



making space for peace

Peace in Action

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About PBI-USA

Peace Brigades International-USA

PBI was founded in 1981 with the mandate to create space for peace and protect human rights. PBI has a horizontal, international structure with an international office in Brussels, international committees, seven field projects, and over a dozen country groups, including PBI-USA. The work of PBI-USA is made possible through the efforts of a small staff and a host of dedicated interns and volunteers, including PBI-USA's Lawyers Collective and Board of Directors (the National Coordinating Committee or NCC).

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Go to www.pbiousa.org and click on the **Donate** button or; Call us and make a credit card donation by phone (202-232-0142).

PBI-USA
P.O. Box 75880
Washington, DC 20013

Thank you for standing with us alongside human rights defenders at risk.

Call for Volunteers - Past and Future

Volunteer opportunities with PBI extend beyond field placements with Projects. To carry out our work, country groups like PBI-USA also depend on interns/volunteers. To learn more about the opportunities below, visit PBIUSA.org or call us at 202-232-0142.

Join the NCC: PBI-USA is currently recruiting Board members for our National Coordinating Committee (NCC), PBI-USA's governing body. The position offers an opportunity to engage with others committed to peace and human rights and help ensure HRDs accompanied by PBI have support in the U.S.

Help Get the Word Out: Follow us on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, invite friends and other PBI supporters to follow and help us spread the word about the brave individuals we support as well as PBI events and volunteer opportunities.

Recruit a Volunteer/Tell Your Story: Volunteers often come to PBI after hearing about the experience of others who made the commitment. We need former volunteers to spread the word in your networks or consider working with PBI to develop opportunities to share your story in person or in writing.

Join Our Volunteer Alumni Network: If you are a former volunteer with PBI, in any capacity, please make sure PBI-USA staff know your history with the organization so we can keep in touch and send invitations to as many PBIers as possible to join us at our next volunteer reunion being planned for 2019!



PBI-USA

From the extrajudicial killings of protestors by U.S.-funded security forces in Honduras, to the alarming rate at which defenders in Colombia are killed two years after the signing of the Peace Accords, to the killings and mass arrests of dam opponents in La Concepción, Guerrero, Mexico, to the growing repression of defenders in Guatemala including the arrest of Bernardo Caal Xol of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón, PBI-USA worked to raise awareness with the public and government officials about the concerning situations facing defenders throughout PBI project countries, particularly land, indigenous, and environmental defenders, and urging positive action to end the abuses and open up space for their work to continue.

In June, PBI-USA led a weeklong advocacy speaking tour in Washington, D.C. with land and indigenous rights defenders from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, meeting with 14 Congressional offices, as well as the Organization of American States and the U.S. State Department. The tour included a public event at American University Washington College of Law and a lunchtime event co-hosted with the American Friends Service Committee and the Latin American Working Group. Pictured above, PBI-USA advocacy director Pat Davis poses outside Senator Dick Durbin's office with defenders:

José Ángel Rivas Vega (pictured above left), a member of the Ódami indigenous group, and field coordinator with the Sierra Madre Alliance (ASMCA), a civil society organization in Mexico that accompanies the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Tarahumara in the state of Chihuahua in exercising their collective rights despite the reprisals they face for doing so.

Raúl Caal Ical (above center), member of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón, which opposes the Oxeq hydroelectric project affecting 195 communities in the municipality of Cahabon, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. As a result of their opposition to the project, resistance members have been criminalized, attacked, seriously threatened, and imprisoned.

Ariel Madrid (pictured above right) is a human rights lawyer and legal coordinator with the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ) in Honduras, which provides legal representation to communities fighting development projects such as the people in Pajuiles, where residents have long maintained an encampment to block construction equipment from entering their community. Members of a special police unit known as the Tigres, funded by the U.S., forced residents to remove the blockade in May 2018 but it was later restored.

PBI-USA visits Guatemala & Mexico

Over two weeks in September and October 2018, PBI-USA staff members, Amelia Parker and Pat Davis, traveled to PBI projects in Mexico and Guatemala to visit with accompanied defenders and gain a better understanding of their struggles, spend time with PBI volunteers and learn about their daily activities, as well as meet with U.S. and international authorities to share PBI's concerns regarding the current human rights situation facing the defenders we accompany. Below, they share details of their trip.



