

Do not tolerate so immensely well the injustice that does not affect yourself!
[Du må ikke tåle så inderlig vel den urett som ikke rammer dig selv! Arnulf Øverland, 1937]

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation organises and partially funds legal advice to women at risk of becoming prisoners of conscience anywhere in the world and we support the local lawyer who defends the woman.

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation supports women who face legal proceedings, are detained, arrested, charged or imprisoned because of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status, provided that they have neither used nor advocated illicit violence.

- We help to find the right lawyer for women at risk of becoming prisoners of conscience when they are detained, arrested, charged, and facing legal proceedings.
- We assist the lawyer in establishing a legal strategy and the best defence in each individual case.
- We provide local lawyers with information about international law and similar cases in other jurisdictions.
- We organise a network of and for lawyers that defend female prisoners of conscience.
- We partially finance legal costs for the defence.
- We ensure and organise international observation of the hearing against potential female prisoners of conscience.
- We support women prisoners of conscience during their prison sentence.
- We help women who are prisoners of conscience to seek asylum in safe countries.
- We work with NGOs and international organisations, and provide information about female prisoners of conscience and their conditions in prison.
- We endeavour to always improve women's human rights and public recognition by spreading information about breaches of human rights affecting women, conditions in prisons for women, etc. We take initiatives in order to create and support female role models.

Governing principles for the Vígdís Freedom Foundation

1. The UN Human Rights declaration

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation believes that every person, irrespective of where they are born, live or temporarily stay has the rights as set out in the UN Human Rights declaration; and that the right to rely on this declaration is irrespective of whether or not the declaration has been signed and ratified by the country where a prisoner of conscience is detained.

2. Definition of “prisoners of conscience”

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation believes that no person should be arrested, detained or imprisoned because of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status provided *that they have neither used nor advocated illicit violence.*

3. Professional legal advice in order to achieve a fair trial

Article 10 in the UN Human Rights declaration states that:

“Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.”

There are many reasons why an accused woman could be incapable of defending herself, including lack of knowledge of law, legal procedures or analysis of facts. The Vígdís Freedom Foundation believes that a necessary condition for achieving a “*fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal*” is the right to be represented by legal counsel of own choice.

The right to legal counsel means that a defendant has the right to be represented and assisted during trial by a legal professional. The right to counsel is not explicitly included in the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Not all countries recognize the right to counsel nor is the professional proactivity and quality of government appointed counsel always sufficient. If the defendant cannot afford a lawyer and the government does not pay the defendant's legal expenses there may be situations where a single individual must protect her rights against what can be a formidable foe. In these situations the Vígdís Freedom Foundation organises legal advice to women who - if convicted – will be “prisoners of conscience”.

Most prisoners of conscience are charged with sham criminal offences. In order to provide good legal assistance the legal counsel should be retained as early as possible, and at least when accusations are made against the woman.

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation wants to support the defence lawyer and to reduce the personal and financial risks that a lawyer may face in taking on what may be a contentious legal case which may also challenge existing political power structures.

If a “prisoner of conscience” is convicted, the Vígdís Freedom Foundation will continue to assist and monitor that there be “*no cruel and unusual punishment*” (i.e. sexual harassment, rape, etc. in prison) and to pursue the release of the prisoner through legal processes and other appropriate means.

4. The Vígdís Freedom Foundation supports only women prisoners of conscience

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation is founded by Anne Christine Kroepelien who is a lawyer and a politician, and who believes that women must “*stand together and support each other*”.

For centuries women world-wide have been suppressed by power structures in society that are established by men. In Norway, women were given the right to vote only a little more than 100 years ago. In some jurisdictions of the world, women are treated as second-rate citizens; they have inferior rights (i.e. not allowed to drive cars, access university, etc.) compared to men, and inherit less from their parents than their brothers. Women are often physically weaker and more vulnerable than men, and are more often than men subject to violence during their lifespan.

The Vígdís Freedom Foundation believes that it is in the interest of society to recognise that women have the same human and political rights as men.

5. Part-payment for legal defence of female prisoner of conscience

Normally, the Vígdís Freedom Foundation can pay up to 50 % of legal costs.

The name Vígdís Freedom Foundation and its location

The Nordic women are among the most liberated, free and privileged women in the world. As such they have a “special” obligation to help women who fight with peaceful means to obtain the same civil and political rights in other countries.

The name Vígdís is composed of two elements; *vig* and *dis*. The name *dis* is a female protective spirit and “*vig* = fight/war. *Vigdís* in the Norse mythology was known as a female spirit (valkyrie) that protected those who fight. The Vígdís Freedom Foundation uses the old Norse spelling the name.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir is the protector of the Vígdís Freedom Foundation. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir is Iceland and the world’s first female democratically elected president, and a role model for women who fight for human rights and public recognition anywhere in the world. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir’s ideas and achievements as president of Iceland has also been an inspiration to the name of the Vígdís Freedom Foundation.

The Foundation is located in Oslo, Norway, where a secretariat will be established and board meetings are held.