



Mexico 20 years

del
Migrante
Saltillo



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

20 YEARS ACCOMPANYING HUMAN RIGHT DEFENDERS IN MEXICO

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Front page picture: Alberto Xicoténcatl, director of the Saltillo Migrant Shelter in Coahuila, and a team member of PBI Mexico's Northern, Coahuila, 2020 © Manuel Valcarce

Back cover picture: Teresa Santiago, Land and Territory Defender of the San Mateo Tlacotepec Community, and a team member of PBI Mexico, during the filming of the documentary The Blood of the Earth, Puebla, 2019 © PBI México

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PBI Mexico Project Team Members 2019

The people who made up PBI Mexico's team came from 18 countries in the Americas, Europe and Oceania. 76% of those involved were volunteers – in the field, and as part of the Strategy Committee and the Training Committee. We would like to recognise the extraordinary work they are conducting every

day to contribute to the protection of human rights defenders. Thank you to each and every team member for your dedication and commitment to PBI Mexico, the project's work would not be possible without your participation!

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20 years alongside human rights defenders in Mexico

This year, 2020, Peace Brigades International (PBI) celebrates 20 years of working in Mexico. It has been a long trajectory, full of both successes and dark moments shared with Mexican human rights defenders (HRDs). Together we continue to hold the reassuring hope of a future where the rights of all will be respected.

In June 2008 I arrived in the city of Chilpancingo to work with PBI. I met my future teammates, who came to this project believing in the importance of international solidarity. Past and present volunteers remind those who wish to use violence against HRDs that their acts will not go unnoticed, because there are international eyes supporting the work of Mexican HRDs.

After returning briefly to Europe, having lived as a field volunteer in Guerrero for one year and in Oaxaca for six months, I decided to return to Mexico to join PBI Mexico's Coordination Office. I stayed long enough to understand that Mexico had become my home and that I wanted to continue accompanying the people who fight for social change and who necessarily question the power of the status quo.

During my time as a volunteer in Guerrero, my teammates and I lived through difficult and painful periods as a result of the state's increasing violence and militarisation. I remember the forcible disappearance and killings of Raúl Lucas Lucía and Manuel Ponce Rosas, president and secretary of the Organisation for the Future of the Mixtec People (Organización para el Futuro del Pueblo Mixteco, OFPM). But I was also lucky to accompany Emiliana, Alejandro and Francisco Cerezo on the day of their brothers' release, after Antonio and Héctor had been arbitrarily jailed for eight long years.

In 2011, with my colleagues from the Mexico City Coordination Office, I was privileged to accompany the unceasing work of the network of organisations which would become the CSO Group (Espacio OSC), as they pushed for the creation of a protection mechanism for HRDs and journalists. The law behind the mechanism entered into force in June 2012. It was a historic moment for everyone, a tangible result of the tenacity and bravery of Mexican civil society.

Over the course of these 20 years, PBI Mexico has worked to open spaces so human rights defenders can continue their campaigns. We have been by the side of many HRDs and advocates, women and men, who have contributed to the development and strengthening of international accompaniment as a tool for the protection of human rights.

The advances in human rights in Mexico have been considerable in this time: It is enough to consider the importance of a psycho-social approach, the awareness of intersectionality, the struggles of Mexican women, a legal framework on human rights issues that is the most advanced on the continent... However, there is still a long way to go.

In this period, we have also witnessed an increase in risks, especially for people who defend land, territory and the environment. We shared the sadness of human rights organisations who lost, in the worst possible way, companions in the struggle – like Isidro Baldenegro López, Juan Ontiveros Ramos and Julián Carrillo in Chihuahua's Sierra Tarahumara. These were only a few of the tragic losses in one of the country's most dangerous regions to defend human rights. We have not forgotten the students of Ayotzinapa, and the more than 60,000 forcibly disappeared people across Mexico since the start of the so-called war on drugs.

Two decades since PBI arrival in Mexico, we are pleased that Mexico can rely on a stronger and more-consolidated civil society, yet as an organisation we have not stopped expressing our concern about the high levels of impunity and the public-security strategy based on militarising the country. The context continues to be very adverse, and the threats and acts of aggression against HRDs and journalists have not ceased. In particular, in these chaotic times of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts, the struggles led by human rights defenders remain more relevant than ever. The need to protect the women and men who defend human rights represents a challenge for Mexico, here in the present and on into the future.

Carla Cavarretta,
PBI Mexico General Coordinator

Photo: Carla Cavarretta giving a security workshop to members of the Radio Ñomnda (a communitarian radio), Guerrero, 2011



PBI Mexico in 20 milestones

- 1.** 2000: PBI Mexico opens.
- 2.** 2001: A PBI office opens in Chilpancingo, Guerrero: the first international NGO with a permanent presence in the state. First accompaniments in Guerrero: Ranferi Hernández and dissident tenant farmers in Acapulco. After the assassination of HRD Digna Ochoa y Plácido, I we accompany Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Center Prodh)² and the technical secretary of the "All Rights for All" Network (Red "Todos los Derechos para Todas y Todos", RedTDT)³ in the Federal District.
- 3.** 2002: First security and protection consultations. Accompaniment of the Cerezo Committee (Comité Cerezo)⁴ in the Federal District, and the "José María Morelos y Pavón" Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos "José María Morelos y Pavón")⁵ and Enedina Cervantes Salgado in Guerrero.
- 4.** 2003: Accompaniment begins of the "Tlachinollan" Human Rights Centre of the Montaña (Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña "Tlachinollan")⁶ and Tita Radilla of AFADEM⁷ in Guerrero.
- 5.** 2005: New accompaniments in Guerrero: leaders of the OPIM8 threatened for denouncing militarisation; Inés Fernández and Valentina Rosendo, victims of sexual torture committed by soldiers⁹; Celsa Valdovinos, wife of Felipe Arreaga of the OMESP, who had been arbitrarily detained¹⁰.
- 6.** 2006: Accompaniment of the civilian observation mission¹¹ in the context of the teachers' conflict in Oaxaca and the brutal repression of the subsequent movement.
- 7.** 2007: PBI coordination office opens in the Federal District.
- 8.** 2008: PBI office opens in Oaxaca. In October, a permanent team opens there because of increased petitions for accompaniment following the 2006 social conflict. In 2009, PBI starts accompanying CEDHAPI¹² and the 25 November Liberation Committee (Comité de Liberación 25 de Noviembre)¹³.
- 9.** 2009: Accompaniment of the release of Héctor and Antonio Cerezo from prison.¹⁴ Paradigmatic sentence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights: ruling against the Mexican State in the Radilla Pacheco case.¹⁵ (In 2011, the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, SCJN) recognises the judgement as legally binding and limits military jurisdiction.¹⁶)
- 10.** 2010: Release of Juan Manuel Martínez Moreno from prison.¹⁷ PBI accompanies his lawyer, Alba Cruz, of the 25 November Liberation Committee, in the case which led to his exoneration and release, after being imprisoned in 2008 accused of the murder of US journalist Brad Will. Release and exoneration of Raúl Hernández Abundio of the OPIM: PBI accompanies the OPIM and its Tlachinollan lawyers during the case.¹⁸
- 11.** 2010: Accompaniment begins of Father Alejandro Solalinde and the Migrant Shelter "Hermanos en el Camino" (Albergue del Migrante "Hermanos en el Camino")¹⁹ and the "Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño" Regional Human Rights Center (Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos "Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño", Barca-DH)²⁰ in Oaxaca.
- 12.** 2012: Creation of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Mecanismo de Protección para Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas)²¹: After a long process led by the CSO Group (Espacio OSC)²², including advocacy accompanied by PBI since 2012, the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Ley de Protección a Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas) is passed.
- 13.** 2012: Exploratory mission and opening of the regional team in Chihuahua City, covering the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila. Accompaniment begins of the Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte) in Ciudad Juárez.²³
- 14.** 2013: Accompaniment of Código DH (formerly the 25 November Liberation Committee) related to the indigenous consultation in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca.
- 15.** 2014: Accompaniment begins of the Juan Gerardi Human Rights Center (Centro de Derechos Humanos Juan Gerardi)²⁴, the Saltillo Migrant House (Casa del Migrante Saltillo)²⁵, Fray Juan de Larios Centre for Human Rights (Centro para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios)²⁶ and the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization (Organización Familia Pasta de Conchos)²⁷ in Coahuila. Release from prison of the Figueroa Gómez brothers²⁸ and the five young men accused in the car-bomb case in Ciudad Juárez²⁹, accompanied by the Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre. Accompaniment of Tlachinollan related to the disappearance of 43 students from the normal rural school in Ayotzinapa.³⁰
- 16.** 2015: Accompaniment begins of Consorcio Oaxaca.³¹ Release of Cristel Piña from prison³², a case accompanied by Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre. Opening of PBI's Southern Team, covering the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero.
- 17.** 2016: Accompaniment of civil society observation missions in relation to Operation Nachixtlán.³³ Accompaniment begins of the Focus Group on Businesses and Human Rights (Grupo Focal sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos).³⁴
- 18.** 2017: Accompaniment of the Contingency Plan for Human Rights Defenders (Plan de Contingencia para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos) in Chihuahua.³⁵ General Law on Disappearances (Ley General en Materia de Desaparición): accompaniment begins of the Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico (Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos) and the National Campaign Against Enforced Disappearance (Campaña Nacional contra la Desaparición Forzada).³⁶ Civilian observation mission to Chilapa and Chilpancingo, Guerrero.
- 19.** 2018: Accompaniment begins of the organisation Sierra Madre Alliance (Alianza Sierra Madre, A.C., ASMAC), which accompanies communities in the Sierra Tarahumara in Chihuahua.³⁷ Accompaniment begins of the State Exhumation Plan (Plan Estatal de Exhumaciones, PEE) in Coahuila.³⁸
- 20.** 2019: Mobilisation around the disappearance of HRDs Otilia Eugenio Manuel and Hilario Cornelio, both eventually found safe and well.³⁹ Commitments and preparation for the recovery of the miners' bodies trapped in the Pasta de Conchos mine, a case accompanied by the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization.⁴⁰