Oaxaca

The trip to the projects began in Oaxaca, where we met with PBI-accompanied groups Educa and Consorcio Oaxaca, both of which carry out a large breadth of work. With Educa, we were able to reconnect with Neftali Reyes Mendez, who participated in a 2014 speaking tour organized by PBI-USA that brought together land and environmental defenders from Latin America with communities fighting destructive resource extraction projects in southern Appalachia.

Educa seeks to improve quality of life for Oaxaca's marginalized communities through the promotion of civic participation, justice, and equality. The group promotes citizenship education, trains indigenous authorities, and supports local sustainable development projects. With the entry of megaprojects such as hydroelectric dams and mining projects into the area, Educa began to focus on supporting communities in resistance to the projects. In Oaxaca, land and territory rights defenders are facing increasing attacks. In a range of publications, including the daily newsletter *La Minuta*, as well as in a biweekly radio program, Educa chronicles the ongoing struggle for rights in Oaxaca where attacks on human rights defenders have increased significantly in recent years, both in terms of the frequency and the level of violence used. Educa members, for their part, have suffered harassment, threats and defamation. Due to its risk situation, as well as the risk faced by communities it supports, PBI started accompanying Educa in 2013, although collaboration between the two organizations goes back to 2001.

Next, we met with Consorcio Oaxaca, a feminist organization that promotes women's rights and gender equality by educating women on their rights, supporting the creation of citizens' networks, and carrying out a series of activities, including courses on topics such as the protection of women human rights defenders and legal representation of women victims of violence. Consorcio also runs a retreat house for women defenders suffering from burn out and stress related illnesses, where they are treated with traditional medicine and supported in 2

ways that will strengthen their work. In addition to the retreat house, Consorcio runs a safe house for women at risk that takes into account their full range of needs. Consorcio has recently begun working more broadly to support defenders struggling to defend their rights against an array of impositions, from megaprojects to educational reforms. One group accompanied by Consorcio, the Committee for the Defense of Indigenous Peoples (CODEDI), has been the target of extreme repression this year: five CODEDI members have been extrajudicially executed. Consorcio staff have also suffered surveillance, threats, and harassment, including eleven break-ins to offices and members' houses in the last seven years, in which documents and computers were stolen while other objects of value were left behind. PBI-USA helped Consorcio director Yesica Sanchez contact the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to explore protective measures for those individuals and groups most at risk. Consorcio's work includes pressing for the release of thirty political prisoners. Consorcio staff spoke to us in particular of the cases of Enrique Guerrero and Damian Gallardo, both imprisoned on false charges since 2013, although the UN has recognized them as human rights defenders who were arbitrarily detained and tortured. Enrique, a university student at the time of his arrest, has been teaching philosophy to his fellow inmates at the high security prison where he is detained. Damian, a teacher, has published a collection of poetry from prison, with the help of the World Organization Against Torture, which published the volume, and Consorcio, which has helped publicize it. Mexico's President, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, has promised to grant "amnesty" to political prisoners, and Consorcio and many other advocates throughout Mexico are hopeful that those falsely accused will soon be released. PBI has accompanied Consorcio Oaxaca since 2016.

Mexico City

Next, we headed to Mexico City, where we received a thorough tour of PBI Mexico's coordinating office, which coordinates work between PBI's northern and southern teams in Mexico. The Mexico City office was organizing the production of a video on large-scale development projects; responding to two emergency situations, one in the north and one in the south of the country; and finishing a joint report, with the Washington Office on Latin America, on strengths and limitations of the Federal Protection Mechanism. Pictured in the left column is a small section of a powerful mural painted on the wall across from the Mexico City office that reads: "My body is not a battlefield."

The following day, we met with the Cerezo Committee, an organization that PBI has long accompanied, which works for the defense and promotion of human rights, especially of those who have suffered political repression. The Cerezo Committee was established after the 2001 arrest, torture and detention of brothers Alejandro,



Héctor and Antonio Cerezo Contreras. They were held in a maximum-security prison under false accusations of being responsible for placing explosives in three branches of a bank and being members of the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces. Siblings Francisco and Emiliana then formed the Cerezo Committee to advocate for their brothers' release. In 2005, Alejandro was released and four years later, Antonio and Héctor were freed. They pledged to continue working for the release of all political prisoners in Mexico. Today the Committee is one of the leading organizations documenting human rights violations, particularly of human rights defenders, in Mexico. PBI began accompanying the Committee in 2002 following several episodes of harassment and threats against Francisco and Emiliana. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued precautionary measures for Francisco, Alejandro and Emiliana in 2006; however, the measures have not prevented continued attempts to criminalize them and restrict their travel.



