintana has repeatedly stated that the song belongs to everyone, as a collective voice of resistance and remembrance

Spanish
Original lyrics

Canción sin miedo

Que tiemble el Estado, los cielos, las calles
Que teman los jueces y los judiciales
Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma
Nos sembraron miedo, nos crecieron alas

A cada minuto de cada semana
Nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas
Destrozan sus cuerpos, las desaparecen
No olviden sus nombres, por favor, señor presidente

or todas las compas marchando en Reforma
Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora
Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas
Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana

Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia
Gritamos por cada desaparecida
Que retumbe fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas!
¡Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida!

Yo todo lo incendio, yo todo lo rompo
Si un día algún fulano te apaga los ojos
Ya nada me calla, ya todo me sobra
Si tocan a una, respondemos todas

Soy Claudia, soy Esther y soy Teresa
Soy Ingrid, soy Fabiola y soy Valeria
Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza
Soy la madre que ahora llora por sus muertas Y
soy esta que te hará pagar las cuentas
¡Justicia! ¡Justicia! ¡Justicia!

Por todas las compas marchando en Reforma
Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora
Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas
Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana

Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia
Gritamos por cada desaparecida
Que retumbe fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas!
¡Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida!
¡Que caiga con fuerza el feminici

Y retiemblen sus centros la tierra
Al sororo rugir del amor
Y retiemblen sus centros la tierra
Al sonoro rugir del amor

Women's Rights

Day without women, Mexico, 2020

Fearless Song, Mexico, 2020

Dolle Mina, The Netherlands, 1969 and 2025

In 2025, the historic Dutch feminist group Dolle Mina reemerged to confront a troubling resurgence of femicide and gender-based violence in the Netherlands. Reviving their legacy of nonviolent protest, they recreated a powerful act from their past, burning a corset at the statue of Wilhelmina Drucker in Amsterdam. This symbolic gesture, representing liberation from societal constraints, was carried out by a multigenerational coalition of original members and new activists, signaling a united stand for women's rights in the face of persistent injustices. Dolle Mina first emerged in 1969, inspired by global feminist movements and driven by the urgent need to address gender inequality in the Netherlands. Their activism focused on issues like reproductive freedom, bodily autonomy, and the invisibility of women in public life. Their slogan "Baas in eigen buik" ("Boss of my own belly") became a national rallying cry for women's self-determination.

DRONI

BAAS IN
DE VROUW !!!
VROUW BE
ABORTU EAM
REGISTR EPLICH

Decades later, the resurgence of femicide served as a stark reminder that the struggle for women's safety and dignity remains far from over, prompting the group's powerful return to the public sphere. The revival of Dolle Mina has had both symbolic and societal impact. By bridging generations of feminist activism, they have reignited public discourse around systemic gender violence, reframing femicide not as isolated crimes but as part of a broader pattern requiring urgent political recognition and structural change. Their presence not only honors their historic legacy but also amplifies a new wave of voices demanding protection, justice, and equality for all women