1. <https://bit.ly/2x9js7L>
 2. <https://bit.ly/2xQp1bW>
 3. <https://redtdt.org.mx/>
 4. <https://bit.ly/2QC3fiq>
 5. <https://bit.ly/33EoB3N>
 6. <http://www.tlachinollan.org/>
 7. <https://bit.ly/3cHIVo6>
 8. <https://bit.ly/2KpboD4>

9. <https://bit.ly/33yU6MN>
 10. <https://bit.ly/2KpboD4>
 11. <https://bit.ly/2WDszlm>
 12. <http://cedhapi.org/>
 13. <https://codigodh.org/>
 14. <https://bit.ly/34XiiZJ>
 15. <https://bit.ly/34Z0kGr>
 16. <https://bit.ly/3diQW4c>

17. <https://bit.ly/2VKsu3K>
 18. <https://bit.ly/2x12f0H>
 19. <http://www.hermanosenelcamino.org/>
 20. <https://bit.ly/399LXPS>
 21. <https://www.gob.mx/defensorasyperiodistas>
 22. <https://espacio.osc.mx/>
 23. <https://bit.ly/2KDozAN>
 24. <https://bit.ly/399H2hQ>

25. <https://bit.ly/2J6m2OK>
 26. <http://www.frayjuandelarios.org/>
 27. <https://www.pastadeconchos.org/>
 28. <https://bit.ly/3bfFPHr>
 29. <https://bit.ly/2QAWnSa>
 30. <https://bit.ly/3cBRssX>
 31. <https://consorciooaxaca.org/>
 32. <https://bit.ly/2UqjE5>

33. <https://bit.ly/2x5du8o>
 34. <http://bit.ly/2yrL0Wc>
 35. <https://bit.ly/2RZxDUF>
 36. <https://bit.ly/3cCC0g7>
 37. <http://alianzasierrama-dre.org/es/>
 38. <https://bit.ly/2V5JwMX>
 39. <https://bit.ly/2U6jP0H>
 40. <https://bit.ly/3bw3kFN>

Defending the defenders: 20 years walking with PBI

By the Cerezo Committee Mexico (Comité Cerezo México)

In the year 2000, after more than 70 years of being governed by just one political party – the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) – the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) succeeded in having their candidate, Vicente Fox Quesada, sworn in as president of the republic. Since then, Mexico has lived through what for many has proven a failed transition to democracy.

In that year, Mexico attempted to move out of a profound socio-political crisis that had been unleashed by the appearance of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) on 1 January 1994, then aggravated by the emergence of the Popular Revolutionary Army (Ejército Popular Revolucionario, EPR) in June 1996. Both groups were the concrete expression of a serious questioning of capitalism, and particularly the previous 12 years of neoliberalism and its disastrous consequences for the Mexican people.

The work of a broad-based social movement – comprised of peasants, indigenous peoples, grassroots groups and human rights defenders (HRDs) – helped determine the victory for President Vicente Fox. The movement was at the vanguard of denouncing the PRI's serious human rights violations, and it was this movement that dared to question the PRI's power monopoly in the first place.

However, it paid a high price for its audacity. Between 1994 and 2000, the PRI had a policy of systematic repression against the popular human rights movement. The rise of the EZLN and the EPR was the basis for the re-imprisonment of individuals for political reasons, as well as torture, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial executions and forcible disappearance. The pretext was national security, and the alibi was to link HRDs to insurgent groups to justify their subsequent repression. The PAN's election win brought hope for change, a hope that HRDs saw collapse in 2006 with the large-scale repression seen in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico State and Oaxaca.

The year 2001 saw the assassination of Digna Ochoa y Plácido in October, and our own arrests in August, as well as our subsequent denunciations of torture, flawed legal processes and the conditions in national maximum-security prisons. For many HRDs, these incidents were not strong-enough warning signs to understand that, in essence, the policy of repression against human rights defenders remained unchanged, although the scale had been reduced.

The mass repressions of 2006 were a violent return to a reality that many believed was in the past. President Felipe Calderón's six-year term (2006–12) brought a strengthening of neoliberal economic policies, and with it an intensification of serious human rights violations. We can say that most human rights organisations were in shock for the first two years of Calderón's mandate. How

6 had the situation changed so rapidly? And why?

For the Cerezo Committee Mexico, threats and harassment between 2001 and 2012 showed us the need to establish new, broad protection mechanisms for HRDs. The significant increase in requests we received from human rights organisations and workers for security workshops was also evidence of this need – we taught around 35 security workshops in one year. Organisations who worked with migrants or in defence of territory were the first hit by the Calderón government's terror strategy.

