

Nevertheless, She Persisted

She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, the women below have contributed their efforts to major issues around the world, from politics to social issues to human rights. The role of women has changed dramatically in the last seventy years, thanks to the pioneering efforts of these women, and thousands like them who refuse to accept things as they are.

Golda Meir



Golda Meir was the Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974, the first woman to serve at a time when women did not usually shape public policy. She was born on May 3, 1898, in Kiev, Ukraine. In 1906, her family immigrated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At fourteen, Golda had to fight her parents to go to high school; she wanted to be a teacher, they wanted her to find a husband. In 1916, she graduated from high school and registered at the Milwaukee Normal School to become a teacher. Golda married Morris Myerson in December 1917; the couple made plans to immigrate to Palestine after Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. In Jerusalem, Golda tried to be a traditional wife and mother but longed for meaningful work. In 1928, she was offered the job of secretary for the Women Workers Council in Tel Aviv. Moving quickly up the ranks, she became a member of the Executive Committee of the *Histadrut*, which manages the cooperative farms (*kibbutz*) in Israel, and head of its political department in 1936. During World War II, she held several key posts in the World Zionist Organization and in the Jewish Agency, the highest Jewish authority in British-mandated Palestine.

On May 14, 1948, Golda Meir was a signatory of Israel's independence declaration and afforded respect as a founding member of Israel for the rest of her life. Meir personally crossed into Jordan for secret meetings with King Abdullah to persuade him to stay out of Israel's war against the Palestinian Arabs. She was elected to the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament) in 1949 and appointed by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to be the Minister of Labor, in charge of finding jobs and housing for the nearly 700,000 immigrants who streamed into the country after the end of World War II. In 1956, Ben-Gurion made her Foreign Minister, the second-highest position in the government- Meir was the only female foreign minister in the world at that time. In 1966, she retired for a short time while undergoing treatment for cancer, though she was asked many times to return to the public arena. Meir was persuaded to become secretary of the Labor Party in 1967, but after the sudden death of the prime minister, was prevailed upon to succeed him. During her premiership, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on October 6, 1973, which led to the Yom Kippur War. Though Israeli forces were able to regain the offensive, this was a disastrous political setback for the Labor Party, and Golda Meir resigned on June 4, 1974.



Before her death on December 8, 1978, Golda Meir evolved into an elder statesman and beloved public citizen. As a politician, Meir was consistent, strong in her resolve, and undisturbed by self-doubts. Presidents and kings found her willfulness charming, while her plain-spoken personality endeared her to ordinary people around the world. Though she exhibited stereotypically feminine attributes- cooking during political meetings, her warmth and emotionality, her matronly appearance- those who knew her never fail to mention her toughness.

The Mirabál Sisters- *Las Mariposas*



The Mirabál Sisters followed their convictions with bravery and selflessness to lead resistance movements against the regime of Rafael Trujillo, the oppressive military dictator of the Dominican Republic. Born into a family of landowners, the four Mirabál sisters- Patria, Minerva, María Teresa, and Dedé - developed an awareness of the suffering that resulted in their country under Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship. For more than three decades, Trujillo held on to power through terror, intimidation and corruption. One

of the Mirabál sisters, Minerva, was jailed and banned from continuing her law studies for refusing his sexual advances. Eventually, Minerva returned to her law studies and graduated from the University of Santo Domingo, but was banned from actually practicing law.

The successful Cuban revolution and the rise of Fidel Castro played a major role in radicalizing many Dominicans, including the Mirabál sisters. Many Latin Americans could detect a major step forward in the struggle for social justice in a part of the world where millions had long been denied the basic elements of a decent life. As the desire for change began to stir in the Dominican Republic in 1959, the response of the Trujillo dictatorship was swift and brutal. Hundreds were imprisoned, many were tortured, and some simply disappeared, never to be seen again. Minerva became involved in various political resistance movements against Trujillo, and she was arrested and harassed on multiple occasions on orders given by Trujillo himself. In 1959, Minerva and her sisters Patria and María Teresa formed the underground *Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio* (MR14J), named a Trujillo-authorized massacre Patria had witnessed while on a church retreat. Known by the code name of *Mariposa* (butterfly), the sisters and their husbands had become thoroughly enmeshed in the anti-Trujillo resistance, and soon became known for their activities to agents of Trujillo's secret police. By the end of 1960, Trujillo had lost patience with the revolutionary movement and particularly with the Mirabál sisters. Incensed by their fearless refusal to cease their oppositional activities, Trujillo gave orders to kill the sisters. While on their way to visit their husbands in prison on November 25, 1960, the sisters were arrested and beaten to death. To hide the nature of the crime, their bodies (and that of their driver, Rufino de la Cruz) were placed back in their jeep, which was pushed over a high cliff and staged as an accident. When the deaths were reported in the press, few readers at home or abroad were fooled by the story of an "automobile accident" that took the lives of Las Mariposas.

