

## Call for 'Arctivists'

### Art + Activism Against Repression During the Covid-19 Crisis

#### Introduction

The Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), through a grant from the Open Society Foundations, has set up a fund – Arctivists – to support activists and artists across the world responding to the outbreak of Covid-19 and its implications for human rights defenders, activism, and shrinking civic and political space. Paired activists and artists are able to apply for up to £3,000; it is envisaged that most grants will be for between £1,000 and £2,000.

#### Background

The outbreak of Covid-19 has put a strain on governments around the world and is adversely affecting particularly vulnerable communities, activists and human rights defenders, including by further shrinking existing civic and political spaces. For example, in response to the Covid-19 emergency, the Hungarian Parliament recently granted PM Viktor Orban the power to rule by decree, in a country that has already witnessed considerable restrictions on democratic spaces; in Colombia, shifting governmental priorities in the wake of the Covid-19 emergency have left rural and indigenous communities unprotected, thus facilitating the targeting of their leaders by illegal armed groups; Chinese activists who denounced the government's approach to tackling the pandemic have been incarcerated for subversion; Algerian civil society organisations have denounced a government clampdown on anti-regime protesters taking place while the world is distracted by the pandemic. These are only some of the challenges that have resulted from the emergency framework adopted by several governments in response to the spread of Covid-19.

At the same time, the emergency has bred new responses, and forms of both local and global solidarity, that either build on existing, positive official or unofficial responses to the virus or compensate for a lack thereof. For example, media activists in Brazil, Perú, South Sudan and elsewhere are sharing public health information in their communities, in the form of comics, videos or cartoons; civil society organisations across Latin America are encouraging human rights workers to participate in therapeutic sessions where they can share their feelings through art, whether in the form of artefacts, stories or music.

Against this backdrop, and the obstacles to accessing reliable information regarding how responses to the virus are affecting civil society, synergies between activists and artists are more important than ever. For example, art in all its forms amplifies activism and facilitates conveyance of key messages and information, which may compensate for the lack or manipulation of official narratives. Where civic spaces have shrunk, art can provide an alternative venue for activists to broaden their movements and support their work despite curtailed democratic spaces. The imaginative spaces that art offers can bypass traditional barriers that governments may erect in an attempt to stymie civil society activism, for example, by conveying ambiguous or subtle messages. We recognise that the many activists are artists, and vice-versa – as such we will be flexible in how we apply these categories.

## Objectives

CAHR recognises that collaborative endeavours between activists and artists have the potential to provide innovative responses to the current Covid-19 emergency, whether in a reactive, therapeutic or imaginative form. We seek applications from activists and artists to address one or more of the following three objectives:

- 1) Document, monitor and analyse events in real time.
- 2) Reflect on wellbeing, both your own and that of your communities/ organisations.
- 3) Go beyond a reactive response to imagine new, alternative futures. This future-oriented work could assess how crisis and disruption open up new possibilities for creativity and innovation, as well as for regressive and repressive measures, and/or build on positive responses to the virus itself (local and global forms of solidarity).

## Expected outputs

Activists could write a diary, make a weekly podcast, write a blog, etc. Artists could work in their chosen media, to respond to the activist's contribution and/or to wider developments in their country/region. We are open to innovative suggestions on the nature of the collaboration between activists and artists.

## Project proposals

Activists and artists should apply by presenting a single collaborative project proposal that does **not exceed two pages** in length and includes the following:

- 1) A brief profile/bio of the artist(s) and activist(s) involved.
- 2) A brief description of the project/programme of work, highlighting in particular how it responds to the Covid-19 emergency and its links to activism and civic/political space; which of the 3 objectives set out above it responds to; any safety, security and ethical concerns, and how these will be addressed; whether it builds on existing initiatives or is a new collaboration, and through which media/methodologies it will be carried out.
- 3) The main beneficiaries and audiences of the project/programme of work and why the methodology/medium is appropriate for the local context.
- 4) Details of additional sources of funding or contributions.
- 5) The envisioned output(s) of the project/programme of work, for both the activist(s) and artist(s).
- 6) The amount of funding you are applying for, and a brief justification for the specific amount requested in the form of a basic budget and justification of resources (subsistence/salary costs can be included). It is envisaged that most grants will be for between £1,000 and £2,000. Additional justification will be required for larger awards, up to £3,000, for example, that the application involves groups of activists and/or artists.
- 7) One appendix featuring examples of artistic work can be included in the application. The appendix can be additional to the 2-page application.

While applications need to be in English, activist and artist outputs which are in part or completely in local languages are welcomed.

### **Criteria for assessment**

- 1) Clear description of the link between Covid-19, and responses to the virus, on the one hand, and threats to activism and civic/political space on the other, affecting either the artists/activists making the application and/or their country.
- 2) Evidence of a strong working relationship between the artist(s) and activist(s).
- 3) Feasibility and relevance of the project in challenging and difficult circumstances (including consideration of safety, security and ethics).
- 4) Evidence of innovation and creativity – notwithstanding point 3) above, we are willing to take risks with this fund to support work that is provocative and challenging.

### **Deliverables**

The activist(s) and artist(s) are expected to provide a timeline for outputs in their application, between now and 31 December 2020. The artist(s) and activist(s) are also expected to submit a short joint report (2 pages) detailing the activities undertaken as well as all expenses incurred, by 31 January 2021. All inquiries and submissions should be directed to Piergiuseppe Parisi ([piergiuseppe.parisi@york.ac.uk](mailto:piergiuseppe.parisi@york.ac.uk)) and Pippa Cooper ([pippa.cooper@york.ac.uk](mailto:pippa.cooper@york.ac.uk)).

### **Timeline**

There is no fixed deadline for proposals – applications will be considered on a rolling basis over the coming months. We will endeavour to get back to applicants within 2 weeks. Successful proposals will be selected by a panel that will include CAHR staff and associates from a variety of backgrounds.

### **Copyright**

Copyright for the outputs remains the sole and exclusive property of the artist and the activist. Terms of reference/contracts will provide CAHR with the limited right to reproduce, publicly display, distribute and otherwise use the expected outputs in relation to CAHR's work, and as an example of work commissioned through the Open Society Foundations' grant. Copyright will be addressed in terms of reference/contracts developed with successful applicants.

### **Confidentiality and ethics**

CAHR will discuss anonymity, confidentiality and other ethical issues with artists and activists as they arise in relation to specific projects.