Before leaving México, we were fortunate to be able to witness the annual march (pictured above) organized to commemorate four years since the disappearance of the 43 students from the rural college of Ayotzinapa and keep pressure on authorities in the case of the students as well as the many others disappeared in Mexico. On September 26th, the day of the march, the parents of the disappeared students met with President-Elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador to talk about the case, their frustrations, and specific requests for the new administration. The government declared their commitment to the case and to the inclusion of international entities to help identify those responsible. The former government of President Enrique Peña Nieto continues to insist on its own version of events as the "historic truth," despite the huge quantity of evidence against it and the constant pressure from civil society and international entities such as the UN.

Guatemala City

Next, we continued on to Guatemala, where we pursued another full week of meetings with accompanied groups and individuals. To strengthen our understanding of the current situation, we met with longtime human rights advocate Claudia Samayoa, founder of UDEFEGUA (Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala).

From Claudia (pictured atop the following column), we gained greater insight into the events leading up to and following the decision by Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales to bar the reentry into the country of the head of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), Ivan



Valesquez. UDEFEGUA's offices were among those surrounded by military vehicles following the President's announcement, UDEFEGUA describes the President's actions as a coup, given that the Constitutional Court had previously ruled that the President lacked the authority to expel Velasquez from the country. President Morales has stated that he will not obey any "illegal order" from the court. Claudia explained that the yearlong clamp down on civil society and spaces for civic engagement, which began with Morales' effort to expel Ivan Velasquez in August 2017, continues, but the White House has not taken a strong stance in support of democracy or anti-corruption efforts. She expressed concern that with next year's presidential election, attacks against defenders, numbering 21 nine months into 2018, will increase.

The evening brought an opportunity to spend more time with PBI's team of field volunteers in Guatemala. The field team has a wide and rugged terrain to cover and they show up for the challenge enthusiastically. The 11, soon to be 12, volunteers share a living space that also serves as the Guatemala City office. During our visit, the team was working on a new home for the hundreds of publications that lined the walls in addition to their daily visits, meetings, phone calls, report writing, alert issuing, household chores and cooking duties. The next day we met with our partners at the Guatemala Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Defenders Project for further updates and analysis. They confirmed Claudia Samayoa's concern that repression against defenders in the coming year would increase. In their opinion, the increase in killings of HRDs this year, along with repressive bills in the Guatemalan



Congress, is part of a very well-coordinated plan to attack HRDs and their support structures. Pictured above, Amelia and Pat meet with Robert Mercatante, Human Rights Defenders Project and Isabel Solis, Guatemala Human Rights Commission. Following our morning meeting, we had a lovely lunch with longtime PBIs Maripaz Gallardo de la Torre and Eva Scarfe who joined us to share their reflections on PBI's work as well as current threats facing defenders in the country. Maripaz and Eva remain active in PBI, serving on project committees for Honduras and Guatemala.



Cahabón

After a few days in Guatemala City, we set off to meet with members of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón (pictured above and on the next page), a collective process organized in 2015 by 38 Q'eqchi communities to defend the land, settled by their ancestors more than ten centuries ago, against the construction of two hydroelectric dams on the Oxec River in Alta Verapaz. More than one hundred communities are affected by the construction, which has diverted the river, threatening habitats. At our meeting in Cahabón, we were able to reconnect with Raul Caal, who participated in our summer speaking tour. We were moved by the commitment and hardship we witnessed during our visit and by the courage of those demanding their right to consultation under ILO Convention 169, at the risk of their own safety and freedom, as demonstrated by the case of Bernardo Caal Xol shared below. PBI has accompanied the Resistance since July 2017, including the good-faith consultation organized on August 27, 2017 in which 26,537 people participated, resulting in 26,526 rejecting the presence of the company and 11 voting in favor. Despite the overwhelming rejection of the hydroelectric project by the communities, licenses were granted for the project to move forward and the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón continues to demand their revocation.

