

PBI Colombia • Newsletter #19 • October 2014

# PBI Colombia



**Twenty years  
of accompaniment**

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# Editorial



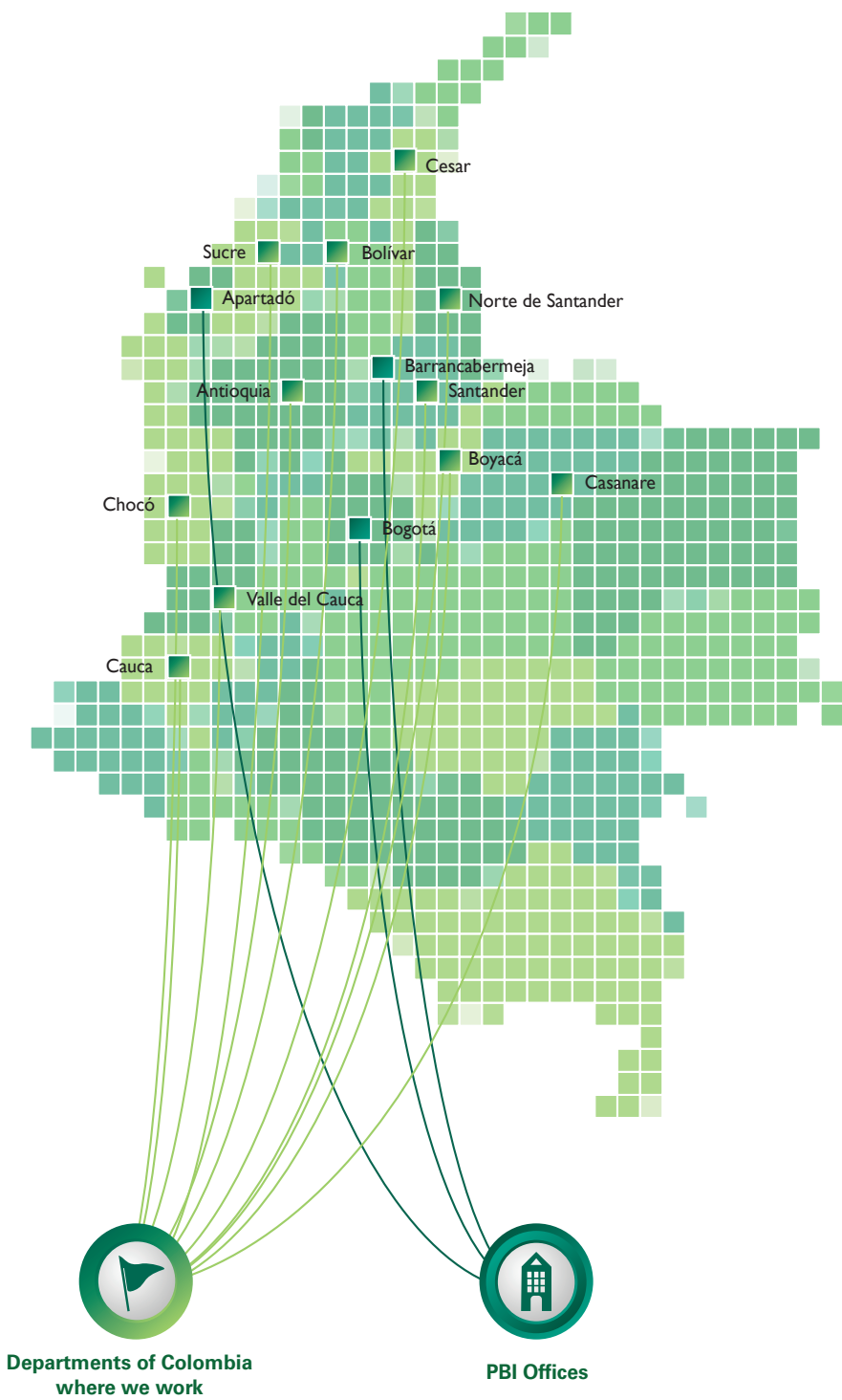
In 2014, Peace Brigades International marks 20 years of work in Colombia. During this time, more than 450 Peace Brigades field volunteers (brigadistas, as we call ourselves in Spanish) from across five continents have passed through our teams in Colombia, leaving their mark and helping the organization, characterized by its non-hierarchical structure, to grow. Above all, these volunteers have been inspired by the human rights defenders and organisations that give their all each day to make this country a place of peace and one in which the truth is known about what has occurred over six decades of internal armed conflict.

In our work as international observers in Colombia over the last twenty years, we have sought to use our accompaniment to create a safe space for the human rights defenders and communities that demand their rights on a national and international level.

Our hope is that international accompaniment, as the only option for nonviolent human rights protection, will cease to be necessary because Colombia achieves a just and sustainable peace - whether or not an agreement is reached in the current peace talks in Havana. We envision, in other words, a Colombia capable of creating true peace: without impunity, with social justice and guarantees of non-repetition, and with a State that can guarantee its citizens their security and the full exercise of their rights.

Looking back over these last two decades, we have only gratitude and admiration for the people and organisations we have accompanied, whose generosity is so apparent to us after each accompaniment we carry out. We have laughed and celebrated together, but we have also cried together for the people we have lost, for the injustices and the forced exiles. Each brigadista who has passed through PBI Colombia carries in her heart a small piece of Colombia. Many have stayed to live and work in in Colombia with other organisations, and the vast majority have made defending human rights a way of life. With this publication we hope to present, in broad strokes, the work of the Colombia Project, and to thank those who support our day to day work in Colombia as well as those who, as brigadistas, have formed part of PBI Colombia.

# Where PBI works



1. **Presence** of international observers and international companions as protection in the face of threats received by members of human rights organisations and accompanied communities.



2. **On-going dialogue** with civilian and military authorities in Colombia, the diplomatic corps in Colombia, international organisations, and different authorities in Europe and North America in order to express concern and educate different sectors regarding the protection of individual, organisations, and communities accompanied by PBI.



## PBI Colombia's central areas of work

3. **Regular production and distribution** of informational material in order to inform the PBI Colombia support network about the current situation in the country, the protection needs of organisations and communities, and to give voice to the concerns of those organisations and communities.



4. **Support for rebuilding the social fabric** through workshops for human rights and community organizations in which PBI provides tools for security and emotional support.



**1. The struggle against impunity and the search for truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition.**



**2. Business and human rights.**



**3. Promoting peace.**



**PBI Colombia's  
thematic priorities**

# Organisations accompanied during the last 20 years



Inter-Church  
Commission for  
Justice and  
Peace (CIJP)

Social Corpora-  
tion for Commu-  
nity Advisory and  
Training Services  
(COS-PACC)

Association for  
Social Research  
and Action  
(NOMADESC)

Claudia Julieta  
Duque  
(Journalist)

Committee in  
Solidarity with  
Political  
Prisoners  
(FCSP)



Colombia Family  
Members



Nydia Erika  
Bautista  
Foundation  
(FNEB)

Jorge Molano  
(Attorney)

San José de  
Apartadó Peace  
Community



Association of  
Guamocó  
Agro-ecological  
and Mining  
Brotherhoods  
(AHERIMIGUA)



Corporation for  
Judicial Freedom  
(CJL)



Grassroots  
Women's  
Organisation  
(OFP)

Centre for  
Research and  
Popular  
Education  
(CINEP)



Regional  
Corporation for  
the Defence of  
Human Rights  
(CREDHOS)



José Alvear  
Restrepo Lawyers'  
Collective  
(CCAJAR)

Luis Carlos  
Pérez Lawyers'  
Collective  
(CCALCP)

Peasant Farmers'  
Association of  
the Cimitarra  
River Valley  
(Acvc)



National  
Movement of  
Victims of State  
Crimes  
(MOVICE)

Humanity  
Standing

Sisma Mujer



Magdalena Medio  
Victims' Association  
(ASORVIMM)



Cauca Valley  
Peasant Farmer  
Coordination  
(CCVC)



Humanitarian  
Action Corporation  
for the Coexistence  
and Peace of  
Northeast Antioquia  
(CAHUCOPANA)

Association for  
Alternative  
Social  
Promotion  
(MINGA)

Grassroots  
Training  
Institute  
(IPC)

Cacarica  
Community for  
Self-determination,  
Life, and Dignity  
(CAVIDA)

Manuel Cepeda  
Foundation

Association of  
Family Members  
of the Detained  
and Disappeared  
(ASFADDES)

### **A trip to the Peasant Farmer Reserve**

During a verification mission, the farmers show some bullets that they found embedded in the trees and the ground, very close to their houses.



## **Images of international accompaniment**

PBI frequently accompanies the Peasant Farmer Association of the Cimitarra River Valley, in the Peasant Farmer Reserve Zone of the Cimitarra River Valley.