On the evening of May 30, 1961, Trujillo was assassinated in a machine-gun attack on his limousine. With the end of the Trujillo dictatorship, Dominicans expected their country to move easily toward democracy; however, unrest, instability, poverty, and social inequality continued to plague the nation into the next decades. The surviving Mirabál sister, Dedé, raised her sisters' children, published books about their sacrifice, and opened a museum to keep their memory alive. She devoted her life to preserving her sisters' legacies until her death in 2014. Throughout Latin America, the Mirabál sisters became feminist icons, with the anniversary of their deaths being commemorated annually as the International Day of Non-Violence against Women. In the Dominican Republic, the next generation of Mirabáls has stepped on the public stage of that hopeful nation. Patria's son, Nelson González Mirabál, became chief aide to the nation's vice president, Jaime David Fernández Mirabál, Dedé's son. Minou Tavárez Mirabál, who was only four years old when her mother Minerva was killed, became the deputy foreign minister of the Dominican Republic.



Indira Gandhi



Indira Gandhi was destined for politics. First appointed prime minister in 1966, she garnered widespread public support for agricultural improvements that led to India's self-sufficiency in food production as well as for her success in the Pakistan war, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Born on November 19, 1917, in Allahabad, India, Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi was the only child of Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru, who served as the first Prime Minister of India when the state was created in 1947. As a member of the Indian National Congress, her father was a protégé of Mahatma Gandhi, and dedicated himself to India's fight for independence. After her mother passed away from tuberculosis in 1936, Indira attended Swiss boarding schools, then studied history at Somerville College, Oxford, England.

In March 1942, Indira married Feroze Gandhi, a Parsi lawyer (unrelated to Mahatma Gandhi), and the couple had two sons: Rajiv and Sanjay. During her father's premiership, Gandhi served as his unofficial hostess, welcoming diplomats and world leaders at home and traveling with her father throughout India and abroad. She was elected to the Congress Party in 1955 and, four years later, was named its president. Upon Nehru's death in 1964, Indira took on the role of Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Two years later, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri suddenly died and Indira was appointed by Congress Party leaders to be prime minister. Within a few years Gandhi gained enormous popularity for introducing successful programs that transformed India agrarian sector into a self-sufficient producer. Agriculture shifted to modern methods, adopting the use of High Yielding Variety seeds, pesticides and fertilizers to protect the crops. As a result of this modern and scientific approach, India created a food surplus and no longer relied on foreign aid to feed itself. India also nationalized 14 private banks, changing the country's banking system, saving India's economy, and granting equitable access to rural areas. In 1971, she threw her support behind the Bengali movement to separate East and West Pakistan, providing refuge for the ten million Pakistani civilians who fled to India in order to escape the Pakistan army, committing troops to the fight and supplying armaments. India's decisive victory over Pakistan in December led to the creation of Bangladesh.



Following the 1972 national elections, Gandhi was accused of misconduct by her political opponent and convicted of electoral fraud in 1975. Instead of resigning, she responded by declaring a state of emergency on June 25; citizens' civil liberties were suspended, the press was acutely censored, and the majority of her opposition was detained without trial. Gandhi finally eased the emergency restrictions and called for the next general election in March 1977. The people overwhelmingly voted Gandhi out of office. Within the next few years, democracy was restored, but the current party power had little success in resolving the nation's severe poverty crisis. In 1980, Gandhi campaigned under the New Congress party and was elected into her fourth term as prime minister.

In 1984, the holy Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, was taken over by Sikh extremists seeking an autonomous state. In response, Gandhi sent Indian troops to regain the temple by force. In the barrage of gunfire that ensued, hundreds of Sikhs were killed, igniting an uprising within the Sikh community. On October 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated outside her home by two of her bodyguards, seeking retribution for the events at the temple.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo- *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*



Each Thursday, Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo fills with women wearing white scarves and holding signs covered with names. They are the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and they are there to bring attention to the kidnapping of their children and grandchildren by Argentina's brutal military dictatorship in the 1970s. For decades, the women have been advocating for answers about what happened to their loved ones. It's a question shared by the families of up to 30,000 *desaparecidos*, the "disappeared", from a period during which the country's military dictatorship turned against its own people.