Cobán

After leaving Cahabón, we stayed in Cobán to meet with two accompanied groups. Over dinner, we spoke with Alex Vasquez (pictured below, second to right), a member of Red de Sanadoras (TZK'AT Ancestral Healing Network of Community Feminism from Ixmulew). From Alex, we learned about the discrimination and threats traditional healers face. Women defenders who serve as ancestral healers in Mexico have a history of being politically persecuted, suffering death threats, stigmatization, displacement and criminalization as a result of their work in defense of women, land, and indigenous rights. In addition to their advocacy work, they work as healers, midwives, herbalists, and more in indigenous communities. PBI's accompaniment began in February 2018.

Next, we met with CCDA, the Campesino Committee of the Highlands, whose members and leaders have suffered tremendous repression. Five members of the group were brutally killed this year and one has been disappeared. PBI recently began accompanying the CCDA during the summer of 2018. Below, the second picture from the left, was taken outside the CCDA office on our recent trip in October 2018. The organization works to improve indigenous farmers' lives by seeking social, economic, and political change and respect for indigenous culture and rights. The leader of CCDA's Alta Verapaz/Baja Verapaz office, Lesbia Artolo Teyul (pictured below, left), informed us that:

“As a result of PBI's accompaniment, CCDA members are no longer getting beat up, do not fear arrest, and are not discriminated against when they go to file a report with the local Public Ministry's office.”

In Cobán, we had the great privilege also of meeting with Bernardo Caal Xol, an imprisoned member of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón, who had been detained since last January awaiting trial. Bernardo was grateful for our visit in October 2018 and the weekly visits he receives from PBI field volunteers. Read more about the unjust case against Bernardo in the Guatemala update ahead. PBI will continue to accompany Bernardo and his legal team as next steps in his case are determined.

We headed back to Guatemala City after our stay in Cobán to meet with U.S. embassy personnel and share our concerns, particularly regarding the ongoing murders of human rights defenders in 2018. We also discussed the use of U.S.-donated military vehicles to intimidate human rights organizations and a pattern of politically motivated legal actions taken against human rights defenders, particularly in Cobán. We ended the week observing and participating in a security workshop (pictured on the cover and below, right) planned by PBI Guatemala for accompanied defenders, wrapping up a very informative and productive visit to two PBI projects.





PBI Guatemala

In Guatemala, the number of human rights defenders murdered in 2018 reached 22 by the end of October. At least 10 indigenous leaders struggling to defend their lands are included in that list. Others have been falsely charged and imprisoned despite clear evidence available to dispute the charges, continuing a growing pattern of criminalization against indigenous defenders in Guatemala.

In an October 12, 2018 address to the United Nations, Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz reported on her recent visits to Guatemala and Mexico. In Guatemala, she said, indigenous peoples constitute the majority of the population yet *“face structural racism and discrimination in their daily lives, reflected in the lack of protection of their lands, territories and natural resources and in their difficulties in gaining access to justice, health and education, or political participation.”* She said she was concerned to learn that *“in spite of the overall national economic growth, the levels of inequality are increasing. Around 40 per cent of indigenous peoples still live in extreme poverty, and more than half of all indigenous children in Guatemala are chronically malnourished.”* She mentioned that the implementation of the vast majority of the commitments in 1996 Peace Accord on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Identity remain unfulfilled, as do most of the recommendations issued in 2002 by her predecessor.

“It is deeply disturbing that today, 22 years after the signing of the Peace Accords, only 19% of the commitments adopted in the Accord on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Identity have been implemented.”

She went on to say, *“Both in Mexico and Guatemala, I received numerous complaints about the impacts of the current ‘development’ model on the rights of indigenous peoples. The drastic increase of extractive and other projects fails to respect indigenous peoples' right to determine their own priorities and strategies for the development and use of their lands, territories and natural resources. These projects are generally undertaken without adequate human rights impact assessments nor good faith consultations to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned.”* She also expressed extreme concern *“about the increasing levels of violence, forced evictions and the criminalization of indigenous peoples in both Mexico and Guatemala.”* “In Guatemala,” she said,

“I visited indigenous leaders in prison for defending their lands and I am particularly disturbed by the killings of several indigenous leaders during and since my recent visit.”

Seven out of 11 of the organizations accompanied by PBI Guatemala have open legal processes against some of their members. The Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala's (UDEFEQUA) Annual Report registered 166 acts of criminalization against defenders in Guatemala in 2017. This trend continues in 2018 with 76 acts of criminalization registered from January 1 - June 8.