In parallel to our workshops, we decided to participate in the establishment of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Mecanismo de Protección para Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas): we pushed for that initiative. The government of President Enrique Peña Nieto, which ended in 2018, taught us that neither the Protection Mechanism nor laws that defended HRDs on paper were enough. As long as the Mexican State had no political will, serious human rights violations would continue to be committed, despite a change of ruling party and its political statements.

This entire journey has been taken alongside PBI, which has accompanied us since February 2002. They have given us the capacity and the experience to affirm that our context has become more complex, as has the situation for human rights defenders. We don't live under the same repressive policy that operated between 2006 and 2018, but neither can we claim that repression against working HRDs has ended. We human rights defenders undertake our work in the contradiction between ongoing neoliberal economic policies, and the opposition to or cancellation of some of these policies by members of the current government.

Photo: Antonio Cerezo and a member of PBI during the activities organised by the Cerezo Committee Mexico for the International Week of the Detained Disappeared, Mexico City, 2019



“PBI arrived in Guerrero at a critical moment of State violence”

In the year 2000, at a time when there was still no international presence in the state of Guerrero, PBI began its first accompaniments of local human rights organisations. Five years had already passed since the first petitions for PBI's presence were made by the International Service for Peace (SIPAZ), established in Chiapas as a result of the Zapatista uprising in 1994. In December 2003, PBI started accompanying the members of “Tlachinollan” Human Rights Centre of the Montaña (Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña “Tlachinollan”) in their new office in Ayutla de los Libres. Abel Barrera Hernández, anthropologist and Tlachinollan director, tells us about PBI's arrival in Guerrero and these 17 years of shared work.

What was the situation of public order in the state of Guerrero in the 2000s?

They were critical times for Guerrero. We saw a supremely violent panorama where the army was taking control. We observed many cases where the army tortured members of the general populace in the belief that they were members of the guerrilla groups. In 1998, the Charco massacre occurred: 11 young indigenous people executed by soldiers in Tlatlaya. It was a context where State violence was becoming institutionalised and the authorities needed to understand that they couldn't use force that way.

In this context, how was the permanent presence of an international organisation in Guerrero received?

PBI's arrival disconcerted the state authorities: they didn't understand the importance of an international human rights organisation in terms of the security situation for human rights defenders (HRDs). They considered it an intrusion into public life and an inconvenient presence.

Did the Tlachinollan team have any concerns about PBI's arrival?

We didn't, but the local intelligence [department] were very crude and said that NGOs [non-government organisations] financed violent groups – they stick to that line even today. We observed [them take] a position that broadly disqualified international NGOs, which they accused of interference. There were several campaigns to discredit international organisations.

What was PBI's role in Guerrero during those years?

Being in the field, being a direct witness and documenting human rights violations. At that time, Valentina and Inés⁴¹ and the OPIM were facing many obstacles as they sought justice. They faced serious risks in denouncing the army – the army was (and continues to be) untouchable.

On an internal level, Tlachinollan held regular meetings with PBI that provided a lot of feedback: within our network of human rights organisations in Guerrero, we succeeded in constructing a new narrative. We managed to show another perspective in the struggle for human rights. PBI's lived testimony helped others to understand that our work wasn't about confrontation with the army but about fighting for dignity and life.

How did PBI offer support to Tlachinollan?

PBI helped us establish contact with State authorities. From the beginning, we saw PBI's presence in Mexico City as important to conduct advocacy at a national and international level. They documented our accompaniments in Chilpancingo, Tlapa [de Comonfort] and the Costa Grande and transcended the borders of Guerrero and of Mexico. The international tours were very important for disseminating our work. We felt protection and increased awareness of our work in Europe.

What contributions has PBI made over these 12 years of accompaniment?

We held many work meetings in Chilpancingo, but there was also a lot of sharing and friendliness. We had a comfortable, fluid relationship. We shared important moments, like birthdays, and that way [the PBI volunteers] experienced our food and festive spirit in the state of Guerrero.

We also haven't forgotten that it was former PBI volunteers who opened Tlachinollan's international team. PBI has played an important role for us in terms of the struggle for justice and truth, but because we feel like family.



Photo: Accompaniment to the Human Rights Center “la Montaña Tlachinollan” during a visit of UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Michel Forst, Tlapa de Comonfort, 2017

“I always told the men, ‘You shouldn’t fight with your wives – fight the government!’”⁴¹: Obitilla Eugenio Manuel.

Obitilla Eugenio Manuel defends the rights of the Tlapanec people in the state of Guerrero and founded the Organisation of the Me’phaa Indigenous People (Organización del Pueblo Indígena Me’phaa, OPIM). In November 2019 she received Mexico’s National Human Rights Prize in recognition of her “significant trajectory in effectively promoting and defending” basic human rights. PBI accompanied Manuel between 2005 and 2011.

How and when did you start defending human rights?

It started when I was almost 12 years old. I saw that justice wasn’t served against those who committed crimes. I could especially see the violence against women. The women were very afraid and kept quiet because they were abused by their husbands. Also, a couple of years before there had been an epidemic; among the 50 people who died were two of my siblings. We hadn’t been vaccinated because the government didn’t care about us.

What pushed you to make a commitment to human rights?

My dad, although he had no money, always wanted me to study and learn Spanish so I could teach it to my community and help defend them. When I was in primary school, he decided to go with me to the seat of the municipal government, Ayutla de los Libres, to find me a house so I could study. I remember that we got up at one o’clock in the morning and walked until 9am, because there was no highway.

My father cared a lot about women’s rights. He said, “Women have the right to speak and participate in the Assembly just like

Photo: Accompaniment to the community of Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero, 2009



their husbands, not only to have children.” I was 13 years old, and for the first time I attended a workshop on women’s rights in the National Indigenist Institute (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI), now the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas, INPI).

How did you show your commitment in your community?

I participated in the Assemblies in my community. At the beginning they didn’t pay attention to me, then I started to bring together the women in my family and later in my community: at 17, they treated me as if I were lawyer. I mediated between men and women. I always thought that fighting was a strategy to divide us and I advocated for helping, on being united and on working together for ourselves. I always told the men, “You shouldn’t fight with your wives – fight the government! We need medicines, a highway, teachers so our kids can get ahead....”

When did you realise that you were a human rights defender?

It was in 1998 when 16 Me’phaa men from the community of Camalote were forcibly sterilised. I supported them in their claims before the Health Ministry and the government. I had to justify who I was before the authorities and that was how I defined myself, as a human rights defender. In 2000, we saw the need to form an organisation to train the community about its rights. And after that, I became more committed with the case of Valentina Rosendo Cantú, who was raped by soldiers on February 22nd, 2002⁴². I was the translator [interpreter] because she didn’t speak Spanish. And from that, I received many threats because I was reporting against soldiers and I was fighting for women’s rights.

What do you think of PBI’s accompaniment?

I am very grateful to PBI because it is very useful. Maybe there are no words to describe it. I like how they work: their weapon was their T-shirts. I think it’s important that PBI acts as an international presence, that they speak with local, state and federal authorities. Very few of us have this awareness [about human rights], so we can change this country and it can function properly.

Obitilla has always worked to demand the right to a dignified life free of violence in the Mountain of Guerrero. She continues to be subjected to threats, surveillance and harassment because of her work defending indigenous rights. In February 2019 she was the victim of kidnapping and forced disappearance with her colleague Hilario Cornelio Castro.