Photo: Alejandro González





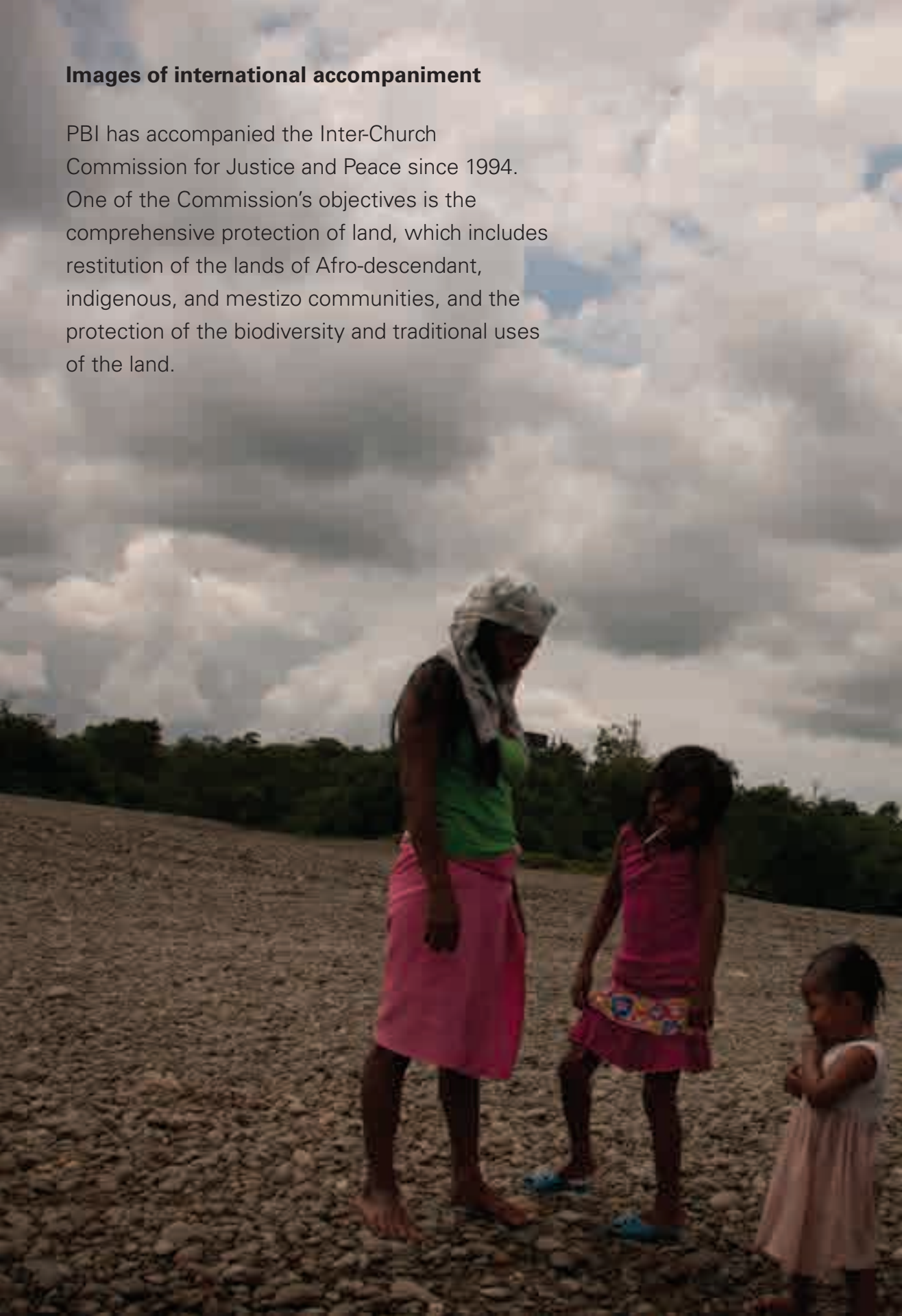


The objective of the Peasant Farmer Reserve Zone (*Zona de Reserva Campesina* - ZRC) is to promote and stabilise the small-scale farmer economy, and overcome the causes of the social conflicts that affect them. The ZRC of the Cimitarra River Valley extends for 550,000 hectares, 370,000 of which are Forest Preserve. The ACVC works for the comprehensive defence of human rights, focusing their work in the ZRC and on sustainable development, agricultural projects, and in the areas of education and health. Their efforts focus on organisational, educational, and political work.



## **Images of international accompaniment**

PBI has accompanied the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace since 1994. One of the Commission's objectives is the comprehensive protection of land, which includes restitution of the lands of Afro-descendant, indigenous, and mestizo communities, and the protection of the biodiversity and traditional uses of the land.





### **Nonam Indigenous Community**

Due to the armed conflict and the fear it generated, the community abandoned its village, Santa Rosa de Guyacán, in 2010, surviving in crowded conditions in the sole shelter in Buenaventura for one year.







After their return in 2011, the Nonam Community created the humanitarian reserve zone, a community initiative to be able to continue resisting in the territory despite the pressures of the armed conflict. To achieve this objective, the community members fence in the areas in which they are living and prohibit entry of any armed actor, whether legal or illegal. These zones are based on the principle of distinction between the civilian population and combatants, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. The Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace has accompanied and assisted the Nonam Community during their displacement and return.



### Images of international accompaniment

Pueblo Bello: On the night of 14 January 1990, approximately 60 members of the paramilitary group "*Los Tangueros*" (The Tangos) arrived at Pueblo Bello and forced the residents from their homes. Afterwards, they took them to the central town plaza, forced them to lie face down, and selected 43 of the farmers, whom they gagged and took away.



de dignidad caminando hacia la Justicia



14 de marzo de









Despite the suffering, the family members have kept up a tireless struggle to find the remains of their loved ones, understand what happened to them, and seek justice against those responsible. After years of fruitless searches and legal proceedings before different authorities and tribunals, searching for truth and justice that could not be found, in 1997 the representatives of the victims denounced these events before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. In January 2006, the Inter-American Court found the Colombian state guilty for violating the right to life, physical integrity, guarantees of justice and freedom. PBI accompanies José Daniel Álvarez, son of one of the disappeared persons. (Photos: Alejandro González/PBI Colombia).



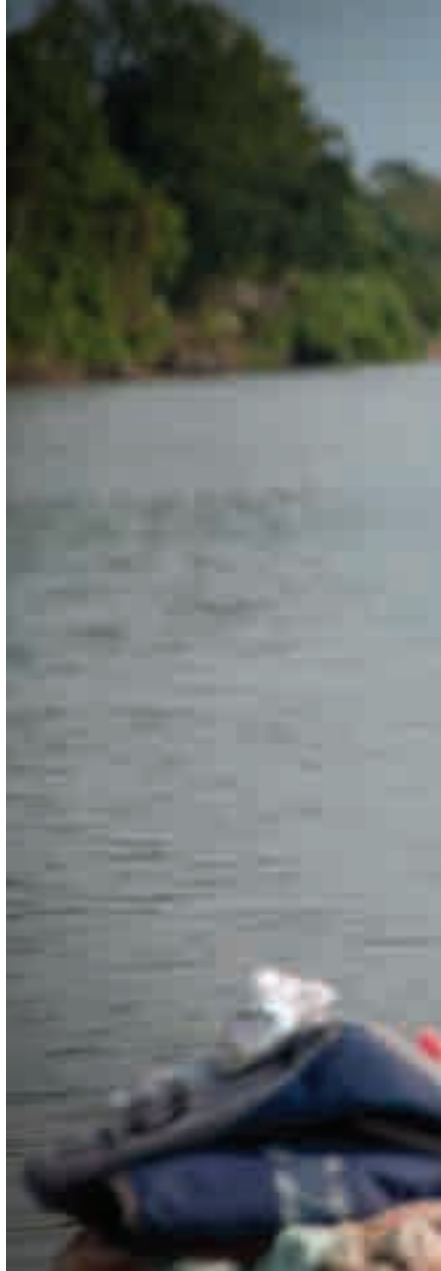


## **Images of international accompaniment**

The Afro-descendant communities located on the banks of the Naya River are close to having good news: receiving titles to their land.









Thanks to the leadership and perseverance of the Community Counsel, the land titling process has finally begun in the Afro-Colombian lands of the Naya. This process is pursuant to Law 70 of 1993 and in compliance with Colombian Constitutional Court Sentence T-909 of 2009, which recognises the collective rights of Afro-descendent communities based on ancestral occupation of the land. The Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace began accompanying the Naya Community after its displacement in 2001. The Commission's and the community's request is for the application of the precautionary measures granted to the community in 2002 by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.

# Colombia: a new challenge














The Colombia Project was an ambitious one for PBI: from the beginning a decision was made to establish teams in both Bogotá and in Barrancabermeja. The first group of volunteers arrived in Colombia on 3. October 1994.

## Colombia: a new challenge

# PBI's first steps

By Luis Enrique Eguren, former PBI volunteer from the Spanish State and founding member of PBI Colombia

 It was a quick call from Francesc, full of hope, something like: “The money is in place– it’s a green light! We’re going to Colombia!” Through the efforts of Werner and PBI Germany, several international foundations linked to the churches had contributed to cover the costs of a PBI exploratory mission in Colombia.

The purpose? To examine whether the experience of PBI in Guatemala, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and other countries could translate to this setting.

We had received various written requests, among others from the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES) and Eduardo Umaña, a prestigious lawyer who was later killed in 1998.

From the beginning, we saw that the gravity and complexity of the human rights situation in Colombia would require a careful and reflective approach, especially since there had not been any widespread experience with international accompaniment in the country.

We were trying to understand, in short, if the presence of internationals would be capable of protecting people who were working in the defence of human rights from threats and attacks, and also under what conditions and with what strategies this would

be possible.

A few months later we arrived in Bogota to begin what we already assumed would be two intense months of interviews, research and travel: a profound education in the broadest sense of the word.

The team was composed of four people from different countries, each with experience in PBI: Francesc (Spain), Janey (USA), Marcela (Colombia) and Quique (Spain).

We were warmly received by the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace, who made a provisional space for us in their office, a sort of base of operations.

They helped us with initial contacts that, little by little, became a broad and diverse network. From Bogota our travels extended to Barrancabermeja, Barranquilla, Meta and Sucre.

Looking back, I think for the four of us it was one of the most intense periods of our lives. We learned about a country that was beautiful, complex and immersed in different conflicts at the same time.

We had the incredible fortune that hundreds of people were willing to share with us their analysis, opinions and direct experiences, from members of NGOs, communities, and social organisations to members of the Government, security forces, embassies, etc.



From the beginning, we saw that the gravity and complexity of the human rights situation in Colombia would require a careful and reflective approach.

I can also say that we laughed, we cried, we grew as people. Colombia became a part of our minds and our hearts.

After finishing the mission, it took several weeks to write the report, which in the end was over two hundred pages long, in which we concluded that international accompaniment could play an important role in Colombia in certain contexts and under certain circumstances. Based on the report, PBI deliberated and finally made the decision to open a project in Colombia, followed by fundraising efforts.

The idea of accompaniment was well received by the aid agencies and we were soon able to open a small support office in London, train volunteers and carry out a lot of other work.

In November we opened the first team in Bogotá, shortly followed by the opening of a team in Barrancabermeja. Of course we felt an enormous responsibility.



By: John Lindsay, volunteer from USA, member of Exploratory Committee

It was tough, the war was tough, remember that it was in December 1993 when Pablo Escobar was killed. Back then the war in Medellín with the drug gangs was at its height, there was a feeling of denial, at least in the United States. There were groups of Colombians abroad working on human rights issues but internationally they didn't receive the same amount of attention as later. I remember that when the exploratory team returned many reports from the U.N. were published, I had an entire box of them and I knew that around ten political assassinations were occurring on a daily basis, but it was difficult psychologically to confront because there wasn't, at least in the U.S. and possibly in Europe, a political context in which to talk about it.



By: Xabier Zabala Bengoetxea, volunteer from Basque Country (Spanish State), 1994-1996

Barrancabermeja was going through a period of relative calm and now we can say with certainty that it was the calm before the storm. It was a city with an established balance, with a well-defined border between the eastern neighbourhoods and the rest of the city, much more separated than some neighbourhoods. In this context, it was difficult to firm up the accompaniment work since the human rights defenders weren't living with a sense of imminent risk, and they joked with us about our impatience to pin down our work."





Since 1994, 456 volunteers have participated in PBI Colombia



Volunteers have come from 31 different countries.



65% of volunteers have been women.





A photograph of two people riding a motorcycle on a paved road. The person in the driver's seat is wearing a plaid shirt and jeans. The passenger is wearing a light-colored t-shirt, blue jeans, and a tan baseball cap with a circular logo. They are both carrying large black backpacks. The motorcycle has a yellow license plate with the text 'YDE-330'. The background shows a lush green field, a line of trees, and a clear blue sky. The lighting suggests it is late afternoon or early morning.

# Peaceful resistance

The people PBI has accompanied have in common a commitment to human rights, the fight against impunity and the dream of a Colombia with peace and social justice. We present to you the stories of some of the courageous women and men that have dedicated their lives to the noble cause of human rights.



# Doña Brígida

**D**oña Brígida is one of the founders of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community. In 1997, 84 families decided to take refuge through this International Humanitarian Law mechanism to declare the civilian population outside the conflict.