On November 9, 2018, Q'eqchi' community leader Bernardo Caal Xol, member of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón (some of whom are pictured above without Bernardo), was found guilty and sentenced to 7 years for aggravated robbery and illegal detention of private security guards hired by the company building the hydroelectric dams that Bernardo and his community are protesting. The security guards filed their complaint in July 2017 despite the alleged events taking place in September 2015 because they supposedly did not know who imprisoned them until they saw Bernardo on television. Bernardo was arrested in January 2018 and imprisoned until his trial. His lawyers, the Human Rights Law Firm (BDH) – also accompanied by PBI, are determining the best next steps and PBI and the lawyers with whom we work stand ready to assist in Bernardo's continued search for justice and struggle to get home, back to his family and the resistance. In PBI Guatemala's Bulletin No. 39, available at pbi-guatemala.org, Bernardo shares what keeps him going:

“What gives me strength is the struggle that other people carry on against the companies that dispossess people of their territory. To know that others continue the fight and that I am not alone. That there are people monitoring my situation and that national and international organizations accompany me.” – Bernardo Caal Xol



PBI Colombia

PBI has maintained a protective presence in Colombia since 1994. In 2016, we witnessed the Colombian government sign a peace agreement with the FARC-EP, ending a 50+-year conflict. The post-agreement period in Colombia has seen a reduction in military actions that were prevalent during the conflict. However, violence against human rights defenders and social leaders has increased to levels not seen in the past ten years, occurring where victims and communities have publicly denounced the increased presence of neo-paramilitary groups. Despite the positive steps that have been taken to put an end to the armed conflict between the Colombian state and the FARC-EP, and the initiation of peace talks between representatives of the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the assassinations of human rights defenders and social and political leaders, as well as the increase of neo-paramilitary activity, all create a very actual and difficult challenge in the construction of a real and long-lasting peace in Colombia.

Next year, we will mark the 20th anniversary of our accompaniment of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a community that continues to suffer serious human rights violations. In September 2017, the Peace Community submitted their observations to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to show the systemic nature of the violations against the Community, emphasizing that, of the at least 350 crimes suffered by the community, only one case has seen any judicial progress, that being the massacre of February 21, 2005 in the rural communities of Resbalosa and Mulatos in the village of San José de Apartadó where the Colombian justice system agreed with the Peace Community and found that the 17th Brigade of the National Army of Colombia and a group of paramilitaries from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) did indeed plan and execute the massacre in 2005 despite the denial of the Colombian government. The 17th Brigade continues to threaten the Peace Community, most recently filing a *tutela* action against the Community alleging that it had violated the fundamental rights “to honor,” “to reputation,” and “to privacy” of the military personnel of that brigade. One week earlier, on September 20, 2018, the Community had just received a threat, informing them of an “irreversible decision of the paramilitaries to eliminate, before the end of 2018, three leaders of the Peace Community,” among them the Legal Representative, Germán Graciano Posso who survived an assassination attempt against him in December 2017.

PBI is very concerned regarding threats against the Community, including attempted assassinations, as well as the filing of a legal action by the Colombian State against a peace organization whose case is making its way through the Inter-American Human Rights System, due to impunity granted by the state for serious crimes committed against the Community in Colombia. In November 2018, seventy-one international organizations and governmental bodies signed a letter addressed to the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights (IACHR), expressing concern for the complaint filed by the Colombian government against the Peace Community and urging the bodies to take action to prevent new human rights violations that would cause irreparable harm to the Community.

Aggression against defenders and social leaders continues to be one of the greatest challenges to a durable and sustainable peace in Colombia. Peace requires a firm commitment from the new government to uphold human rights and prevent abuses, continue with the implementation of the Peace Agreement, and continue peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN).

To counter-act this aggression, PBI implements a psychosocial focus that supports the reconstruction of social fabric, understanding that in the contexts of socio-political violence and an increase in criminalization, the stress and constant concerns that this work brings impacts defenders on both physical and emotional levels that not only attacks the human rights defender personally, but also weakens their collective organizational processes of resistance.

From October 8 -11, 2018, the Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders (IMD) and PBI organized a regional conference in Colombia to talk about the psychosocial impacts of working under constant threat with representatives from each entity of PBI in Latin America as well as 30 women human rights defenders from 20 organizational members of the IMD in Mesoamerica, including an accompanied defender from each PBI project in Latin America (Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico). Pictured above, PBI volunteers and WHRDs gather in a healing circle at the regional conference in Colombia.