⁴¹. On 16 February 2002, Valentina Rosendo Cantú, a 17-year-old Me’phaa indigenous woman, was raped during an interrogation by Mexican army personnel in her community of Barranca Bejuco. One month later, Inés Fernández Ortega, also a Me’phaa indigenous woman, was also sexually assaulted when soldiers invaded her home in Barranca Tecuani.

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec: Accompaniment in a territory threatened by “clean” energy

Located in the south of Mexico, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec crosses both Oaxaca and Veracruz. The Pacific and Atlantic Oceans are separated by only around 200km, making this Mexico’s narrowest point. Development projects have been operating in the area since the early 20th century, and PBI has accompanied human rights defenders protecting land and territory – and facing threats for their opposition to such projects – since 2011.

“The isthmus, commercial route for the world”

In 1907, General Porfirio Díaz opened the commercial route connecting the ports of Salina Cruz (Oaxaca) with Coatzacoalcos (Veracruz), publicised as “The isthmus, commercial route for the world”. With the opening of the Panama Canal, international traffic moved to other coastlines, but the dream of connecting these two ports was never abandoned: the government of Enrique Peña Nieto called it the “Salina Cruz Special Economic Zone”. The current government is promoting the “Multimodal Interoceanic Corridor”, a project which incorporates the “modernisation of the Isthmus’ railway [...] to be able offer services for cargo, transport, storage, packaging and various logistical services; infrastructure will be strengthened for highways, rural roads and the airport network; and a gas pipelines will be built to supply businesses and domestic consumers. [...] free zones will be created to attract investment from the private sector”.⁴²

As well as being a very attractive location for international traffic, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the region with the greatest potential for generating power through wind energy in Mexico. Today, inhabitants of the town of Unión Hidalgo are facing down the construction of a new wind farm called Gunaa Sicarú (Central Eólica Gunaa Sicarú), with approximately 300 wind turbines.

Business interests vs. the needs of local peoples

Despite President Andrés Manuel López Obrador affirming that authorisation has already been obtained from indigenous communities for the Development Plan for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (Programa para el Desarrollo del Istmo de Tehuantepec, PDIT)⁴³, various communities and social organisations claim that it was a simulated consultation:

“In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec we experience a serious contradiction: on the one hand, rich land; on the other, many of its people, mostly indigenous, live in poverty. This situation is a result of the pillaging promoted by governments for the benefit of transnational companies. The best example of this is the wind farm megaproject, where more than four billion US dollars have been invested, but this substantial investment has not benefited the lo-

cal people while it has generated immense profits for European electricity companies.”⁴⁴

The communities visited by the 2019 International Mission to Observe and Document the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Oaxaca, organised by the Oaxaca Consortium (Consortio Oaxaca), expressed the same opinions. (PBI Mexico, together with other national and international organisations, accompanied the Mission.)

Unión Hidalgo

“If they build the Trans-Isthmus Corridor, they’re going to ask us for more energy... the roads that used to be ours now have checkpoints and gates. People who used to live from hunting and collecting firewood no longer have access to that land,” said one community member in Unión Hidalgo. He spoke with us in the public information meeting for the regional environmental impact statement (manifestación de impacto ambiental, modalidad regional), which PBI attended at the request of accompanied organisation Código DH.

The community members already understand the impacts of wind farms. In 2004, private owners signed land-rental agreements with the company DEMEX; this was followed by the construction of the first wind farm in Unión Hidalgo, “Piedra Larga Fase I” and Piedra Larga Fase II”.⁴⁵ The signing of those contracts and the resulting construction were conducted without respect for communal land management, and without free, prior and informed consent. The residents did not receive any information in their native language (Zapotec), nor did they receive information on the social, environmental and economic impacts the project would bring. Opposition was immediate, but amid evictions and acts of aggression by Oaxaca State Police, DEMEX’s project went ahead.

Photo: Land and Territory Women Defender from Unión Hidalgo, Oaxaca, 2019



Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Popoluca, Náhuatl and Afromexican” (National Development Plan 2019–2024, p. 54). PBI’s translation <https://bit.ly/2Uu4Urc>

^{45.} Declaration “The Isthmus is Ours”, signed by various social, trade-union and community-based organisations in Oaxaca. PBI’s translation

^{46.} <https://bit.ly/2vDBT49>

^{42.} Her demands for justice for Rosendo Cantú reached the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), which in 2010 found the Mexican State guilty for its responsibility in these instances of human rights violations.

^{43.} National Development Plan 2019–2024 (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2019-2024), pp. 53-54. PBI’s translation

^{44.} “In a consultation conducted through regional assemblies, authorisation for the project was obtained from the region’s peoples: the Biniza or Zapotec, Ayuuk or Mixe, Zoque, Ikojts or Huave,

new Gunaa Sicarú Wind Farm. Community members claim that the land and territory would be seriously affected because the project will incorporate approximately 300 turbines, to be installed in natural reservation areas with a significant presence of fauna, palm groves and aquifers. The community has suffered harassment, criminalisation, threats, acts of intimidation and attacks, as well as the closure of roads leading to agricultural and pastoral lands and the burning of palm trees (which many families depend on for their subsistence).

Óscar Marín Gómez, the region's communal property representative, identified the major challenge: communal lands are being handed over to wind-farm and mining megaprojects through leases. In addition, Marín Gómez emphasised that the damage the wind-farm companies had caused to more than 30,000 hectares of land must be evaluated before granting further concessions. He also pointed out the need to investigate the corruption that permitted those concessions in the first place.⁴⁷

San Dionisio

The General Assembly of the Town of San Dionisio del Mar describes the Barra Santa Teresa Wind Farm (Parque Eólico Barra Santa Teresa), located on the sandbar of the same name, as: "the second-biggest in the world. And of course it will have extremely serious consequences for our municipality: attacks on our primary source of survival, which is fishing; attacks on the primary food of the ethnic groups of the region, the Huave (Ikojts) people;

and massive destruction of the flora and fauna in this area[.P]rimarily mangroves and marine birds; desecration of the ancestral and religious ceremonial sites in the area; visual and noise pollution for the neighbouring settlement in Pueblo Viejo."⁴⁸

The Assembly's iron-willed opposition has stopped machinery from entering to begin building this project since 2012.

"The enemy isn't among us; it's over there, waiting for us to divide ourselves," says Isaúl Zelaya López.⁴⁹ And it is the social fabric which is one of the aspects most affected by the wind farms' arrival. Despite the fact that San Dionisio is one of the few towns which has successfully avoided the farms' construction, it has cost them conflict with their neighbouring town, Santa María del Mar, and the political instability of nine years without a mayor.

The residents of Unión Hidalgo have likewise suffered rejection and vilification by their neighbours who have rental contracts with the wind-farm companies. "For me, progress is when unity and brotherhood grow, when women can govern beyond our hearths [...] women are the basis of this town. Development is when I can walk safely at night," say the women of the Unión Hidalgo collective Indigenous Women Defending Life (Mujeres Indígenas Defensoras de la Vida).⁵⁰ The group established a community kitchen to contribute to rebuilding the town and its social fabric.

PBI will continue to accompany the communities of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as they search for progress.