She tells us, "It has been very difficult work, with lots of displacement and lots of deaths." She calls herself a convinced revolutionary, and adds, "I'll be that way until I die."

True to her commitment to non-violence she does not harbour any hate or desire for revenge, despite having suffered the loss of several of her children.

Through her artwork, Doña Brígida promotes the historical memory of the Community. "We are building peace here,

cultivating community, working together in a united way. This is the best peace there is."

When we talk with her about PBI's anniversary she smiles and in her expression you can see the many memories reflected. "Thanks to international accompaniment we have been able to advance our struggle. PBI has accompanied us since the beginning. I'm very grateful for all the support you've shown us over the years, from being with us here physically in the Community in good times and bad, to the possibility of participating in international speaking tours to tell the story of what has happened to us here."



# Arley Tuberquia



It's a privilege to have PBI directly accompany the Community for 20 years. Over those years there have been so many moments that have brought us laughter and that have brought us pain... At times there have been situations where Peace Brigades volunteers have shown true courage. It gives me goose bumps to think that someone accompanying us is willing to give so much of him or herself. The Peace Brigades volunteers find themselves in situations in which even we, the Community members, are afraid. It's impressive to see a volunteer pass that threshold of fear and continue to accompany."

Arley laughs as he tells stories about different Peace Brigades volunteers riding mules. "Even for the people in the Community, riding a beast [of burden] across the river with water up to their neck and mud all around—if

it's hard for us, just imagine for PBI. Not just anyone can grab your beast and head up the mountain. You have to appreciate that effort."

When we ask about the future he becomes serious. It's difficult, he admits, "to look back at all those years of resistance, the achievements and the pain, when it seems that what is to come will be much more difficult in this society where individualism reigns and not the Community's ideals of the collective, the communal."





# César Jerez

**F**or César Jerez the challenges do not erase his smile. Despite the pain of suffering the loss of so many colleagues, and conscious of the needs of the communities he accompanies, he carries out his work with the joy of someone who knows he is fighting for a just cause.

César became a part of the *Campesino*<sup>1</sup> Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC) in the late 1990s during the large *campesino* marches in the Magdalena Medio region. The participants had fled the violence and were denouncing paramilitarism and demanding social investment.

The ACVC was formed to defend the *campesino* population, demanding land restitution and property rights for those who had been working the land for decades. César became a member of the team that formulated a development plan for the region.

During the second term of President Alvaro Uribe Velez he was forced into exile due to the judicial persecution suffered by the ACVC.

However, he returned to Colombia and assumed responsibility for the promotion of the *Campesino* Reserve Zone (ZRC) within the ACVC. This work has exposed him to every kind of accusation and put him in the eye of violent actors. Yet, he continues to travel throughout the region to work together with *campesinos* to create conditions of basic dignity.

1. *Campesino* is often translated as “campesino” or “family farmer”.



# Mario Martínez

**M**ario Martínez lives between urban and rural life. Over the last four years, as president of the *Campesino* Association of the Cimitarra River Valley, he has had to spend much of his time in Barrancabermeja.

But above all Martínez is a *campesino* who joined the ACVC as president of the local Community Action Board (JAC) in the Cimitarra Valley hamlet of Dos Quebradas — land targeted by investment capital to exploit natural resources and implement mono-crops like African palm.

The *campesinos* in this region have created the *Campesino* Reserve Zone, a legal construct that recognizes collective ownership and prevents commercialization of the land. The struggle for the ACVC is to maintain the ZRC whose members face constant accusations of being guerrilla collaborators.

Martínez recounts how paramilitaries have killed numerous *campesinos* and how the Army killed 23 people in the reserve between 2005 and 2010, presenting them as guerrillas killed in combat, in what are known as “false positives.”

Currently, the principle problem is arrest warrants issued against *campesinos* for rebellion. Martínez himself was jailed for this offense in 2008 but they were unable to substantiate the charge and he was released after 7 months.

In this context, PBI is “the only defence we have had here,” he says. “The State has had a lot of respect for international accompaniment. We have been able to work in rural communities where we are vulnerable and, fortunately, with PBI here, nothing has happened to us.”



# Leonardo Jaimes Marín

**L**eonardo Jaimes Marín has dedicated his entire life to the defence of human rights. He began as a seminarian with the Claretians in 1988 and began accompanying the *campesinos* of El Carmen de Chucuri a year later. He has continued ever since, never abandoning “the profound option of a life in service of marginalized groups,” as he describes his work.

Between 1991 and 1994 he was the coordinator for the *campesino* shelter in Barrancabermeja. This was a rewarding time, but also full of risks. He was threatened and attacked until he was finally forced to leave.

He was one of the founding members of the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace. Since January 2007, he has been a lawyer with the Santander branch of the Political Prisoner Solidarity Committee (FCSP), and

five years ago he created, together with other human rights defenders, the People’s Legal Team (Equipo Jurídico Pueblos). In addition, Leonardo and Father Javier Giraldo were two of the first people to receive the PBI exploratory committee that visited to Colombia in 1994.

Today he combines his work as a criminal law professor at the Industrial University of Santander (UIS) with work in human rights defence, and assures us he will continue side by side with the victims until impunity is overcome.





# Franklin Castañeda

**T**he violence and student killings that took place at the University of Atlántico in 2000 when Franklin Castañeda was a student there have marked his life and he has dedicated himself to human rights work ever since. He knew what it was like to receive threats from an early age, watching his parents confront them for their work as trade unionists and human rights defenders.

However, in 2006, threats intensified against him, and after an attack and an attempt to disappear his brother, he had to leave his native Barranquilla for Bogotá. Since March 2011, he has been the president of the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee (FCSP) which he has formed a part of for 14 years.

On balance he is positive about his career as a human rights defender. He points out, "this work is full of small rewards almost daily:

achieving someone's release or defeating policy proposals that sought to expand military jurisdiction."

However, there are also many losses and sacrifices. "I've lost many friends and at times you realize you are in a kind of jail—the jail is your armoured office, your armoured car with two guards."

Even so, he hasn't lost his optimism about the future: "I believe the fight for peace, for democracy, for human rights in Colombia is long, but someday we will get to a point where at least the human rights movement won't be so necessary."



# Elkin Ramírez

**E**lkin Ramírez was one of the founding members of the Corporation for Judicial Freedom (CJL) in 1993. More than two decades later he continues in the daily struggle to defend land against new models of development being implemented in Antioquia.

For Elkin, supporting these resistance initiatives is the most gratifying work he has experienced as a human rights defender. In fact, in addition to being the treasurer for CJL's board of directors, he is responsible for accompanying community organizing processes.

This work has had consequences for his personal life. For six years, Elkin, Father Javier Giraldo, and the ex-Human Rights Ombudsman for Urabá, Miguel Angel Afanador, were under legal investigation for bringing the denunciations made by *campesinos* from

the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which alleged abuses committed by the Carlos Bejarano Muñoz Engineers Battalion (17<sup>th</sup> Brigade).

This work, critical to his role as a human rights defender, provoked Colonel Nestor Iván Duque, the Battalion commander, to accuse the three men of perjury, slander and false accusation, resulting in legal proceedings against them.

In 2011, the Prosecutor General terminated the investigation, but over many years the possibility of a conviction hung over their heads and they had to dedicate time and energy to their own defence, limiting their work accompanying victims.



# Liliana Uribe

**L**iliana Uribe was also part of a group of friends in Medellín that joined together two decades ago to offer their legal knowledge in human rights defence to the community. Those were times when many young people faced prosecution, accused of being militia members [for guerrilla groups]. The Corporation for Judicial Freedom began its journey by taking on these cases.

Little by little they expanded their work outside of the urban area into Eastern Antioquia, the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community, and the Department of Chocó, especially the Lower and Middle Atrato regions. At the same time they were promoting the Seeds of Liberty Human Rights Collective (CODHESEL), a coalition of Antioquian organisations.

Liliana was forced into exile after taking on representing victims in the paramilitary killings of Basque international worker Iñigo Equilez

and Colombian priest Jorge Luis Mazo in 1999.

Upon her return, she was one of the first lawyers to denounce the systematic practice of extrajudicial killings that would later be known as “false positives.”

With these crimes, as with the forced disappearances in the hamlet La Esperanza of the Carmen de Viboral municipality and the many cases regarding human rights violations against Atrato communities, Liliana has fought impunity by bringing legal action before international entities like the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.





# Jorge Molano

**J**orge Molano's career as a human rights lawyer began working with the prestigious lawyer and humanist Jose Eduardo Umaña Mendoza (killed in 1998). Later he would continue his work with several organisations until becoming an independent lawyer and legal advisor to NGOs in 2005.

Currently, he continues to work on some of the most emblematic cases in Colombia's recent history, including representing family members of the victims in the 1985 Palace of Justice siege, as well as Operation Dragon and the Sintraemcali trade union case in which political leaders in Valle de Cauca were the targets of a campaign to discredit them and assassination attempts.

He represents family members of those killed in the 2005 massacre in the San Jose de Apartadó Peace Community. He also represents the family members of Jhonny

Silva, a student allegedly killed by members of the police force's Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) at the University of Valle during a student protests in 2005. Finally, he is working on the La Java, Manizales case, in which two young men were victims of extrajudicial killing by members of the Army, and another young man survived as is now under State protection.

Molano was honoured in 2010 by the United States Department of State for his work human rights defence work. However, the renowned lawyer faces serious and on-going threats, for which he has been granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. PBI has accompanied him since 2009.



# Berenice Celeyta

**B**erenice has been a human rights defender for 28 years. It all began on 6 November 1985, when Berenice was on her way to an interview at the Externado University in Bogotá, and while in transit through downtown, was witness to the Palace of Justice siege. As assistant to the human rights lawyer José Eduardo Umaña, Berenice helped create a team to investigate human rights violations committed during the siege, and thus she began her work in defence of human rights.

Looking back on the last 28 years of work, what has been most difficult for Berenice to understand has been the *modus operandi* of the victimizers: the cruel forms of inflicting harm, the land grabbing, the crimes – and not just crimes against humanity but the crimes against cultural heritage, against the country's natural resources.

However, in the face of all this cruelty, the most valuable thing Berenice has discovered is the resistance of the communities, which, in spite of persecution, harassment, terror, have continued to demand their rights, continued to organize themselves, to construct memory, to work for their rights and for the environment.

Berenice is rather pessimistic about future possibilities of achieving peace. Her concerns centre on the two issues not being discussed in Havana: the current development model and the security model. With regards to violations of human, social, cultural and environmental rights, Berenice believes that there has not yet been any transformation, and that the long list of land-grabs continues to grow. For her, then, it is urgently necessary to begin a debate about foreign investment and privatization, and that such debates should include not just victims of the conflict, but all of Colombian society.



# Reinaldo Villalba

“We must justify our time on the Earth.” This quotation, which Reinaldo Villalba has selected as the motto for his life’s work, is from Jaime Pardo Leal, a university professor and one of the most influential figures in Reinaldo’s life.

Reinaldo, a lawyer and humanist, fulfilled one of his dreams when he entered the José Álvarez Restrepo Lawyers Collective (CCAJAR) twenty-two years ago.