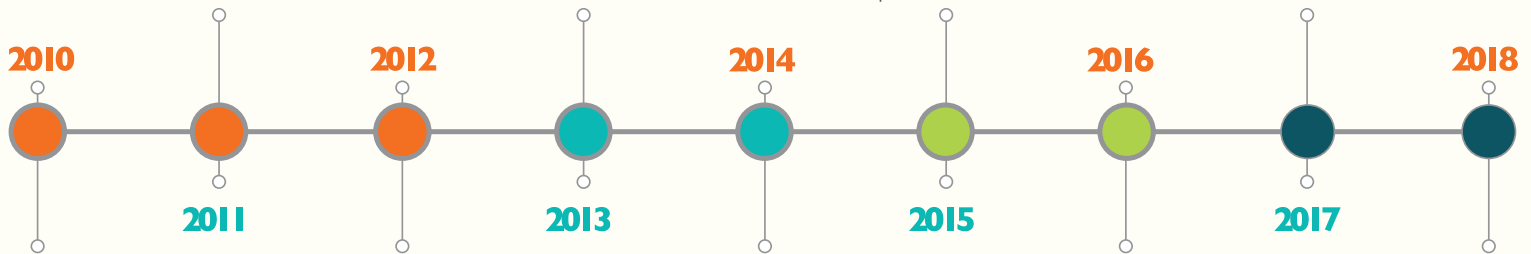
Five years in Honduras

- First Exploration Mission and publication of the mission report

- **Decision to open the project in Honduras and deployment of the first field team**

- Publication of a report on the situation of defenders for the 2015 UN Universal Periodic Review of Honduras
- Start of accompaniment to Gladys Lanza (Visitación Padilla) and Arcoiris
- Presence during the Second "Marcha de las Antorchas" (March of the Torches); the Indignant Opposition requests the installation of a commission against impunity
- Presence during university protests due to the criminalisation of UNAH students
- Presence in Costa Rica during the judgement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the Case of López Lone v. Honduras

- Publication of the Workbook on Protection for Defenders
- Observation of university protests due to the criminalisation of UNAH students
- Start of accompaniment to Hedme Castro (ACI-Participa)
- Observation of protests during the post-electoral crisis



- Accompaniment request from the Honduran Human Rights Coordination Group (Plataforma de Derechos Humanos de Honduras)

- Second Exploratory Mission and publication of the mission report

- Publication of the report on the defence of human rights in the 2013 electoral context
- Start of accompaniment to Dina Meza and CEHPRODEC
- First security workshop for defenders
- Incorporation into the Espacio ACI network
- First speaking tour of defenders to Europe
- Incorporation into the CIFCA network

- Start of accompaniment to AJD, COPINH and Kevin Ramírez
- Publication of the report on defenders in Honduras prior to the periodic examination of Honduras by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

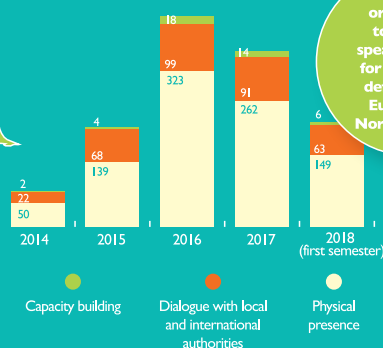
- Start of accompaniment to C-Libre, ASODEBICOQ and CNTC

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In the last 5 years, PBI Honduras has accompanied 10 people and organisations that defend human rights, including the right to land, territory and the environment; freedom of expression, association and peaceful demonstration; women's rights and the right to sexual diversity.

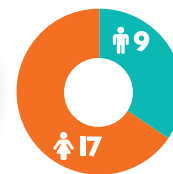


We have carried out accompaniments in 12 of the 18 departments in the country



PBI has organised a total of 17 speaking tours for Honduran defenders to Europe and North America

Field volunteers



26 volunteers from 11 countries have been part of the project

Netherlands Spain Mexico
United States Chile
Italy France Switzerland
Colombia Germany Argentina

PBI Honduras

Human rights defenders, both foreigners and nationals, in Honduras are experiencing an increase in repression, including intensified stigmatization, as well as continued killings and attacks. Following the Presidential elections of November 2017 resulting in the re-election of Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, protests erupted in the country and U.S.-funded military police responded with force, injuring and killing dozens of protesters. The UN, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and numerous members of the US Congress decried the use of live ammunition against protesters, to no avail, and in fact repression of defenders continued to escalate. PBI-USA is calling for the U.S. to cut all aid to Honduran security forces. In the case of Berta Cáceres, on November 29, 2018, seven individuals were found guilty of her 2016 murder, including two U.S.-trained military men, but the architects of the crime were not named although the court found that the murder was ordered by executives of the Agua Zarca dam company Desa for delays caused by protests carried out by Berta and her organization, COPINH. PBI will continue to accompany members of COPINH who remain at risk.