47. Statements made at the public event, "The importance of the communal defence of land", commemorating 55 years of the Presidential Resolution on Communal Property in June 2019. PBI attended at the request of the organisation ProDESC

48. Press release, General Assembly of the Town of San Dionisio del Mar, 17 August 2012.

49. Statement made during the 8th Anniversary of the General Assembly of the Town of San Dionisio del Mar. PBI attended at the request of Código DH, which accompanies the Assembly.

50. Statements made during the International Mission to Observe and Document the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Oaxaca, on 18 October 2019.

Photo: Accompaniment to a field trip to visit wind farms with human rights defenders and members of the diplomatic corps, Oaxaca, 2013



An alliance to defend indigenous peoples' human rights in the Sierra of Chihuahua

Since the opening of PBI's office in Chihuahua in 2013, we have established connections with various civil society organisations, including the Sierra Madre Alliance (Alianza Sierra Madre, A.C., ASMAC) which we have formally accompanied since 2018.

ASMAC works to accompany indigenous communities in a region where high risks permanently threaten the wellbeing of those who defend their lives and territories. Chihuahua is one of the states which has had, over the last decade, one of Mexico's highest murder rates of human rights defenders (HRDs).

In recent years, PBI has opened spaces for direct interactions with international actors. In addition to increasing the recognition of ASMAC's work, this has allowed organisations abroad to monitor and assess the implementation of the government's measures to protect the life and integrity of Mexico's HRDs. "PBI helps us do our work with greater confidence. Also, through collaborating with PBI we have seen a change in the attitude of the authorities, and an increase in their openness [to our work]," says Ernesto Palencia, ASMAC's lawyer.

As part of a tour organised by PBI in March 2017, Isela González – ASMAC's director – spoke before the National Human Rights (Comisión de Derechos Humanos, CNDH). She raised her concerns about the elevated risks experienced in Latin America by HRDs focusing on land and environmental issues. In addition, José Ángel Rivas, ASMAC's field coordinator, participated in a tour to Washington, DC in 2018 with other HRDs from Guatemala and Honduras. There, Rivas met with US senators, authorities and allied organisations. He explained to them the context impacting his work to defend land and territory rights in Chihuahua.

For ASMAC, these advocacy tours have meant that the issues faced by the Sierra's communities are included on the agenda of international public opinion. Their problems can be debated and monitored, and the organisation has been able to strengthen its links with its donors – which gives them a stronger sense of ownership in the fight for dignity and territory.

Although some members of ASMAC have protective measures authorised by the Protection Mechanism, they have not seen convincing actions taken to resolve the structural causes of violence against HRDs. For this reason, the organisation believes the pre-



Photo: Isela Gonzales, ASMAC director, during a visit of UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Michel Forst, Chihuahua, 2016.

sence of international observers is fundamental to "give the work visibility, and also for the presence of media; for the opportunity to be recognised by private and public organisations, and institutions within Mexico and abroad," as Ernesto Palencia puts it.

Despite their exhaustion and the dangers they face, according to Isela González, "the presence and accompaniment of civil society organisations are fundamental for the Sierra's communities."

It is also important to consider that changing routines in order to protect themselves, as those who defend the communities' dignity have to do, "creates uncertainty and psychological stress", according to Susan Navarrete, coordinator of ASMAC's organisational development.

Despite the difficulties and risks of their work, the ASMAC team continues to hold ambitions whose development will be supported by PBI. One is to contribute to the implementation of the principles of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition for the relatives of HRDs who have been assassinated, as well as the serious human rights violations against indigenous communities. Others are to "achieve the recognition of the communities' ancestral lands", as Palencia says, and to support the communities in exercising their autonomy as a guarantee of their self-determination.

51. <http://bit.ly/256foxa>

52. <http://bit.ly/31xDxjl>

53. <http://bit.ly/2i9U6B0>

Maricela Vázquez, lawyer with the Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre, participated in a PBI-led advocacy tour in Europe

Between September 16th and October 4th, 2019, Peace Brigades International (PBI) invited Maricela Vázquez, lawyer with the Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte, PDN) on an advocacy tour in Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

In Switzerland, Maricela Vázquez met with UN special entities like the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to provide information on the case of Adrián Favela and Adriel Ávila. The two men were forcibly disappeared in 2012. According to eyewitnesses, several individuals in civilian dress, carrying shotguns and identifying themselves as ministerial police, arrived at the Favela Márquez home and removed the men by force. The case still remains under investigation and, according to the PDN, its process has been marked by a failure to comply with legal requirements within established timelines, and a lack of progress and actions that could locate the two men.

In Maricela's speech before the 42nd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva⁵¹, she insisted that access to justice in Mexico is made more difficult when "70% of [human rights violations] have been committed by the armed forces". She highlighted the alarming situation of violence and its impacts before the council, and shared the statistic that 24 human rights defenders (HRDs) and 15 journalists had been murdered during the current administration.

In Brussels, a delegation of HRDs – including PDN – outlined the human rights situation in Mexico before members of the European Parliament⁵². They focused on forcible disappearance, torture, femicide, the situation of vulnerable groups such as HRDs and migrants, and the criminalisation of the defence of land and territory.

Maricela highlighted the fact that torture continues to be practised as an investigation method, and asked the European Union to be more vigilant over the implementation of the Istanbul Protocol within the EU–Mexico agreement, in order to prevent and eradicate torture. She emphasised that one cause of the ongoing use of torture in Mexico was the lack of harmonisation of the nation's laws on forcible disappearance and torture.

In addition, Maricela called on the European Union to undertake more preventive actions in light of the attacks against HRDs and invited the EU's Mixed Parliamentary Committee to visit to Ciu-

dad Juárez. In a European parliamentary debate⁵³, Greens Euro-deputy Anna Cavazzini shared her opinion that the EU could put more pressure on Mexico in regard to human rights, and proposed the establishment of economic-sanction mechanisms in case of non-compliance.

Meetings were also held with European institutions such the EU's European External Action Service (EEAS) and seven permanent representatives of states in Brussels.

During the European tour, Maricela met with the ministries of foreign affairs in the UK, Switzerland and the Netherlands. She asked them for technical assistance in the forensic identification of disappeared people, training for Mexican forensic experts and monitoring of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Mecanismo de Protección para Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas).⁵⁴

In addition, Maricela met with the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights to ask for support in the case of Adrián Favela and the security situation facing the Paso Del Norte Human Rights Centre. She also met with law societies and international organisations⁵⁵ such as REDRESS⁵⁶ or the International Commission on Missing Persons⁵⁷.

Maricela also participated in public events such as the International Forum on Peacebuilding in Mexico, organised by the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP), Panel for Mexico (Taula per Mèxic) and Serapaz.⁵⁸



Photo: Maricela Vázquez in the International Forum on Peacebuilding in Mexico, Barcelona, 2019

54. <http://bit.ly/2S5LBEO>

55. <http://bit.ly/2OB4u0c>

56. <https://redress.org/about-us/>

57. <https://www.icmp.int/>

58. <https://bit.ly/2XWJNRP>

Accompanying Coahuila's State Exhumation Plan: Achievements and obstacles for civil society



Photo: Accompaniment to exhumations, Coahuila, 2019

The Fray Juan de Larios Diocesan Centre for Human Rights (Centro Diocesano para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios, FJDL) is one of the organisations that accompanies the State Exhumation Plan (Plan Estatal de Exhumaciones, PEE) in Coahuila, representing collectives of family members of forcibly disappeared people. At the request of this organisation, which we have accompanied since 2014, PBI has also acted as an international observer of PEE since it was established in late 2017. PBI has also accompanied the exhumation days⁵⁹, held in different parts of Coahuila on a predetermined calendar, and the Forensic Coordination Panels (Mesas de Coordinación Forenses, MCF), which monitors all aspects of the Plan.