In 1976, the Argentine military overthrew the government of Isabel Perón, the widow of populist president Juan Perón. The military dictatorship that resulted called itself the "Process of National Reorganization," or "*Proceso*," and dubbed its activities the Dirty War. The war ushered in a period of state-sponsored period of torture and terrorism. The *junta*, members of the military dictatorship, turned against Argentina's citizens, whisking away political dissidents and people it suspected of being aligned with leftist, socialist or social justice causes and incarcerating, torturing and murdering them. Among the *desaparecidos* were children born to pregnant women who were kept alive long enough to give birth to their babies, then murdered. Five hundred of those children, and others seized from their parents during the Dirty War, are thought to have been given to other families. The junta made no effort to identify or document the *desaparecidos*. By "disappearing" them and disposing of their bodies, the junta could in effect pretend they never existed. But the family members and friends of the missing knew they had existed. And they searched desperately for traces of their loved ones.

In 1977, a group of desperate mothers began to protest. Every week, they gathered in the Plaza de Mayo and marched, tempting the ire of the military junta. Government officials at first tried to marginalize and trivialize them by calling them *las locas*, "the madwomen", but they soon moved against the protesting women with the same brand of violence they had visited on their children. In December, one of the group's founders, Azucena Villaflor, was kidnapped and murdered. Twenty-eight years later, her relatives received confirmation that she had been killed and dumped in a mass grave. For the duration of the war, several more of the group's founders were also kidnapped and killed.

But the women didn't stop. They protested throughout the 1978 World Cup, which was hosted by Argentina, and took advantage of international coverage to make their cause known. They protested despite state threats and at least once incident in which a portion of the group was fired on by machine gun-toting policemen during a protest. In 1981, they gathered for their first "March of Resistance," a 24-hour-long protest that became an annual event. Their activism helped turn the public against the junta and bolster awareness of a policy that counted on silence and intimidation.



Argentina's Dirty War has been over since the military junta gave up power and agreed to democratic elections in 1983. Since then, nearly 900 former members of the junta have been tried and convicted of crimes, many involving human rights abuses. However, the Argentinean government enacted laws to cease prosecutions, as it is understood that military personnel were "following orders". But until the mystery of the country's missing children is fully solved, the mothers and grandmothers of the *desaparecidos* have vowed to keep fighting for the truth.

Mother Teresa



Nun and missionary Mother Teresa, known in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, devoted her life to caring for the sick and poor. Born in Macedonia to parents of Albanian-descent and having taught in India for 17 years, Mother Teresa experienced her "call within a call" in 1946. Her order established a hospice; centers for the blind, aged and disabled; and a leper colony. In 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work. She died in September 1997 and was beatified in October 2003. In December 2015, Pope Francis recognized a second miracle attributed to Mother Teresa, clearing the way for her to be canonized on September 4, 2016.

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, the future Mother Teresa, was born on 26 August 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia, (present-day Albania). Her father, a well-respected local businessman, died when she was eight years old, leaving her mother to support the family by opening an embroidery and cloth business. The Bojaxhius were a devout Catholic family, and after spending her adolescence deeply involved in parish activities, Agnes left home in September 1928 to become a nun. She was admitted as a postulant (training to be a nun) at the Loreto Convent in Dublin, Ireland. She received the name of Teresa, after her patron saint, Therese of Lisieux. Sister Teresa was sent to Calcutta in January 1929; while living there, she taught in St. Mary's Bengali Medium School. In 1937, she made her final profession as a Loreto nun and came to be called Mother Teresa.

On September 10, 1946, on a train from Calcutta to Darjeeling, Mother Teresa received what she termed the "call within a call," which was to open a new congregation in the slums of Calcutta to aid the city's poorest and sickest people. Mother Teresa quickly translated her calling into concrete actions- she established a school and a home for the dying destitute in a dilapidated building the government donated to her cause. In October 1950, she won canonical recognition for her congregation, the Missionaries of Charity, which grew to include 158 foundations, holy orders in Calcutta and London, a leper colony, an orphanage, a nursing home, a family clinic and a string of mobile health clinics.