PBI has increased our team in Honduras to respond to an increasingly violent context in Honduras. Since arriving in Honduras, PBI has supported social and economic justice organization CEHPRODEC and journalist Dina Meza, and we now also accompany COPINH and the LGBTI organization, Arcoiris. Equally, we also accompany the National Union of Rural Workers (CNTC), the Association for the Defense of Common Property in Quimistán (ASODEBICOQ), and the Committee for Freedom of Expression (C-Libre), directly benefiting more than fifty human rights defenders. Through the project in Honduras, we hope to contribute to raising awareness of and increasing recognition for the work of human rights defenders in the country and the risks they face every day. See the graphic above for an outline of the project's development over the past five years.



PBI Mexico

PBI's activities in Mexico began in 1994 when, following the Zapatista uprising, it received requests for an international presence in the state of Chiapas. Following several exploratory missions to the country, PBI's General Assembly decided to establish a permanent presence in Mexico in 1998, focused largely on the southern states of Oaxaca and Guerrero since Chiapas already had a strong presence of international organizations. The first PBI office opened in Mexico City in 1999.

Since 2013, PBI Mexico has bet on a model of 'regional' presence, allowing the project to respond flexibly to accompaniment petitions made by civil society from different states and to protect a large number of people and organizations in more places. An advantage of the regional model is that it provides opportunities for human rights defenders to make connections across states and establish wider support networks, improving their protection and advocacy capacities. Since 2015, PBI has kept two regional teams in northern and southern Mexico, as well as a coordinating office in Mexico City. PBI currently accompanies defenders and organizations in the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero and Oaxaca, and in Mexico City.

Land, territory and environmental defenders face extreme levels of risk throughout Mexico. In fact, Mexico is towards the top of the list among countries with the most attacks against environmental defenders. Despite progress at the legislative level, such as the constitutional reform of human rights in 2011, or the law that creates the Federal Protection Mechanism for defenders and journalists, the situation has worsened, putting defenders at greater risk and increasing their vulnerability in general. Since 2011, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) confirmed a continuous annual increase in attacks, placing Chihuahua, Guerrero and Oaxaca as the most dangerous states for human rights defenders. In just under twenty-four hours at the end of October 2018, each of those states suffered the loss of a human rights defender. Women human rights defenders are also vulnerable in Mexico. The attacks against WHRDs tend to be threats aimed at their children, sexist comments, or comments containing sexual content. Their public role as defenders is often questioned by the patriarchal system that does not accept that women can undertake public roles in society or positions of power and authority. It is within this context that PBI accompanies women defenders in Mexico.

Here we highlight two women defenders from Mexico who travelled to a September 2018 meeting organized by PBI to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The meeting, held over 3 days, provided space for 40 human rights defenders from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia to exchange experiences and knowledge about holistic protection. Different workshops were held on the work of defenders, to reflect on the last 20 years and prepare strategies for the next 20, as well as analyze the global tendencies that impact the risk of defenders and collectively identify common needs of human rights defenders. The gathering took place in Brussels, the new location of PBI's international office. Given the current growing tensions and setbacks for the respect of global human rights, it is important to remember these declarations and the commitments of UN member States to protect and promote human rights and the work of human rights defenders. It is worrying to hear speeches promoting hatred and intolerance being given space in public debates and being accepted by sectors of public opinion.

Cristina Auerbach (pictured above, left) from the Pasta de Conchos family organization is a well-known human rights defender working with miners in the state of Coahuila. She works on the case of the Pasta de Conchos mine where 65 miners, whose bodies have yet to be rescued, were killed in an accident in the mine in 2006. She supports the families of these miners and works to assure that these types of incidents do not repeat themselves and that the labor rights of miners are respected. For her work she has received threats, harassment and defamation, but despite everything she continues to be convinced of the importance of human rights defense work and her input has been fundamental in advancing the topics of justice, reparations, and non-repetition of human rights violations in Coahuila.