On December 19th, 2009, a group of relatives of disappeared people in Coahuila called a press conference to report the disappearance of 21 people in the state that year. This was followed by months of attempts to meet with authorities to get information about the cases and asking authorities to speak publicly on the issue of forced disappearance. Since then, these relatives joined forces and formed the collective United Forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila, FUUNDEC) – this then extended across the country and FUUNDEC-Mexico was formed.

After years of perseverance in communicating with authorities, in November 2017 the relatives had a win: a state law was passed which sanctioned PEE. Its aim is to seek and effectively identify

people who have become victims of forced disappearance in Coahuila by coordinating and organising with both authorities and civil society. This Plan is accounted for in the Law on Forensic Processes for the Localization, Recovery and Identification of Persons (Ley para la Localización, Recuperación e Identificación Forense de Personas) and has broad-based support from the federal government as well as international organisations like the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), among others.⁶⁰

In addition, it has been strengthened by groups such as the Autonomous Working Group (Grupo Autónomo de Trabajo, GAT), which comprises specialists and academics chosen by the collectives of relatives to represent them in dialogue with the authorities, thus acting as a mediator.

Both international observation and support are vital, according to the relatives' groups. A member of V.I.D.A. Group told PBI, "We feel the accompaniment. It is important that people abroad realise what is happening in Mexico. Thank you for being here to see that [the Plan] is done right."

The State Plan is a pioneering initiative in Mexico, and came into being thanks to the perseverance of the collectives (now numbering seven) working to locate the over-1700 people who have

59. <https://bit.ly/2V5JwMX>

60. <https://bit.ly/2wt1Ypg>

been disappeared in Coahuila since 1995. The collectives are active participants in the Plan, with both a say in meetings and votes in its Coordination Panels. One example is the implementation and the role of organisations in the State Search Commission (Comisión Estatal de Búsqueda, CEB). This is an autonomous committee whose aim is to monitor searches undertaken for people who have been disappeared but not located, and to coordinate actions among the authorities who seek, identify and locate these individuals. The collectives have been given the opportunity to name the coordinators and specialists who manage the CEB, which has also offered them great support in return.

Despite the advances made through the Plan, it continues to face many obstacles which complicate its effective implementation. These include the lack of multidisciplinary teams dedicated exclusively to the Plan (comprising anthropologists, forensic scientists and odontologists, experts, etc.); irregularities in exhumation pro-

cesses; and especially, significant delays in identifying and handing over the recovered bodies, because of this suite of issues.

Blanca Martínez, director of Fray Juan de Larios, confessed, "We won't finish for another 40 years." Since the Plan began, only 87 bodies have been exhumed, with only ten of these identified and handed over to their families.

In addition, the PEE faces serious challenges, such as implementing an extraordinary mechanism for special forensic identification for the state of Coahuila. As the PEE is an emblematic process which could potentially be replicated in other Mexican states, as well as being a considerable step forward on the issue of forced disappearance, it is essential that Mexican authorities solidify their commitment to the issue in concrete steps and with the necessary resources.

Accompanying the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization in their fourteen year struggle to recover 63 miners

"Pasta de Conchos is very important because it will set a precedent for how mining should operate, how workers should be treated, and [show] that companies should think twice before opening mines", Cristina Auerbach⁶¹

Every February 19th for the last 14 years, the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization (Organización Familia Pasta de Conchos) remembers the tragic explosion of the Pasta de Conchos mine in Coahuila which cost 65 miners their lives. After years of struggle, hope and effort by human rights defenders (HRDs), Mexican authorities are finally planning to recover the bodies of the 63⁶² miners still in the mine.

For the families, this episode ruptured their family and community dynamics, as well as creating an unfillable gap which remains to this day. In addition to the painful absence of their loved ones, they feel the pain of not being able to offer a dignified burial to their fathers, brothers, friends and husbands who are still beneath the earth. For the first time in years, however, the miners' families hope to finally offer their relatives a fitting farewell.

In their search for justice, and after exhausting all legal remedies available in Mexico, the case was brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2010. In March 2018 it was finally accepted, and was one of the first to implicate a mining company.⁶³ As detailed in the acceptance documents,⁶⁴ the Mexican State's responsibility is manifest in its failure to guarantee the miners' fundamental rights (like the right to life), as it did not force mining company Grupo México to respect safety norms.

This had a fatal result for the mine's workers and led their families to a point of no return.

The case reached a decisive stage in early 2019: after several months of dialogue with relatives,⁶⁵ the Mexican Government committed itself to designing a work plan⁶⁶ to recover the trapped miners' bodies and return them to their families. This would allow the miners' families to reach closure through "attending to aspects such as justice and holistic reparations".⁶⁷

The first steps to recover the miners' bodies have already been realised. A committee of international experts has been formed, with combined experience in coal mining and mining-related accidents. The committee approved a recovery attempt, and the Mexican Geological Survey initiated technical studies (still underway) to assess the most appropriate method. It will then select a mining company to undertake the recovery.⁶⁸

This case is considered emblematic in the history of human rights struggles, and marks the way for future cases related to dangerous working conditions. It highlights that labour rights are an inseparable aspect of human rights, even though the topic rarely comes before the IACHR.

⁶¹ <https://bit.ly/2UsbbUf> Our translation.

⁶² In the week of the tragedy in 2006, only two bodies were recovered <https://bit.ly/3cz5n2O>

⁶³ <https://bit.ly/2W187GH>

⁶⁴ <https://bit.ly/2WYyJHPE>

⁶⁵ <https://bit.ly/2WVDvI0e>

⁶⁶ <https://bit.ly/3bfNPZ6>

⁶⁷ <https://bit.ly/2WVDvI0e> Our translation.

⁶⁸ <https://bit.ly/2xOJVYv>

Paradoxically, the Pasta de Conchos case has not been led by trade unions, but has reached the IACHR only through the persistence of HRDs and the miners' families; the case impacts the strategic interests of major economic and political actors. Cristina Auerbach, director of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization, has continually been subject to threats and defamatory media statements for her work defending the rights of the miners and their relatives.

Because of the risks Cristina Auerbach faces,⁶⁹ PBI Mexico has accompanied both Auerbach and the Pasta de Conchos Family

Organization since 2014. As part of this relationship, Auerbach and other organisation members have participated in advocacy tours to Europe, presenting the issues of their coal-mining region and of mining workers across the world.

While PBI Mexico celebrates the success of this long-running struggle, we insist and demand that national and local authorities comply with their obligation to ensure that the HRDs involved in this case can continue to conduct their legitimate human rights work with their physical and psychological integrity intact.

⁶⁹. <https://bit.ly/2xRVoa3>

Photo: Accompaniment to Cristina Auerbach, director of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization in the Carbon zone, Coahuila, 2017



Ten years accompanying the CSO Group, observing the progress and missteps of the Mexican Protection Mechanism

Pushed for a decade ago by Mexican civil society and international bodies, the introduction of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Mecanismo de Protección para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas)⁷⁰ was a significant step forward for human rights in Mexico. However, the Mechanism continues to demonstrate notable deficiencies and concerning failures in the high-risk context faced by Mexican human rights defenders (HRDs).