In 1971, Mother Teresa traveled to New York City to open her first American-based house of charity, and in the summer of 1982, she secretly went to Beirut, Lebanon, where she crossed between Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut to aid children of both faiths. The Missionaries of Charity reached Communist countries in 1979 with a house in Zagreb, Croatia, and in 1980 with a house in East Berlin, and continued to expand through the 1980s and 1990s with houses in almost all Communist nations, including 15 houses in the former Soviet Union. One of her greatest regrets was that, despite repeated efforts, she was never able to open a foundation in China. In 1985, Mother Teresa returned to New York and spoke at the 40th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly. While there, she also opened "Gift of Love", a home to care for those infected with HIV/AIDS at a time when doctors and nurses were refusing treatment to those patients for fear of being infected with the disease.

Since her death in 1997, Mother Teresa has remained in the public spotlight as one of the greatest humanitarians of the 20th century. She combined profound empathy and a fervent commitment to her cause with incredible organizational and managerial skills that allowed her to develop a vast and effective international organization of missionaries to help impoverished citizens all across the globe. Despite the enormous scale of her charitable activities and the millions of lives she touched, to her dying day she held only the most humble conception of her own achievements.

Malala Yousafzai



Malala Yousafzai defied the Taliban as a young girl in Pakistan and demanded that girls be allowed to receive an education. For her activism, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in 2012, but she survived and has continued to speak out on the importance of education. In 2013, she gave a speech to the United Nations and published her first book, *I Am Malala*, which became an international bestseller. In 2014, she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Malala Yousafzai was born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan, located in the country's Swat Valley, a popular tourist spot that was known for its summer festivals. However, the area began to change as the Taliban tried to take control. Yousafzai attended a school that her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, had founded. After the Taliban began attacking girls' schools in Swat, Malala became an advocate for girls' education when she herself was still a child. In Peshawar, Pakistan, in September 2008, Malala gave a speech entitled *How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?* She began blogging for the BBC about living under the Taliban's threats to deny her an education. In order to hide her identity, she used the name Gul Makai. However, she was revealed to be the BBC blogger in December of that year. With a growing public platform, Yousafzai continued to speak out about her right, and the right of all women, to an education. Her activism resulted in the Taliban issuing a death threat against her. Though Malala was frightened for the safety of her father- an anti-Taliban activist- she and her family initially felt that the fundamentalist group would not actually harm a child.

On October 9, 2012, when 15-year-old Malala was riding a bus with friends on their way home from school, a masked gunman boarded the bus and demanded to know which girl was Malala. When her friends looked toward Malala, her location was given away. The gunman fired at her, hitting Malala in the left side of her head; the bullet then traveled down her neck. Two other girls were also injured in the attack. The shooting left Malala in critical condition, so she was flown to a military hospital in Peshawar. A portion of her skull was removed to treat her swelling brain. To receive further care, she was transferred to Birmingham, England. Once she was in the United Kingdom, she would require multiple surgeries- including repair of a facial nerve to fix the paralyzed left side of her face- but she did not suffer any major brain damage.

The shooting resulted in a massive outpouring of support for Yousafzai, which continued during her recovery. For the first time since being shot, she made a public appearance on July 12, 2013, her 16th birthday, and addressed an audience at the United Nations in New York City. Among her many awards, in 2013 Yousafzai won the United Nations Human Rights Prize, awarded every five years. She was named one of Time magazine's most influential people in 2013 and appeared on one of the seven covers that were printed for that issue. Yousafzai coauthored a memoir, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, which was published in 2013. She also wrote the picture book *Malala's Magic Pencil*, based on her childhood, in 2017. In 2014, Yousafzai and fellow activist Kailash Satyarthi won the Nobel Peace Prize for their work on behalf of children's rights; Malala is the youngest Nobel laureate.

Unfortunately, the Taliban still considers Yousafzai a target, although Yousafzai remains a staunch advocate for the power of education. On March 29, 2018, Yousafzai returned to Pakistan for the first time since her brutal 2012 attack. During her four-day trip, Yousafzai visited the Swat Valley, as well as the site where she nearly met her end at the hands of the Taliban. Additionally, she inaugurated a school for girls built with aid from the Malala Fund. Malala Yousafzai tweeted in August 2017 that she was accepted to Oxford University, where she will study philosophy, politics and economics.