"PBI gives me and other human rights defenders in Mexico the chance to wake up alive every day and I feel grateful for that." Cristina Auerbach

Sandra Alarcón (pictured above, right) is a lawyer who works with the Tlachinollan Human Rights Center in the state of Guerrero. She has represented victims searching for truth and justice such as in the case of the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the "Raúl Isidro Burgos" College in Ayotzinapa and in the case of two survivors of sexual torture, Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú, featured on the poster held by Sandra in the photo above. Despite the challenges to achieving justice in these cases, Sandra continues to fight for the recognition of victims of serious human rights violations and for the respect of human rights in Guerrero.



Pictured above, toolkit organizer and active member of the Mathare Social Justice Center, Maria Mutauta, participates in a breakout session at PBI's September 2018 global gathering of human rights defenders to mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In an interview with PBI about her role as a WHRD toolkit organizer, Maria remarked:

"Being a woman human rights defender can be demotivating at times; I sometimes feel that nothing will ever change, and I ask myself: 'Who am I helping? How is this helping?' However, I can definitely say that being part of this group of Toolkit Organizers has been a wonderful experience so far because I get to share, work and network with like-minded and inspiring human beings with strong voices, who never back down regardless of the numerous obstacles that come their way."



PBI Kenya

PBI's project in Kenya continues to evolve since its founding in December 2012 in response to the needs of HRDs in Kenya. In 2016, PBI Kenya created an online protection toolkit specifically aimed at Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) in Nairobi's urban settlements. Fifteen dedicated and passionate WHRDs were selected as Toolkit Organizers (TOs), all of whom are already established figures working for women's and children's rights within their communities and are currently joining forces with PBI to disseminate and further develop the Toolkit.

PBI Kenya has also been engaging with Exiled HRDs (EHRDs), in order to assess the immediate protection needs and challenges of exiled HRDs from the region, including South-Sudan, Ethiopia and Burundi, face. In 2018, PBI Kenya launched a 2-year project addressing extra-judicial killings (EJKs) in Nairobi's urban settlements. To follow updates from the Kenya project, visit pbi-kenya.org.

NepalMonitor.org

The Nepal Monitor project, a joint project of PBI and our local partner COCAP, continues to work with and for human rights defenders in Nepal to increase their protection and support their important peace and human rights work.

Nepal Monitor extended its platform into a comprehensive Peace Monitoring Project (PMP) in August 2016. Initially piloted to include the local-level media of 10 districts, the project has since January 2017 been extended to include district-level newspapers from 25 districts of Nepal's 75 districts. Pictured left, the PMP held a training on August 29, 2018 with district leaders from across Nepal.

In fall 2018, the project also launched a new website, upgrading the design and function of Nepal Monitor's alert and mapping system. To explore the changes to the site, visit nepalmonitor.org.

PBI Indonesia

PBI continues to work in partnership with ELSAM (Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy) to train cohorts of human rights defenders, largely from remote, rural areas of Indonesia. The intensive, 4-month training covers a wide range of skills focused on strengthening the safety, research, and advocacy capacity of defenders in rural areas.

Pictured left, Zakura N A Laratmase is a leader in Sorong's small, marginalized transgender community. Zakura developed strong relationships with other defenders during the training, opening the eyes of fellow trainees to the injustices faced by the transgender community and prejudices prevalent against sexual minorities and people living with HIV/AIDS in Indonesia. Zakura and fellow transgender activists now regularly share best practices with and participate in advocacy initiatives alongside defenders who had previously segregated themselves from the LGBTI community.

On September 28, 2018, a category 7.5 earthquake and tsunami hit Indonesia, resulting in widespread devastation on the island of Sulawesi. The PBI team was not in the affected area but one of our course alumni from our 2018 cohort is from the area. PBI staff spent much of the weekend following the quake-tsunami trying to track her down, as phone lines were not working for a few days. She was in Palu when the wave hit and was displaced. Luckily, she survived and like many people in the region, has been staying in various tents with other survivors, continuing her advocacy with a local legal assistance organization. PBI and ELSAM had planned a weeklong training for environmental defenders in the region for October, but after the storm had to postpone the training until November in a neighboring town.



Zakura (center) on an advocacy tour in the Netherlands, November 2017

While visiting Guatemala, PBI-USA advocacy director, Pat Davis, discusses next steps following the summer advocacy tour with members of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón. October 2018



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