

# Reaching Out

FÒS FEMINISTA

International Alliance  
for Sexual and Reproductive  
Health, Rights, and Justice



## Fòs Feminista Alliance Leading the Way to Sexual and Reproductive Health in Argentina

**F**òs Feminista has a holistic approach to protecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls. Argentina is an example of the interconnected strategies we carry out to effectively address the biggest barriers to access, tailored to the needs of a particular country context. Sometimes we're advocating to reshape laws that restrict reproductive rights. Sometimes we're opening community clinics to expand access to counselors and health care providers. Other times we may even manufacture our own contraceptives and medication to address supply chain issues faced by partners. And in places like Argentina, we're doing all these things, and more.

Thanks to the mobilization of thousands of women, including a coalition of organizations supported by Fòs Feminista, the Green Wave movement in Argentina has been incredibly successful. Collective demands for legislative reform were answered in 2020 when abortion was finally decriminalized.

But, in a country where abortion was historically illegal and stigmatized, there was a huge gap between legalization and actual access to care and medication. Fòs Feminista and our partners are playing a key role in the implementation of the new laws. We have trained medical and counseling professionals, opened and staffed health clinics, and created access to abortion medication.

One critical challenge was that many drugs useful for medical abortions were not yet legally available. Similar to the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, medications in Argentina cannot be distributed to the public without the approval of an oversight board.

That's when INNOVA stepped in. INNOVA, a non-profit company that Fòs Feminista co-owns, works to get medications to people faster. We work through the

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## From the Desk of Giselle



For nearly 70 years as International Planned Parenthood Western Hemisphere Region, our core mission has been to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health care. Now, as Fòs Feminista, we are deepening our impact on

this core mission by prioritizing those who face the biggest barriers to access—such as women living in hard-to-reach communities, or young people seeking contraception and information.

Itzel, a young Indigenous Mayan-Kiche woman, is a great example of how our alliance is providing overlooked girls and women with the full range of services and education they need to thrive. Itzel lives in the Guatemalan province of Quetzaltenango and is a corn and bean farmer. By the time she was 20, she already had two children. Her work is laborious and time-consuming, and what little time she has left in a day, she dedicates to raising her children. Itzel is clear—she does not have the time or energy to care for another child right now. She wants contraceptives, but they aren't available in her rural town. She'd have to travel all the way to the capital. **That's far too expensive for Itzel.**

Luckily, she heard about APROFAM, one of Fòs Feminista's longest-standing partners. Established in 1964, APROFAM provides comprehensive health services to the people of Guatemala. Their mobile health unit includes doctors and nurses who travel to remote areas providing contraceptive methods and other sexual and reproductive health care. And their nearly 3,000 trained volunteers provide person-to-person care and contraceptive counseling, particularly in Indigenous communities.

APROFAM connected Itzel with a reproductive health counselor who shares her Kiche language. They meet and discuss what solutions work best for her. Because of APROFAM, Itzel is able to access contraceptives at an affordable price.

There are thousands more people like Itzel who struggle to access reproductive health information and services. Thanks to generous donations from supporters like you, Fòs Feminista, along with our Alliances partners, is working to make sure that girls and women everywhere have the right and ability to access high-quality sexual and reproductive health care.

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## Using Technology to Expand Sexuality Education in Nigeria

For centuries, draconian laws have cruelly regulated sexual and reproductive health. As these threats persist and grow, demand for Fòs Feminista's skilled and experienced advocacy and comprehensive services is rising. With our strong foundation in Latin America and the Caribbean, we are expanding our Alliance to connect clinicians and changemakers across the globe.

Late last year, Nigeria's Minister of Education directed the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council to expunge all sexuality education content from Nigeria's school curriculum. Fifty-three organizations, including our partner Education as a Vaccine (EVA), joined together to adamantly oppose this move. Because of their tireless efforts, the attempt to block young people from learning about their bodies was stopped.

But young people in Nigeria still have little access to the sexual and reproductive health information





they need. With support from Fòs Feminista, EVA is working to change that with innovations in technology.

Cynthia Terse, a 16-year-old girl from the Ikpanyongo community in Nigeria, didn't understand the changes her body was experiencing. More importantly, she didn't have a trusted adult to turn to. Due to harmful social stigma, she was afraid and embarrassed to talk about it. Thankfully, she heard about EVA and reached out to speak with one of their community volunteers. That volunteer introduced Cynthia to the DIVA app, which educates girls and young women about their menstrual health in

a youth-friendly way. The timing was perfect because things had been getting more serious with her boyfriend, and Cynthia was looking for options to protect herself from pregnancy.