Since then, he has coordinated CCAJAR’s criminal caseload, and has held all the possible positions in the organisation’s leadership: treasurer, vice president, president, and, currently, secretary general.

For him, the most gratifying part of being a human rights defender for all these years is being able to dedicate his life to transforming unjust situations and, above all, to share in the

pain and joys of the victims in their fight for justice.

Reinaldo recognizes that he and his colleagues are alive and still working today thanks to international solidarity. In this way, PBI’s accompaniment has been vital, in all senses of the word: in addition to contributing to his physical security, the accompaniment has contributed to his emotional health and that of his family.





# Eduardo Carreño

**T**he most difficult and complex case on which this distinguished human rights lawyer has had to work is that of the Trujillo Massacre. “That is a very complex situation given the fact that all the factors of criminality continue to be active in that municipality,” he says.

Despite thirty-five years working as a lawyer, and having faced serious threats, Eduardo recognizes that, “as a human rights defender and as a lawyer, I feel fully satisfied with the work I’ve done, in particular having won cases against the Colombian state before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights.”

CCAJAR works with the full spectrum of victims of state crimes, regardless of their political affiliation. “In addition,” explains Eduardo, “we work in training and capacity-building with victims, and in training law

interns so that, in the future, law students are prepared to be human rights defenders.”

For Eduardo, who has known so many PBI field volunteers over the years, he loves to reunite with former volunteers when he does speaking tours in the U.S. or Europe, where they welcome him and continue to accompany him.



# Fabián Laverde

**F**abián began his work as a human rights defender in 1994, when he was still in high school, motivated by the crisis in the coffee industry that year. Later, he joined Asopema (Association of Small and Medium Farmers of Tolima) and, given his leadership roles, suffered persecution and threats that led him to abandon his home and displace to Bogotá.

In the capital, as a result of the suffering caused by being forced to leave his rural home, he made contact with various organisations that supported him. In this way he continued to build his repertoire as a human rights defender and to discover new aspects of human rights work.

In 2004 Fabián began his work with COS-PACC (Social Corporation for Community Advisory and Training Services), accompanying communities and supporting people who were

suffering in a way that he understood first hand.

The work with victims of multinational corporations, with indigenous communities and with family members of the disappeared has meant that COS-PACC and its members have suffered numerous cases of illegal surveillance and threats.

This situation led the organization to seek international accompaniment from PBI, both in order to bring more visibility to its work as well as to have opportunities for dialogue with the Colombian government.

Currently, Fabián's work with Asopema on reconstruction of the social fabric in Tolima is particularly gratifying, as it allows him to return to his roots and his home.



Photo: Charlotte Kesl

# Claudia Julieta Duque

**W**hen she was just 14 years old, Claudia Julieta Duque heard her father speak of the torture to which he was subjected as an adolescent, bringing her face to face with human rights issues.

Claudia Julieta's work as a human rights defender began during her third semester at university, when she began to work as an investigative journalist. Her career has always focused on issues of violence, impunity, armed conflict and human rights violations. "The worst part is, I can't imagine doing anything else!" she says.

However, this work has come at a high cost. "I have had to sacrifice my tranquillity, limit my freedom, fight to protect my daughter and my family, have been subjected to psychological torture – and thus became a direct victim myself – and deal with constant stigmatization

for my work," Claudia Julieta explains. "The presence and accompaniment of PBI in my life are invaluable.

I am sure that without PBI I wouldn't be able to do many of the things that I do. PBI's work supports mine, and is done with such respect; I will always be grateful and be an admirer."

Claudia Julieta doesn't think about the future: "I've accustomed myself to life day to day, to not become attached and to always have a Plan B. And while I see this country building a future full of sophisms, a pact for disarmament with an intolerable level of impunity, I see civil society clinging to the hope for peace."





# Esteban Nieves

**E**steban Nieves made the decision to leave Barrancabermeja when the conditions to continue working and even living there became unsustainable. Two of his colleagues from Sintradit (At-Large and Temporary Workers Union) had already been assassinated by paramilitaries in 1999.

The threats increased in subsequent years, and in order to not befall the same fate, in 2002 the three remaining members of the union's leadership decided to escape to Bogotá. "Sintradit fell apart," remembers Esteban.

But he couldn't stand Bogotá's cold for very long. Two years later, Esteban returned to Barrancabermeja and began to work with Asodesamuba (Association of Displaced People Settled in Barrancabermeja), because, he explains, "I myself came from suffering displacement." At the same time, he joined CREDHOS (Regional Corporation for the

Defence of Human Rights), the organization that had helped Sintradit file all the police reports about the violence exercised against it.

In 2010, Esteban joined the leadership of CREDHOS, and is now its treasurer, as well as serving as its human rights promoter in the Bajo Simacota region.

For this human rights defender, PBI's accompaniment is essential because, he says, "it protects us from the armed group, permitting us to work for the benefit of the communities."



# Iván Madero

A decade of exile, and an ocean separating him from home, did not disconnect Iván Madero from the problems of his country, perhaps because, for him, exile was another form of the struggle, and he always hoped to return.

Now that he has returned, he has taken up the leadership of CREDHOS, the organization that Iván Madero joined just a few years after it was founded, and which he had to leave in 2001 in order to save his life.

CREDHOS was founded in 1987 in Barrancabermeja, during the start of the paramilitary assault on the Magdalena Medio region, with the goal of promoting, defending and protecting human rights and International Humanitarian Law. Iván joined its board of directors in 1993, in the context of dozens of political assassinations, including of various members of CREDHOS.

Given this situation, PBI began accompanying CREDHOS in 1994. Little by little, CREDHOS expanded its work in the neighbourhoods of Barrancabermeja and in various villages in the region.

There were no more murders of CREDHOS board members, but the paramilitary takeover of the city during Christmas 2000 forced several of its leaders to abandon Barrancabermeja. Iván and his wife, after spending a period sleeping in a different place each night, decided to leave.

With his return from exile to assume the presidency of CREDHOS, Iván began a new chapter, marked by the imprisonment of former CREDHOS president David Ravelo, and by the new situation created by the neo-paramilitary groups and their different alliances.



# Judith Maldonado

**J**udith Maldonado, the president and co-founder of the Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers Collective (CCALCP), has spent more than a decade working in the defence of the human rights of the inhabitants of Colombia's Northeast and the Magdalena Medio region.

In September 2001, Judith and other women lawyers decided to form CCALCP in order to use their legal knowledge to support grassroots organizations, unions, and the vulnerable and displaced communities of this region.

They did so in the face of the lack, at the time, of any organization to provide legal support in the face of the serious humanitarian crisis in the region, and the persecution that the social movements there were facing. Judith and her colleagues sought to contribute to social transformation in order to achieve

justice, equality and equity.

This work has led to numerous threats and attacks, but also to international recognition, like the 2011 Shalom Human Rights Award, and the most important reward: the trust of the victims.





# Marcela Castellanos



Marcela Castellanos is a young anthropologist and human rights defender, who joined CCALCP five years ago. Since then, her work has focused on supporting the land rights and collective rights of communities in North Santander Province.

As part of this work, Marcela was among the CCALCP members supporting Ascamcat (Family Farmer Association of Catatumbo) in the construction of the Humanitarian Refuge in the Mesitas hamlet in Hacarí municipality.

Numerous families arrived at the Refuge in order to protect themselves from military operations and combat between the Army and the insurgency.

For Marcela, the presence of PBI alongside human rights defenders in their daily work is, she says, "a solidarity accompaniment that

transcends the country's border, and in this way helps to support the solidarity beyond just PBI and beyond Colombia."



# Abilio Peña

**A** bilio Peña became a human rights defender after having worked in high schools and universities. Motivated by a desire to work with the less fortunate, he joined CIJP (Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace) in 1997. Currently, he is a member of its coordination team. The most difficult part of this work, says Abilio, “is having to contend with a government that is inefficient with regard to human rights protection.”

Though the members of CIJP have encountered innumerable cases of illegal surveillance and threats, Abilio explains how they deal with the situation. “When one has many threats, you ask yourself why, and the answer always has to do with the work we are doing.

We can be affecting the business sectors, those that have links with transnational powers.

And this generates concern and anxiety [for us]. But this doesn’t cause us to lose sleep every night, because we understand that it is a result of what we do, and if we wanted to work in human rights but didn’t want anything to happen to us, well, we should pick another job.”

With regard to a possible peace accord between the government and the guerrillas, Abilio says, “The peace agreement is only the beginning of a number of processes that will have to lead to some type of transformation in society.

Unless these changes happen, it is very likely that violence will continue, albeit in a different way. Experts calculate that much time is needed, that there could be ten years of post-conflict.”





Photo: Charlotte Kesl







# The struggle against impunity











Over the course of its 20-year presence in Colombia, PBI has accompanied human rights defenders in their struggle against impunity.





## EREMOS VIVOS

[illegible]



## The struggle against impunity

# Key requirements for a peaceful country

By: Ana Vicente, volunteer from Spain, 2009-present

**S**ince 1984 the conflict in Colombia has generated more than six million victims, including of forced disappearances (90.000), murders (95.000), threats (130.000), cases of sexual violence (4.000) y forced displacements (5.712.506), amongst other types of violence.<sup>1</sup> Political activists, journalists, civil servants, community leaders, trade unionists, grassroots communities, and many human rights defenders have been victims of abuse and violence.

Despite the gravity of the deeds, the victims have only just begun to have access to truth, many perpetrators have not been prosecuted, the cases (many of which have been closed) collect dust in offices and judicial archives, and the aggressions continue to be repeated almost without consequences.

A constant complaint amongst human rights defenders (HRDs) is the lack of progress in investigating the aggressions that they, as a group, suffer. According to the We Are Defenders programme, there is a 95% level of impunity regarding the 219 murders against HRDs committed between January 2009 and June 2013<sup>2</sup>, and investigations into threats against human rights defenders have not produced even one result; that is to say, there is 100% impunity.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout its 20 years in Colombia, PBI has accompanied human rights defenders in their struggle against impunity and their incessant efforts to uncover the truth, bring the perpetrators to justice, and develop mechanisms to ensure that similar incidents never again occur.

Many of these cases remain unresolved. High levels of impunity act as an incentive for new violations because a lack of sanctions communicates the message that it is possible to break the law without suffering the consequences.<sup>4</sup>

### **EMBLEMATIC CASE: THE DISAPPEARANCES OF ÁNGEL AND CLAUDIA**

The 6th of October 2000 was the last night that Angel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve would share with their friends and colleagues of the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES). Claudia was the sister of Edgar Augusto Monsalve, disappeared in 1995, and Ángel had seen six of his family members disappeared and two murdered. At the time of their disappearance, both were working with ASFADDES, seeking to uncover the truth about those they had loved and lost.