The first initiatives occurred in 2008, when a range of Mexican civil society organisations (CSOs) began meeting to create a work plan to confront the hostile climate experienced by HRDs and journalists. In 2010, the group began developing a proposal for a mechanism to present to the Mexican Government, defining the aims, roles, structure and civil-society participation in the future Protection Mechanism. The Group of Civil Society Organisations for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Espacio de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas⁷¹), known as the CSO Group, arose from this process and officially launched in 2012.

In response to this civil-society initiative, monitored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Mexican Government organised a forum called “Towards a Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defenders”, a positive first step towards the creation of a Mechanism. Unfortunately, it lost momentum due to changes in government⁷². Nonetheless, facing strong political pressure in Autumn 2010, a Protection Mechanism was created for journalists alone, abandoning the idea of an instrument for both journalists and HRDs. Throughout this period, PBI Mexico’s role was crucial – as an organisation conducting international observation and as an external consultant – due to its long experience in protection.

In 2011, as discussions with Mexico’s executive branch and the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) continued without desired results, the OSC Group decided to take the legislative route, proposing a draft law in the Senate. After an intense period of advocacy, the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists was approved unanimously in Congress and the Senate, and was signed into law by then-President Felipe Calderón on June 22nd, 2011.⁷³

Today, ten years after the bill was passed into law, the Mechanism continues to offer insufficient protection to Mexican HRDs and journalists. Between December 2018 and late-August 2019, at least 24 HRDs and 15 journalists were murdered across the country; three of those killed were covered by the Protection Mechanism⁷⁴. In October 2019, during the “Regional Dialogue between Authorities, Experts and Civil Society”, specialists and members of the OSC Group and the international community raised their concerns about the lack of a holistic public policy on protection, one year in to the new federal government.

Enrique Eguren, protection specialist from the organisation Protection International⁷⁵, was a panellist in the event. He emphasised the fact that the roots of the issue are deeper than mere structural issues. According to Eguren, the framework of the Protection Mechanism has several weaknesses, such as its perception that HRDs are “objects of protection” not “subjects of law”. In addition, he highlighted that “mechanisms are reactive, tactical and attempt to respond to situations by authorising protection measures; but the Mechanism cannot impact on the root causes that generate risk, and therefore its reactions to that risk are condemned to continue indefinitely”.

We recognise the good will of the current government, which, through the Interior Ministry’s Undersecretary for Human Rights, Migration and Population, Alejandro Encinas Rodríguez, has publicly accepted that the Mechanism has failings. The Interior Ministry’s Undersecretary asked the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico (OHCHR/M) to conduct a diagnostic study into the Mechanism’s operations⁷⁶. This found that, “among other suggestions, the mechanism could be more effective if it had more and better-quality resources, more efficient internal processes, and better coordination with other authorities”. These and other findings were replicated in the 2019 report which PBI Mexico prepared with the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)⁷⁷.

Now in 2020, we await a genuine commitment from the government to implement a holistic public policy on protection by following up on the recommendations from OHCHR/M’s diagnostic study, as well as through the revision of the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. These steps would make the Mechanism an appropriate response to the risks which continue to face Mexican HRDs on a daily basis.

70. <https://bit.ly/3eVgLM>

71. <https://bit.ly/2KpO0pb>

72. <https://bit.ly/3arlvIH>

73. <https://bit.ly/2KpSLIZ>

74. <https://bit.ly/2QyAy5Q>

75. <https://bit.ly/2QzOTPt>

76. <https://bit.ly/2xcbU47>

77. <https://bit.ly/3eLZotl>

78. <https://bit.ly/2xcbU47>

79. <https://bit.ly/2xHf54D>

Recommendations

PBI Mexico recommends that the Mexican Government:

- Implement the recommendations of the diagnostic study by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico (OHCHR) on the functioning of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Mecanismo de Protección para Defensores de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas).⁷⁸
- Design and implement a comprehensive policy of prevention and protection for human rights defenders (HRDs), based on the seven principles proposed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/31/55)⁷⁹ and in consultation with civil society organisations.
- Ensure that justice is carried out in the cases of HRDs and journalists who have been murdered, faced threats or been criminalised for their work.
- Revise the laws and policies which restrict the freedoms of association, expression and assembly on a state and national level, and avoid the criminalisation of HRDs.
- Design schemes for effective cooperation between the federal, state and local levels of government, which would allow for the development of consistent, coordinated, swift and comprehensive protection responses, while ensuring that the protection measures authorised are based on an accurate risk analysis that has considered issues of gender and intersectionality.
- Strengthen the external and internal supervision mechanisms of the National Guard (Guardia Nacional) to ensure their work is conducted in accordance with national and international human rights standards. Urgently expand and implement appropriate training in human rights and, in particular, in interactions with vulnerable populations such as migrants. To ensure the civilian character of these forces, decouple the army's public security corps from the National Guard, for example, and name civilian authorities at its head.
- Regarding migrants, ensure they receive treatment in line with their human rights and international laws on the protection of refugees, including preserving family units and not returning those at risk or facing persecution to their countries of origin. Ensure that HRDs working with migrants can complete their work within a national legislative framework that does not criminalise or obstruct their right to defend the rights of others, nor obstruct their access to migrants in shelters or state migrant holding centres.
- Promote differentiated strategies for protection, incorporating analyses based on gender and intersectionality, for women HRDs and other vulnerable HRD groups, such as defenders of land, territory and the environment.
- Guarantee the timely fulfilment, without irregularities, on indigenous and peasant peoples and communities to the right to consultation and to free, prior, informed and culturally appropriate consent, through effective consultation mechanisms prior to the design of projects and the granting of concessions. Respect indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, particularly in regard to economic development in their territories, as is foreseen in Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution.

- Fully implement the General Law on the Forced Disappearance of Persons, Disappearances Committed by Individuals and the National Missing Persons System (Ley General en materia de desaparición forzada de personas, desaparición cometida por particulares y del sistema nacional de búsqueda de personas). Ensure that both HRDs who accompany collectives of relatives of forcibly disappeared people and the collectives themselves can carry out their work without being subjected to threats.

- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.⁸⁰

- Ratify Articles 31 and 32 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,⁸¹ in order to recognise the competency of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and examine individual communications from or in favour of victims, as the Mexican Government has committed to do on various occasions.

- Ratify the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, in regard to the protocols for environmental protection.⁸²

PBI Mexico recommends that the international community:

- Provide recognition and political, social and economic support to the work undertaken by HRDs, contributing to the construction of a narrative which underpins their indispensable work in society and aims to end their increasing criminalisation and stigmatisation.

- Contribute to the fight against impunity, given this is one of the principal causes that favours the recurrence of incidents against HRDs. Ensure access to independent, fair and impartial justice for the victims of human rights violations and combat the increasing number of laws which limit or annul the right to defend human rights.

- Foster the security and protection of those who defend human rights, paying particular attention to the specific protection needs of those who defend land and territory, communities and women HRDs. Improve reactive measures and implement new preventative measures in regard to protection, in line with the conclusions of the EU Council.⁸³

- Ensure that the presence of foreign investments and businesses does not foment subsequent human rights abuses and violations, in line with the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights⁸⁴ and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises⁸⁵.

- Ensure the collaboration, cooperation and complementarity of the mechanisms of the United Nations, the Inter-American Human Rights System and national protection systems.