She attended local EVA meetings and was able to discuss her contraceptive options with a professional. More importantly, Cynthia was able to receive the support and counseling she needed to empower her about her body and her choices, allowing her to make informed decisions about her future. The DIVA app is an example of the extraordinary progress we are making with the help of technology. EVA has also

developed other digital tools, including MyQ services, which provide health information and referrals, and Frisky, which allows users to connect to trained counselors.

Advancements in technology are enabling our Fòs Feminista partners to make significant global impact. With these innovative tools, local community educators, advocates, and health care providers are able to reach thousands more people in more and more places—giving us a real chance to advance sexual and reproductive healthcare for future generations.

## Fòs Feminista Alliance *continued from page 1*

regulatory process, negotiate with contractors for low-cost contraceptives, and in some cases even manufacture drugs. Within a year, INNOVA donated more than 25,000 combination packages of misoprostol and mifepristone (combipacks)—proven to be safe and widely used around the world to terminate pregnancies.

Thanks to our joint efforts with our Argentinian partners, we recently won a waiver by the government to distribute combipacks throughout the public health system. Our efforts led the Argentinian equivalent of the FDA to officially approve mifepristone, allowing for its widespread distribution and use for safe abortion care throughout the country. We will be working with one of our local partners, Casa FUSA, to help distribute the medication to those who need it. Later this year, INNOVA will donate another 17,000 combipacks, increasing the availability of safe



and effective medical abortions for those that need them.

Unfortunately, even as we make progress in one country, rights to health care are being rolled back in many other places—including here in the United States! With your support, Fòs Feminista will continue to work closely with local community partners to establish and protect reproductive rights and build access to the safe, quality care everyone deserves.

## What is INNOVA?

Far too often, we find that people cannot afford safe, quality reproductive health products. Along with four of our partner organizations, we created a solution—INNOVA Health Supplies.

INNOVA is dedicated to the distribution of contraceptive products to Latin America and the Caribbean and beyond, including contraceptives, pregnancy tests, menstrual cups, and pregnancy termination supplies. When necessary, we even manufacture new products ourselves.

We accomplish this by working with government regulatory agencies to secure medication approvals, negotiating with pharmaceutical companies for more affordable prices, and distributing low-cost, high-quality products to governments and Alliance partners in 23 countries.

## A Word From Pio Ivan Gomez, Senior Medical Advisor of Fòs Feminista

During my post-graduate training in Colombia in the 1980's, I worked in a hospital ward that cared for women recovering from unsafe abortions. At the time, abortion was a crime in the country, and women often attempted to end pregnancies using sticks and hooks—some even visited unqualified providers.

So many were significantly injured, and every day, at least one died.

I wanted to understand why they took this risk. After speaking with many of our patients, I found that the underlying cause was the social taboos around sex and sexuality.



When abortion is illegal, women die. Yet, there are still countries that outlaw this very safe medical procedure.

Governments must come to understand that it is their responsibility to guarantee citizens safe access to quality abortion care as well as contraception, including emergency contraception. Every day, Fòs Feminista is demanding that they do.

Our greatest concern right now is the onslaught of very

well-organized anti-choice groups. We must continue to fight to guarantee sexual and reproductive rights at the local, regional, and global levels by organizing and uniting the efforts of all pro-rights organizations. I'm proud to work with Fòs Feminista as a leader in this fight.

*Dr. Pio Ivan Gomez is an OB-GYN and epidemiologist based in Bogota. He is a professor and director of the sexual and reproductive health research group at the National University of Colombia and coordinates the sexual and reproductive rights committee of the Latin American Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology (FLASOG).*

## Inching Closer to Reproductive Rights in Honduras

Until just recently, Honduras was the only Latin American country with a complete ban on emergency contraception. But now, after a decades-long feminist movement supported by Fòs Feminista, the emergency contraception ban has finally been abolished! On International Women's Day this year, Honduras's first female president, President Xiomara Castro, signed an executive order that decriminalized emergency contraception.



For sixty years, our partner ASHONPLAFA has been one of the leading providers of family planning services in Honduras, including contraception. Another Alliance partner, Somos Muchas, provides sexual and reproductive health education to small communities that otherwise would have little access to this information.

The path to reform in Honduras may be challenging, but the steadfast, united efforts of our Alliance are making great progress!

*Do you have questions or input to share with us? We want to hear from you! Send an email to [lalexander@fosfeminista.org](mailto:lalexander@fosfeminista.org) or call Lloyd Alexander at 212-214-0278 and let us know how we're doing.*

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