Ángel had decided to accompany Claudia home that night, and it was then that they were approached by armed men who forced them into a truck. The disappearance of Ángel and Claudia occurred in a context of systematic persecution of social organizations in Medellín by state actors.<sup>5</sup>

Between December 1997 and February 2001, the GAULA unit<sup>6</sup> of the National Police carried out 1,808 illegal interceptions of telecommunications, (including the telephones of Ángel and Claudia).<sup>7</sup> The then-director of the GAULA unit was Lieutenant Colonel Mauricio Santoyo (wow a retired General), and for this

reason, the families of Ángel and Claudia and ASFADDES have persistently denounced him as the primary culprit in these disappearances.

Santoyo, who years before was responsible for the security of ex-president Álvaro Uribe, is now in detention in the United States, convicted for drug trafficking, and has confessed to having had contacts with “La Oficina de Envigado” cartel and the Castaño brothers’ paramilitary group.<sup>8</sup>

## **ACCORDING TO THE WE ARE DEFENDERS PROGRAMME, THERE IS A 95% LEVEL OF IMPUNITY REGARDING THE 219 MURDERS AGAINST HRDS COMMITTED BETWEEN JANUARY 2009 AND JUNE 2013**

In October 2013, 13 years after the disappearance, a prosecutor before the Supreme Court in Bogotá concluded that there is evidence formally linking the official with the disappearance of the human rights defenders and the illegal interception of almost 2000 phone lines.<sup>9</sup>

However, despite the importance of this advance, the bodies of Ángel and Claudia have yet to be found and their case remains unresolved.

Their families, along with those of others disappeared in Colombia, continue to demand truth and justice, hope to find their loved ones, and hope to see both the material and intellectual authors of these disappearances pay for their crimes against humanity.

## **EMBLEMATIC CASE: THE MASSACRE OF LA ROCHELA**

On the 18 of January 1989 a commission of 15 judicial officials was sent to Santander Department to investigate the disappearance of 19 local traders. Whilst collecting testimonies, armed men forced them into cars, and, a few

kilometres down the road, killed 12 of them; three survived by pretending to be dead.<sup>10</sup>

Of the paramilitaries participating, only one to date has been prosecuted. Yet the participation of four generals and one ex-congressman, who have been formally accused but not detained since 2009, has been denounced.

The case was brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) by the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective (CCAJAR), and in 2007 the Colombian state was sentenced for its responsibility in the massacre.<sup>11</sup>

In June 2014, following the ruling, the Colombian state held a public act of recognition for the victims. However, their families continue to demand that the perpetrators be formally included in the investigation, that the truth be known, and that the state offer all the guarantees necessary for securing their protection.<sup>12</sup>

## **EMBLEMATIC CASE: “OPERATION GENESIS”**

As described by the paramilitary Freddy Rendón Herrera, alias “El Alemán,” in February 1997 the paramilitary group the Farmers Self-Defence Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU) lent twelve of their men to the Army for the execution of “Operation Génesis.”<sup>13</sup>

According to various legal authorities, during the operation, the military and paramilitaries murdered the Afro-Colombian from Cacarica, Marino López, cutting off his head and playing football with it on several occasions.<sup>14</sup>

The operation caused the forced displacement of 3,500 people, who remained displaced for more than four years.<sup>15</sup> According to denunciations by the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP), since their displacement in 1997, the Afro-Colombian communities of the Cacarica River basin, (members of the Community for Self-determination, Life and Dignity - CAVIDA), and a group of women heads of household who were already living displaced in Turbo (members of the Clamores organization), have been targeted with specious prosecution,



In August 2004, the Public Prosecutor and Technical Investigation Team discovered a series of official documents that detailed illegal surveillance and wiretapping carried out against 170 individuals, in what was known as “Operation Dragon.” These activities targeted human rights defenders like Berenice Celeyta (centre).

threats, harassment, exile, and three forced displacements.<sup>16</sup>

In December 2013 the IACHR issued a ruling against the Colombian state for the murder of Marino López and the forced displacement of communities during Operation Génesis.

However, the approach of the lawyer representing the Colombian state throughout the entire process was to deny any implication of the state in the deeds, to disregard the victims by denying their rural origins, and to attempt to paint them as false witnesses.<sup>17</sup>

The IACHR also declared the state responsible for “not having acted with due diligence during the investigations into members of the armed forces and those associated with paramilitary groups.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that on the 24 of August 2012 the retired General Rito Alejo del Río was found guilty of the murder of Marino López<sup>19</sup>, there have been no advances in the two other

cases the Prosecutor General’s office has opened regarding Operation Génesis: one against General Rito Alejo del Río for additional crimes, and the other involving paramilitaries that were operating in the Urabá area.<sup>20</sup>

Following the IACHR ruling, CAVIDA presented the government with a proposal for collective reparation that has still not seen any relevant progress.

## EMBLEMATIC CASE: “OPERACIÓN DRAGON”

In August 2004, the Prosecutor General and the Technical Investigation Unit (CTI) discovered a collection of official documents detailing the monitoring and illegal telecommunications interception carried out against 170 individuals in Cali, in what has been called “Operation Dragon.”

These activities targeted human rights defenders such as Berenice Celeyta; trade



unions (such as Sintraemcali), and members of the political opposition such as now Senator Alexander López.<sup>21</sup>

The plan aimed to smear, prosecute, and even murder these individuals, and also involved intelligence activity that only the state security apparatus could have carried out.<sup>22</sup>

The Prosecutor General proved that the Brigade III, the Cali Police, and the Administrative Security Department (DAS – the former presidential intelligence agency) worked on and supported this information gathering using state resources<sup>23</sup> and, in October 2011, three members of the Armed Forces were placed under house arrest, amongst them Colonel Julián Villate Leal, for their participation in “Operation Dragon.”<sup>24</sup>

On the 17th of February, almost 10 years after the discovery of these documents, the Criminal Unit of the Cali Specialized Circuit began the trial, dismissing the requests of the four members of the four accused, who had requested a cancellation of the trial due to lack of evidence.<sup>25</sup>

## A SMALL SAMPLE OF THE REALITY

These are just a few examples from a long list of cases: the widespread illegal wiretapping of the DAS revealed in 2008, the disappearances of the Palace of Justice siege in 1985, the massacres of the late 1990s in Barrancabermeja, “Operation Condor,” the massacres of members of the San José de Apartadó peace community.

Crimes against humanity to which there has been almost no response from the legal system, victims who aren’t able to even know where the remains of their loved ones are, communities living far from their lands and unable to return, citizens who still don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel that leads to the truth behind this conflict.

Today in Colombia peace is being discussed. The signing of an agreement with the guerrillas will mark the end of the bloody war that has ravaged the country for more than half a century; however it is important that the negotiations take into account that real peace requires listening to and respecting the voices of the victims and their rights to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non repetition.

1. Semana: [Seis millones de víctimas deja el conflicto en Colombia](#), 8th of February 2014

2. Programa Somos Defensores: Informe especial “Protección al Tابلero”, February 2014

3. Programa Somos Defensores: [Informe Siadhh 2013: D de defensa](#), 21st of February 2014

4. Plataformas Colombianas de Derechos Humanos: Plan Nacional de Garantías para la defensa de los derechos humanos en Colombia, November 2013

5. Cijp: [Claudia Mosalva y Angel Quintero](#), 6 of October 2004

6. The GAULA (Spanish: Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal), are elite units created through Law 282 of 1996 to combat kidnapping and extortion

7. Semana: [Santoyo, ahora a responder por desaparecidos](#), 3rd of October 2013

8. Otramerica: [Desaparecer buscando a los desaparecidos](#), 30th of August 2012

9. Op. cit. Semana: Santoyo

10. Grupo de Memoria Histórica de la Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación – CNRR, «La Rochela: Memorias de un crimen contra la justicia», 2010.

11. El Heraldó: [La masacre de La Rochela: 25 años de impunidad y amenazas](#), 18th of January 2014

12. Semana: [El Estado pidió perdón por masacre de La Rochela](#), 6th of June 2014

13. Cijp: [Operación “Génesis” tortura y ejecución extrajudicial de Marino Lopez Mena](#), 3rd of March 2010

14. Ibid.

15. Rebelión: [A 15 años de la “Operación Génesis”, continúan los asesinatos en Urabá](#), 29th of April 2012

16. Cijp: [26 años de condena al General \(r\) Rito Alejo del Río](#), 24 de agosto de 2012; Cijp: [Intimidan a Marco Velásquez, integrante de CAVIDA](#), 7 de enero de 2014; Cijp: [Paramilitares operan a menos de 100 metros de efectivos regulares](#), 13th of January 2014

17. Comisión Ética 39, [Carta a Presidente Santos](#), 24th of February 2013

18. El espectador: [“Operación Génesis” al desnudo](#), 9th of January 2014

19. Op cit Cijp: 26 años de condena

20. Semana: [Fiscalía tiene dos procesos por la operación ‘Génesis’](#), 28th of December 2013

21. PBI: [Operación Dragón: «Un caso de alarmante y descarada impunidad», dice el abogado Jorge Molano](#), 14th of May 2012

22. El Espectador: [Primeras detenciones por “Operación Dragón”](#), 3rd of October 2011

23. Baseless Prosecutions of Human Rights Defenders in Colombia. Human Rights First. 2009

24. Op cit El Espectador: Primeras detenciones

25. Polo Democrático: [Se inicia juicio contra militares que trataron de asesinar al senador Alexander López](#), 18th of February 2014

# Business and human rights









The extractive industries (including hydrocarbons, minerals, and metals) absorb the majority of foreign direct investment.

# Why is international accompaniment necessary?

By: Vicente Vallies, volunteer from France, 2001-2009

**L**The majority of Colombia's exports are from the primary sector: coal, petroleum and petroleum derivatives represent over 90% of these exports by volume;<sup>1</sup> and more than 65% in financial terms.<sup>2</sup>

The graph also shows that the petroleum, mining and quarrying sectors receive the majority of foreign direct investment.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore important to analyse the impact of these activities on civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

In one decade in Colombia, the country's extraction of coal has nearly doubled, from 38,242 million tons in the year 2000 to 74,350 million tons in 2010.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the number of mining concessions has increased at a dizzying pace in recent years, from 1.1 million hectares in 2002 to over 8.4 million hectares in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the country is experiencing a period of social resistance to the increase in exploration and extraction activities in rural areas. The Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP) registered 274 social conflicts related to the extraction of petroleum, gold and coal between January 2001 and December 2011.<sup>6</sup>

In a recent report, the International Office for Human Rights – Action on Colombia (OIDHACO) and the Colombian Platform for

Human Rights, Democracy and Development conclude, "There are links between mining, conflict and human rights violations, in particular forced displacement."<sup>7</sup>

In light of this, both companies and the governments of countries where the companies are based or to which they export must ensure that they are not benefitting directly or indirectly from these human rights violations.

Various reports have been published on transnational mining in Colombia, including about the role of Canadian companies in the Cerrejón coal mine, and the activities of companies such as BHP Billiton (a Canadian-British company), Anglo American (a South African-British company) and Glencore-Xstrata (a Swiss capital funded company).