- For more detailed recommendations and proposals for concrete actions, see PBI Mexico's article "70 years of human rights and 20 recognising defenders".⁸⁶

⁸⁰. <https://bit.ly/2VR8WLa>

⁸¹. <https://bit.ly/3cCEkDO>

⁸². <https://bit.ly/34ZjifS>

⁸³. <https://bit.ly/3avjsbB>

⁸⁴. <https://bit.ly/2RZc3X>

⁸⁵. <https://bit.ly/2RXoFqK>

⁸⁶. <http://bit.ly/2MgrF0W>

PBI Mexico in Numbers

In 2019, PBI Mexico provided international accompaniment to 13 organisations and two civil society coordination spaces in Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Mexico City.

PBI's accompaniment – which includes physical presence; national and international advocacy; awareness raising; training in security, protection, and the creation and maintenance of support networks; facilitating spaces for dialogue between HRDs and key actors in their protection – benefits more than 70 Mexico civil-society organisations (CSOs) and 396 HRDs, of whom more than 60% are women human rights defenders (WHRDs). The work of these people and organisations benefits at least 25,870 people, who are thus secondary beneficiaries of PBI Mexico's efforts. This can have a nationwide impact on Mexico's human rights situation.

OAXACA: Committee for the Integral Defence of Human Rights (Código-DH); Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Oaxacan Equality (Consortio Oaxaca); Father Alejandro Solalinde and the staff at 'Hermanos en el Camino'; Services for Alternative Education (EDUCA)

GUERRERO: Association of Relatives of Detained-Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations (AFADEM); 'Tlachinollan' Human Rights Centre

CHIHUAHUA: Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre; Sierra Madre Alliance (ASMAC)

COAHUILA: Saltillo Migrant House; Fray Juan de Larios Diocesan Human Rights Centre; Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre; Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation

MEXICO CITY: Comité Cerezo, Mexico; Espacio_OSC: Space for Civil Society Organisations; Focal Group on Business and Human Rights



Photo: Members from North team review table of Contingency Plan for defenders of human rights, Chihuahua, 2019

PHYSICAL PRESENCE

Accompaniment, observation and monitoring	88
Meetings with Mexican CSOs	204
Emergency and preventive activations	8

ADVOCACY

Advocacy meetings with Mexican authorities at local, state and federal levels	106
Advocacy meetings with representatives of the international community (diplomatic corps, foreign governments, parliamentarians, multilateral systems)	71
Awareness raising through thematic publications, articles, letters, communiqués and monthly bulletins	76
Participation in events in Europe, North America and Mexico to raise awareness the situation of human rights defenders	13

TRAINING

Training workshops in security and protection; creation and maintenance of support networks; and analytical spaces	23
Training of trainers workshop	1
Capacity-building activities	11

CREATING SPACES FOR DIALOGUE

Organisation and organisational support for international advocacy tours to Europe and North America	6
Facilitating spaces for dialogue between CSOs and key actors in the Mexican government and/or international community	36

PBI Mexico: 2019 Financial Report

In financial terms, 2019 was dominated by an attempt to stabilise PBI Mexico’s finances, particularly the need to rebuild a financial reserve. Previously we had had a few years of our reserve being eaten away, with negative consequences. This issue had been noted in 2018, so we made a strong effort to limit our expenses, especially in the second half of the year. This was achieved without reducing our activities, and we maintained our focus on protecting human rights defenders and organisations in Mexico.

One of 2019’s challenges was related to the project’s structure, with the first half of the year marked by unexpected changes to staff and team volunteers. Investment in fundraising was maintained, reinforced by collaboration between various members of the project team. This area continues to demand significant commitment from our general manager, the financial coordinator and the institutional strengthening coordinator.

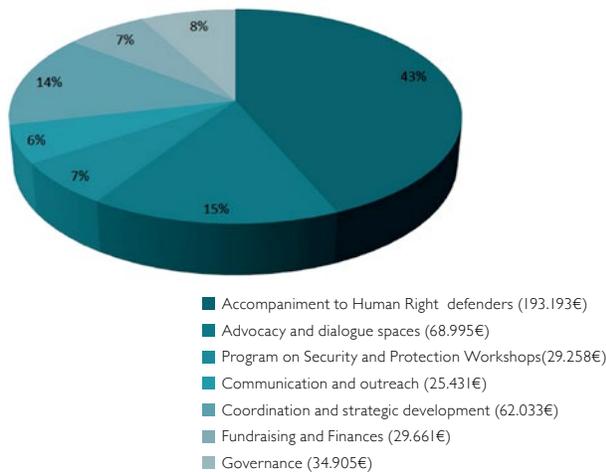
The structure of PBI Mexico’s financing changed dramatically through the increase in public funds and financing. This occurred at the same time as the reduction of income from foundations, and the disappearance of funds from embassies based in Mexico.

After the recent positive development of increased multiyear funding, we have observed that fewer countries which host PBI Mexico support organisations that are now funding us. We also continue to face the challenge of seeking funding sources which have a lower administrative burden.

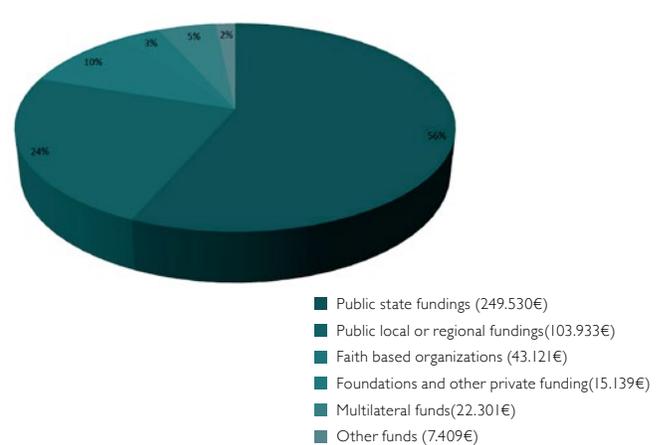
The provisional accounts for 2019 (not yet audited) show a shortfall of 0.5%, a result which mirrors our efforts to limit costs in the second part of the year.

With the support of its donors, PBI Mexico aims to replenish its financial reserves and seek long-term stability.

EXPENSES



INCOME



The financial information in this report is provisional and has yet to be audited. All income and expenses given in euros.

PBI Mexico thanks all our donors for their support, which has allowed us to maintain our work and activities in 2019.

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non-governmental organization with nearly 40 years of experience in international accompaniment, with presence in Mexico since 1999. PBI's goal is to protect the political space for people and organizations that promote human rights in a non-violent manner, and who suffer repression for their legitimate work.

PBI only works at the request of local organizations and does not replace efforts by Mexican human rights defenders to promote respect for human rights. Rather, it merely seeks to support their initiatives by standing next to them.

PBI regularly visits conflict areas, distributes information, and dialogues with civil and military authorities, as well as with human rights organizations and other civil society actors in Mexico. To call international attention to the situation in Mexican, and to help create the necessary conditions for human rights defenders to continue with their work, PBI also maintains dialogue with the international community and international organizations such as the United Nations, disseminates information, and generates support from abroad in order to ensure the safety of Mexican defenders.

More information about PBI's work in Mexico can be found at:
www.pbi-mexico.org comunicacion@pbi-mexico.org



PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL
Promoting Non-violence and Protecting
Human Rights Since 1981
www.peacebrigades.org