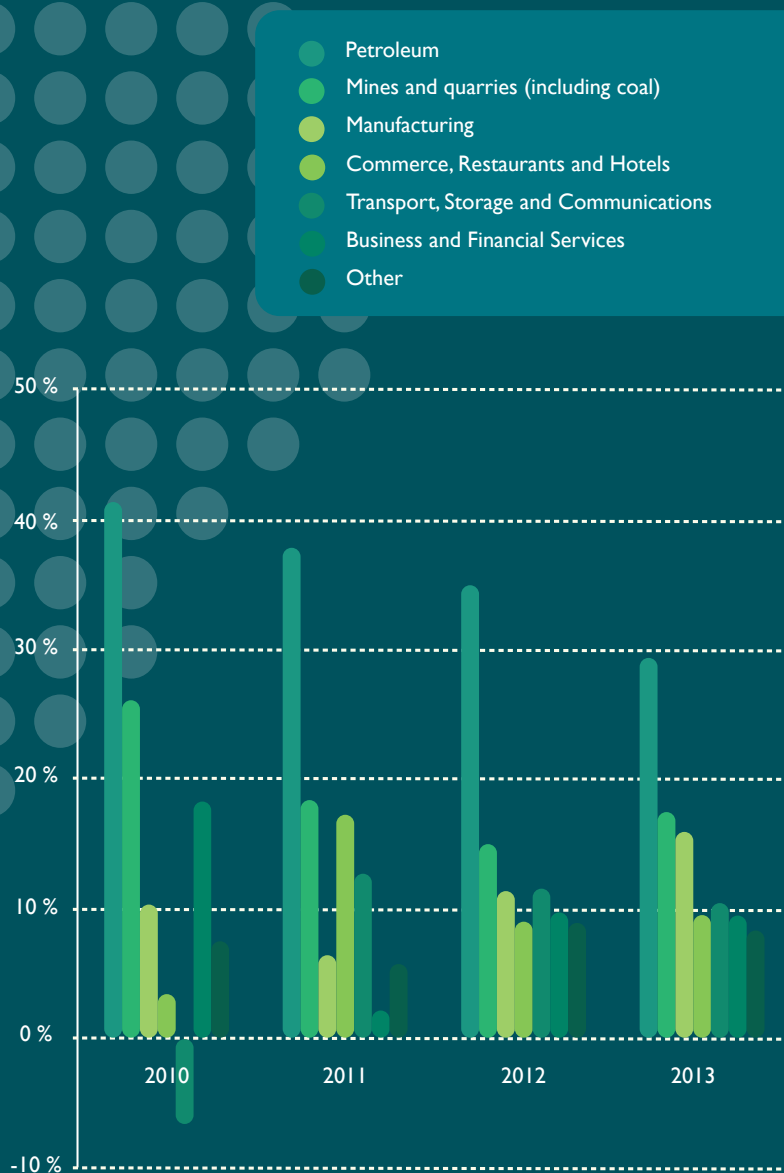
These and other reports on business and human reflect a series of irregularities and human rights violations against the people who live in the areas in which natural resources are exploited for profit.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, in recent years we have seen how dangerous it can be in Colombia for those who fight to protect their quality of life and their land.

To name but a few examples, we remember: Sandra Viviana Cuellar Gallego, a 26-year-old environmental engineer from the city of Cali and a recognised defender of natural resources and the rights of local



## Flows of foreign direct investment in Colombia by Economic Activity





Between January 2001 and December 2011, 274 social struggles related to petroleum, gold, and coal mining were reported.

communities to make decisions on how these resources exploitation projects affect their environment and quality of life, who was disappeared on 17 February 2011; Adelinda Gómez Gaviria from Cauca Province, who had an active role in the Mining and Environmental Forum, assassinated on 30 September 2013; César García of the Environmental and Small-Farming Committee of Tolima, a recognised activist against AngloGold Ashanti's gold mining project known as "La Colosa," murdered on 2 November 2013. And Robinson David Mazo, a member of the Living Rivers Movement that fights against the Hidroituango hydroelectric dam project, assassinated on 30 November

2013,<sup>9</sup> a few months after his colleague Nelson Giraldo Posada was found on the banks of the Cauca River with his throat slit and bullet wounds to his chest and legs.<sup>10</sup>

Other serious problems that have been identified are related to the criminalisation of social protest. 2013, for example, was marked by important social movements: protests by family farmers in the Catatumbo region (June 2013); the National Mining Strike (July 2013); the National Agrarian Strike (August 2013) and the Indigenous Social Minga (October 2013).

The response by the Colombian State to these mobilisations was largely characterised



Small-scale mining in the municipality of Segovia, (Antioquia).

by stigmatisation and repression, resulting in 902 acts of aggression, including 15 assassinations, 7 acts of cruelty or torture including one case of sexual abuse, and 315 arbitrary detentions.<sup>11</sup>

In such a context, in which economic interests create pressure on the land and risks exist for those who protect the human rights of local people, international accompaniment is fundamental.

For many years the PBI Project in Colombia has accompanied human rights defenders and communities in their legitimate struggle to defend their rights to territory, self-

determination and a healthy environment.

Such is the case for the accompaniment PBI provides in the region of Curbaradó (Chocó Province), where Afro-descendant communities seek to recover their collectively-owned land, which has been occupied by business interests since the communities were displaced in 1996 and 1997, when paramilitary groups, with alleged participation by the Colombian Army, carried out counterinsurgency operations in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Even today, there continue to be threats against community leaders, such as Yomaira Mendoza and Enrique Cabezas, land restitution



leaders from the village of Llano Rico, who were displaced to Bogotá in mid-2014 because of a series of over 70 threats and other aggressions.<sup>13</sup> Another example is that of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (CCAJAR) in its work with communities affected by the Cerrejón coal mine in La Guajira Province, where PBI has accompanied CCAJAR on numerous occasions.

For more than 30 years, the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities that have lived in La Guajira for generations have had to live

rights in regional, national and international spheres.

This accompaniment is an expression of solidarity, and demonstrates that there are many committed to a simple idea: that the inhabitants of a territory have the right to decide their future and their development models, and that they should not be afraid of expressing themselves, nor should they fear for their lives when reclaiming their basic rights.

## **IN ONE DECADE IN COLOMBIA, THE COUNTRY'S EXTRACTION OF COAL HAS NEARLY DOUBLED, FROM 38,242 MILLION TONS IN THE YEAR 2000 TO 74,350 MILLION TONS IN 2010**

with the serious environmental, cultural and economic fall-out of the exploitation of one of the world's largest open-top coal mines.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, PBI has accompanied the Judicial Freedom Corporation, a human rights organisation based in Medellín, in its work with the Rivers Alive Movement.

As mentioned above, members of the Movement are facing serious risks for their work in the face of the Hidroituango hydroelectric dam project.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that, apart from accompanying communities and organisations in their struggle to defend the land, and against large-scale that have a negative impact on them, PBI also accompanies organisations that represent the rights of artisanal miners to continue exploiting their territory in the same way as their ancestors.

Over the years, PBI has accompanied organisations like the Valle de Cimitarra Family Farmers' Association, the Guamocó Association of Agro-Ecological Brotherhoods, and the Luis Carlos Pérez Lawyers' Collective, amongst others.

Accompaniment seeks to enable the creation of a safe political space in which individual defenders and communities can give weight to their voice and can reclaim their

Whilst international accompaniment is a useful and important tool, and in many cases is the only non-violent protection alternative, it should be remembered that it is the State's the responsibility to guarantee citizens' full exercise of their rights and guarantee their safety.

For this reason, Colombian defenders, organisations and communities continue, day by day, to demand their right to the use and enjoyment of their territory.



El Cerrejón is located in the Guajira region in the northeast of Colombia; it is one of the largest open-pit coalmines in the world, covering 70,000 hectares.

1. Data from the Colombian Ministry of Commerce (2010 – 2012).
2. According to data from the Bank of the Republic of Colombia.
3. Ibid.
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8. The following, non-exhaustive list, can be consulted: Pax Christi International, The Dark Side of Coal, June 2014; IPC, La locomotora minera: concentración y despojo, December 2012; ABColombia, “Giving it away: the consequences of an unsustainable mining policy in Colombia”, November 2012; Working Group on Mining and Human Rights in Latin America, “The impact of Canadian mining in Latin America and Canada’s responsibility”, May 2014; Oxfam, Divide and purchase: How land ownership is being concentrated in Colombia, September 2013; Hands off the Land Alliance, Colombia: Banacol, empresa implicada en paramilitarismo y acaparamiento de tierras en Curvaradó y Jiguamiandó, May 2012.
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11. CCEEU and Movece, Informe sobre protesta social y derechos humanos, 31 October 2013. Presented during the 139th period of sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
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13. CIJP, “Persecución a Yomaira Mendoza y Enrique Cabeza evidencian ausencia de garantías”, 10 June 2014.
14. CCAJAR, [“El mayor gesto de solidaridad con la Guajira: Exigir que el Cerrejón suspenda su actividad durante la sequía”](#), 6 August 2014.



**Human rights:  
the road to peace**









Over the past 20 years, PBI has accompanied organisations and individuals that today have a role in the peace negotiations between the government and the guerrillas.



# The best dance partner for peace is human rights

By: Roberto Rodríguez, volunteer from Spain, 2000-2006

**I** came to Colombia to work with PBI in 2000. After a few days in Bogotá, we landed in Turbo, directly to Urabá and from then on we really began to see Colombia. This first look and the experience of living 2 years and accompanying with the PBI Urabá team defined my life in Colombia. After 6 years with PBI, I stayed in Colombia where I now live, my children were born here, and my partner and I continue to be involved with the world of human rights and development.

Out “landing” in Urabá was tough and difficult from the beginning. A context of forced displacement, visible and brutal paramilitary presence and control, militarization, and guerrilla presence in the rural areas. But also, resistance, organization, and proposals for return, from the communities we were accompanying.

Between February and April we lived through two massacres by the paramilitaries, one in the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, and the other in Turbo, where displaced people from the Cacarica community were murdered.

They also killed leaders from the peace communities that were organizing in the area of the Atrato River and its tributaries. It was the beginning of what it meant to accompany of these communities, funerals, pain and anger. While we were living these experiences, personally and collectively, in a

team overwhelmed by the work; we heard the news of the Caguán peace process, [and that] the proposal for humanitarian agreements in Chocó was still reverberating.

This news went far, really far. Without understanding much, you felt as though in Urabá there was no peace and that this wasn't possible in the medium term.

And yet, little by little you learnt a bit more about the context and the work of PBI accompanying the Peace and Justice Commission, CINEP and the communities and in this way human rights work began to make sense. In a way, what I think about peace today was then beginning to emerge.

2000 saw more death, the massacre in La Unión in July, trips down the river with the CINEP, presence and accompaniment in Nueva Vida, and the first return voyages to Cacarica. Strength, sorrow, and joy.

The distant peace, only showing itself for brief moments. The peace that pulled away when they disappeared Claudia and Angel of ASFADDES Medellín and we were there accompanying and sharing the fear of their family and friends.

Peace became a word on the one hand full of meaning, and on the other, empty. A used and tainted word. The paramilitaries and Army talked of peace in Urabá, an insult to what the communities were living and we were seeing. News came in from Caguán, the continual



Roberto Rodríguez was a member of PBI for six years.

crisis and threats to break the agreements. In the country the paramilitarism and proposals for war were consolidating.

In early 2001, we left PBI for 2 months and returned to Urabá in May. This time it was different from the first. More aware, more experienced, and knowing more of what we were heading to and what we could expect to encounter.

I think that leaving and coming back, being able go over what we had lived, helped us refine our options and ideas. One being that it was worthwhile to commit ourselves to the defence of human rights, through the accompaniment that PBI provided, and that this was a clear path towards building the possibilities of peace.

During our following years with PBI we lived in Bogotá, often travelling to the other teams, opening up our perspective on Colombia. One of our first jobs upon arriving in Bogotá was to write a contextual analysis of

the breakdown of the Caguán peace process. I enjoyed investigating and writing, it was a learning process, improving my understanding.

Conversations about peace, and at the same time, dealing with the Plan Colombia, guerrilla kidnappings, and a paramilitary massacre every week. The United Nations were doing all they could, and being attacked by the government when their opinions weren't satisfactory.

But nonetheless, with the feeling that this breakdown implied a loss, and possibilities of generating conditions for progress in the country.

Peace got further away, and human rights organizations struggled to survive but there was a certain unity, although "more out of necessity than virtue," as one human rights defender we accompanied explained. PBI stuck with its work, maintaining coherence, defending its space, and continuing to accompany.



After several years living in a situation of forced displacement, several families returned to Cacarica in 2000.

Human rights continued to be the concrete way in which to work towards peace. Even after having left PBI I remain convinced that peace needs accompaniment and the best partners for PEACE are human rights. Human rights understood as a proposal, a route, and an end point.

Human rights can be known by other names such as development, citizenship, and democracy. Human rights that come together in proposals for capacity building, empowerment, and the capacity for the people to be the protagonists of their own lives. Human rights championed by strong

organizations that denounce, publicize, and accompany the struggles of communities and the people against state policies and economic projects that remind us that the transition from war to peace, towards a democracy, needs strong civil society organizations that complement public policy.

In 20 years PBI has accompanied organizations and individuals who today play a part in the peace agreements between the state and the guerrillas.

Community leaders, regional organizations, lawyers, community workers, and human rights defenders, some of whom now sit in





Members of the displaced community of Cacarica returning to their land, accompanied by PBI, December 2000.

congress. An accumulation of people and ideas that resist and propose alternatives, that have proposals for peace, just like so many others killed in the last few decades.

This is the fundamental work of PBI, helping keep proposals, organizations, and individuals alive so that they can work on and contribute to peace in Colombia. The work of PBI will not end with the signing of the peace agreements.

PBI's presence accompanying new civil society proposals, methods of protection to emerge from the agreements, and follow up of these processes, will continue to be key.

New threats and threatened individuals, violence old and new, acts of resistance, and proposals of "another possible worlds" will need to be accompanied.

After 14 years in Colombia, I still hold relative hope that we are on our way to a better situation, firmly set in the tireless struggles of so many organizations and individuals that we accompany, we support, and whom I consider amongst my friends and loved ones.



# Peace as civil resistance











The Peace Community exports organic cacao. Food sovereignty is very important and goes hand-in-hand with resistance on the land.

# The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

Por: Sylvain Lefebvre, volunteer from France, 2008-2012

**W**hile the Colombian government and the FARC continue to negotiate in Havana reaching preliminary agreements on the various agenda items of a potential peace accord that would put an end to 60 years of internal armed conflict, many communities are still resisting from within their territory, day after day, in the face of the complex dynamics of a conflict fuelled by different armed actors, by drug trafficking, and by the Colombian state.

Whether they are indigenous, Afro-Colombian or family farmer communities, they are struggling so that the State protects their human rights. These are civilian-led peace initiatives created in the midst of armed conflict by the very communities displaced by the violence, and which are resisting the conflict's effects and remaining on their land.

Their struggle is based upon their connection with their land, their culture and their identity, and is opposed to the violence that has wrought destruction on their regions and to the business interests associated with numerous human rights violations and the concentration of land tenancy.

Throughout these last 20 years, PBI has been able to accompany several indigenous, Afro-Colombian and family farmer communities. Amongst these communities, one has come to have a symbolic role in the

region and even at an international level: the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, in the Urabá region (Antioquia Province).

The Community declared itself neutral in the armed conflict in 1997, and presents an alternative social model based on community values and respect for life and human dignity to achieve peace.<sup>1</sup> The Community's resistance contributes to peace through their daily work, through their connection to their land, and through breaking with the system of war.

### **“RESISTANCE IS BUILT ON DAILY WORK”**

For Jesús Emilio Tuberquia, it is clear that the Peace Community's strategy has to be an organisational response that is constructed daily. “Those who don't build day by day are lost inside the struggle,” says the man who served for many years the Community's legal representative.<sup>3</sup>

Through their daily work, the community's social fabric is rebuilt, it is able to sustain itself economically, and can achieve a degree of autonomy within its territory. “It is a daily struggle, and that is our autonomy: through our daily practices, and living a life of community and solidarity,” says Jesús Emilio.

Activities that in other contexts would seem normal, even mundane, take on another meaning in the Community. Planting plantains,



harvesting cocoa and going to school are just some of the daily activities that give sense and life to the Community's struggle.

## **THE LAND**

For many of the farmers in the Peace Community, resistance means remaining on their land. Their resistance is closely linked to the earth. "We need the land to grow our food, to build our houses, our health centre, our school," notes Jesús Emilio.

The land is the basis of their "life's work." But these resources must be maximised in a way that is "regulated and controlled, in proportion to our needs." "Don't use it all up," Jesús Emilio insists, going against the grain of the capitalist system and economic development that have been directly linked the violence suffered by the Community.

## **BREAKING WITH THE SYSTEM: COMMUNITY WORK AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Resisting is also rejecting the system and its injustices. "The system is a millennial dictatorship, the dictatorship of power," says Jesús Emilio. That is why an alternative economic, community and solidarity model needs to be built. In the Peace Community, this model is based on community work.

One day every week is dedicated to communal work. "When we do community work we are practicing in a different way against the system. We are demonstrating to the world that another way of life is possible and that the system is completely wrong," says Jesús Emilio.

Nonetheless, the price that the Community has paid in human lives reminds him that it is very difficult to fight against the system. And there, a touch of pessimism seeps into Jesús Emilio's voice. "The trade we have developed is the best you can hope for from inside the system. There is no escape and that is why things won't change."<sup>4</sup>

Jesús Emilio is referring to the cocoa grown by the community and sold to the British fair trade company Lush.<sup>5</sup>

This company engages in "a fairer way of doing business," according to one of the Community's leaders, "without human rights violations and feeding back a large share of the benefits to producers."

Jesús Emilio insists that having to turn to exports has advantages and disadvantages for the Community. "For us it has been something we have been able to achieve as part of our wider search, but we still are not content because things just shouldn't be this way."

## **COMMUNITIES IN RESISTANCE AND PEACE AGREEMENTS**

In the Colombian government's vision, as expressed by Sergio Jaramillo, High Commissioner for Peace and principal strategist behind the peace negotiations, the success of building peace and implementing the agreement that may be reached in Havana, "depends, at its essence, on citizen participation, on the participation of the people on the land".

The goal of the talks is to "identify a shared vision for the country, of what the needs are, what the strengths are, and what are the most urgent projects to meet those needs, and how we will, between all of us, from the communities in the rural areas and the programmes and the authorities, make plans together".

What is more, "in the measure possible, it would be for the communities to execute these projects," and therefore it would follow "a participative, bottom-up planning focus" that would make the communities "the front-line actors and the solution"<sup>6</sup>

This new alliance must be the fruit of collaboration between communities and authorities. The Santos administration appears to understand that simply sending bureaucrats from the capital to the rural areas does not work well, but the solution also is not "the people resolving their own problems on their own account with the nation's resources".

This would lead to a fragmentation of efforts, and follows a logic counter to territorial integration and social inclusion. This new model of institutional construction would be fed by the



PBI has accompanied the peace community since 1997.

strength and mobilisation of communities and would ensure that this strength is channelled towards reinforcing institutions.<sup>7</sup>

This speech demonstrates how peace in Colombia – including in the rural areas – will largely depend on the relationship between rural communities and the government.

But it also illustrates the enormous gap that exists between the Administration's rhetoric and the actual situation of communities like San José de Apartadó.

The Peace Community continues to hope that the Colombian government will comply

with its national and international human rights obligations, including specific orders from bodies like the Colombian Constitutional Court, many of which have yet to be implemented.<sup>8</sup>

The biggest challenge facing these communities will be to remain loyal to their ideals without allowing their initiatives to be co-opted under the banner of peace, and to assert themselves as the true foundation on which to build a more just, equitable and peaceful society.



Foto: Damien Fellous / Libre arbitre

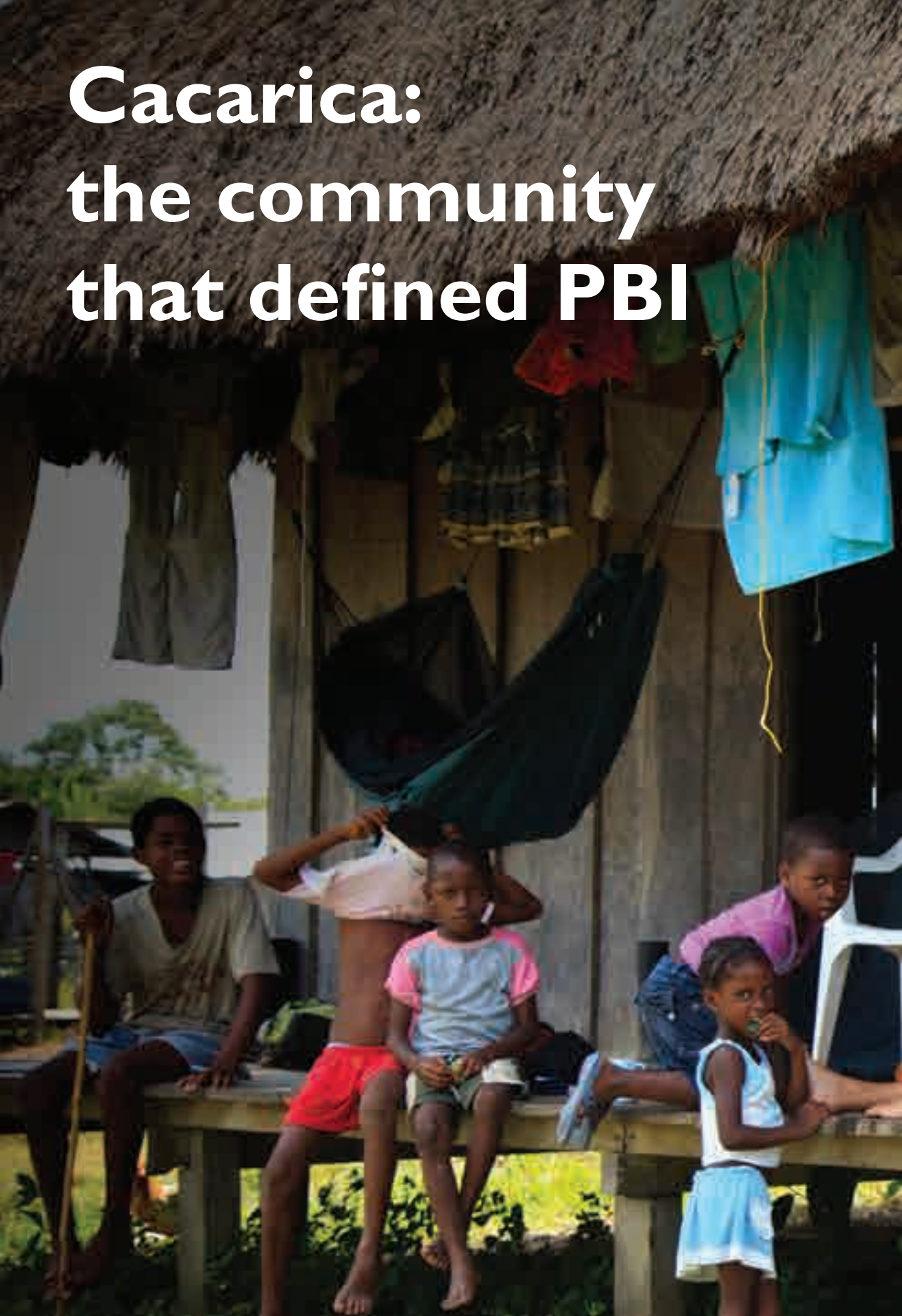
One of the events that had the greatest impact on the community was the massacre of 21 February 2005. On that day, eight people were assassinated and dismembered.

1. The Community's members do not carry arms, do not provide information or support to any of the parties in the conflict and ask that no armed actors enter their community.
2. Interview with Jesús Emilio Tuberquia, San José de Apartadó Peace Community, 18 April 2014.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

5. Lush: [Peace Pioneers](#)
6. Presentation by Sergio Jaramillo during the event "Política de paz y reconciliación: 20 años de experiencias regionales" Hotel Tequendama. Bogotá. 11 June 2014.
7. Ibid.
8. PBI Colombia, "[Garantías políticas desde la base](#)", online newsletter, 9 June 2014.



# Cacarica: the community that defined PBI













When the communities of Cacarica and other areas of the Bajo Atrato were displaced in February 1997 in a military and paramilitary operation called “Operation Genesis,” they had to flee to different places in the Urabá region, and to other areas.

# An example of resistance and struggle for justice in Colombia

By: Katrine Ringhus, volunteer from Norway, 2012-2014

**T**he communities of Cacarica and members of the CAVIDA organization, (Communities for Self-Determination, Life and Dignity of Cacarica), have been and continue to be an example to many in Colombia, crossing limits and setting standards in a context of violence and exploitation. PBI has had the privilege of accompanying them in their journey and struggle for many years.

It has been an emotional experience, long lasting and with a dynamic that has been in constant flux. At the start, 15 years ago, PBI volunteers lived with the people in Cacarica, sharing daily life with the community and getting to know intimately the history and life in the Cacarica River basin, and even forming part of it, despite coming from abroad.

These have been 15 years of common history, with highs and lows, which have forged a relationship that has certainly changed PBI, both in the organization's knowledge and depth of analysis as in its "institutional heart" and solidarity.

When the communities of Cacarica and other parts of the Bajo Atrato were displaced in February 1997 during the military operation known as "Operation Génesis," they had to head elsewhere in Urabá or to other parts of the region.

The people of the Cacarica River basin principally gathered in three places: the

majority went to the sports stadium in Turbo; the rest stayed in Bocas del Atrato, a village located where the Atrato river meets the Gulf of Urabá; some also went to Panama to be sent later to Bahía Cupica on the pacific coast of Chocó.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the displacement, the population of Cacarica was subjected to an economic blockade, the installation of a paramilitary base in their territory, and the disappearance and murder of 82 people from their communities.

Furthermore, during both their displacement and the military and paramilitary invasion of their territory, as well as upon the return of the population to their land, companies such as Maderas de Darién, Multifruits and CIA S.A. have been exploiting the forest and land of Cacarica.<sup>2</sup>

When "Operación Génesis" was carried out in the Bajo Atrato, PBI had been in Colombia for less than three years working, in Bogotá and Barrancabermeja. It still hadn't arrived in Urabá, until the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP),<sup>3</sup> amongst others, requested accompaniment in the area for their work with numerous displaced victims.

In July of 1998, PBI installed a permanent team in Turbo, in Urabá region of Antioquia Department, to accompany, from then on, the communities of Cacarica, either directly or through CIJP.



Photo: Charlotte Kesi

In June 2001, the first Humanitarian Zone in Colombia was officially created: Nueva Vida, in the Cacarica River basin.

## **PBI HAS HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF ACCOMPANYING THEM IN THEIR JOURNEY AND STRUGGLE FOR MANY YEARS**

Accompanying the communities of Cacarica was a new experience for PBI. It was the first time PBI was directly accompanying the people of a community; it was the first time working with displaced people; and, the first time accompanying people permanently. Once installed in Turbo, PBI could fulfil its goal of protecting the people that were living in displacement.

The team began to do rounds of the shelters as well as sleeping each night in the Turbo sports stadium where the majority were gathered. On occasion, the team also

accompanied trips to Bocas del Atrato or, from time to time, up to Bahía Cupica.<sup>4</sup>

In Turbo, the communities of Cacarica began to organize, creating the organization CAVIDA. They negotiated with the government of Andrés Pastrana, demanding conditions allowing them to return to their territory.<sup>5</sup>

One of the rights outlined in the Law 70 of 1993 was that of collective ownership for Afro-Colombian communities, for which the communities had already begun to fight before either displacements in 1995 and 1996.

The title was officially granted in December 1999, when a government representative went to the stadium in Turbo to award this entitlement.<sup>6</sup>

In 1999 it was possible to carry out an initial exploratory mission to the abandoned land, with an eye towards a possible return. A mission of leaders and elders left Turbo, not knowing if the paramilitaries remained in their





Monument commemorating the displacement in Cacarica.

territory or whether any of the communities that had been around before the displacement were still there.

They made it to what would later be declared the Nueva Vida Humanitarian Zone on the Perancho River. Where before there was a community, all that remained were the ruins of the church and the school.

Those that participated in this first return to their territory began clearing the land and sowing the first rice crops in order to be able to make their first harvest when they returned.<sup>7</sup> The Nueva Vida Humanitarian Zone is the first of its type to be created in Colombia.

A Humanitarian Zone is a protected space for the exclusive use of the civilian population. The model itself does not exist in Colombian legislation but rather is based on international humanitarian law norms surrounding the right to life and the protection of the civilian population in an armed internal conflict.

Furthermore, this model has been recognized by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), through the granting of provisional measures to some humanitarian zones in Colombia.

Humanitarian Zones are demarcated by a fence and signs announcing the prohibition



The majority of the people displaced from the Cacarica River basin fled to the sports coliseum in the city of Turbo.

of the presence of armed actors, be they the guerrilla, the paramilitaries or the national army.

They represent a proposal for the empowerment and protection of the communities fighting for their life and their rights.<sup>8</sup> In June 2001 the first official Humanitarian Zones of Colombia, Nueva Vida in the Cacarica River basin, was created.<sup>9</sup>

The return was carried out in three phases: the first took place in January 2000; the second, in September of the same year; and the last phase was completed at the beginning of February 2001. In January 2000 a boat

arrived carrying the first group of returnees, accompanied by national and international organizations as well as state institutions.

PBI took part in this first return and was also present throughout the extended process of return. PBI began to accompany permanently in the river basin, living in the Nueva Vida Humanitarian Zone and later in Esperanza en Dios.<sup>10</sup>

National and international accompaniment has been important for the CAVIDA project. Enjoying accompaniment and support from international organizations has helped them become an exceptionally strong process, an



Photo: PBI Colombia



In January 2000, a boat enters with the first group of returnees.

Photo: Charlotte Kesl



A Humanitarian Zone is a protected space for the exclusive use of the civilian population.

Photo: PBI Colombia



When the communities returned, PBI started permanently accompanying in the river basin, living in the humanitarian zone.



emblematic one in Colombia. The process in Cacarica is emblematic in Colombia in so many different ways, and for PBI the accompaniment in Cacarica has been an important learning process.

It was the first time that PBI had set out to accompany a community process and for the first time PBI was working directly on displacement and mass displacement, an issue that would later come to define much of PBI's work in Colombia. It was the first process of return, an experience that has also been important in the work and accompaniment of other return processes.

Furthermore, this work in Cacarica introduced PBI to a region in which the organization has now maintained a permanent presence for 15 years, accompanying one of the strongest proposals for peace and resistance in the country.

Today PBI does not live with the communities in Cacarica. Accompaniment is carried out via the CIJP and presence in the field is more sporadic.

This doesn't mean that the accompaniment is now over, because CAVIDA continues to be accompanied, but that PBI's work is now more focused on advocating for the fulfilment of the community's protection through political work at the regional, national and international levels. Currently, the communities of Cacarica

are, once again, acting as an example in Colombia. In December 2013 the IACHR found the Colombian state responsible for having "failed to fulfil its obligation to guarantee the security and prevent the displacement" of the communities of Cacarica, due to a lack of protection and not having assured them a safe return.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the IACHR ruled the Colombian state guilty of collaborating with paramilitary groups; having dispossessed the communities of their land, in violation of Law 70's aim of protecting the ancestral lands of Afro-Colombian communities; and finally, of cruel treatment against Marino López.

The State was obliged to award protective measures, in order to "restitute the effective use, enjoyment and possession of those lands legally recognized as those of the Afro-Colombian communities that make up the Cacarica River Basin Community Council".<sup>12</sup>

Given that this was the first time in which the IACHR has found a state guilty of forced displacement of an Afro-Colombian community, this ruling is symbolic and of high moral importance.

The communities of Cacarica once again make a fine example of resistance and struggle for justice in Colombia. And, also, for PBI.

1. Boletín de PBI Colombia 15 años, entrevista con Danilo Rueda de Cijp, Bogotá/Octubre 2009; Somos tierra de esta tierra. Memorias de una resistencia civil. CAVIDA. 2002

2. Zonas Humanitarias y Zonas de Biodiversidad: Espacios de dignidad para la población desplazada en Colombia por Danilo Rueda/Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz y Catherine Bouley/Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Bogotá 2009

3. Known today as The Inter-Church Peace and Justice Commission - CIJP

4. Interview with Pedro Lázaro Pérez, PBI Field Officer in Turbo, 1999/2000.

5. La Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos: [Sentencia en el caso de las Comunidades Afrodescendientes Desplazadas de la Cuenca del Río Cacarica \(Operación Génesis\) vs. Colombia](#), page 53. San José, Costa Rica/ November 2013

6. La Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos: [Sentencia en el caso de las Comunidades Afrodescendientes Desplazadas de la Cuenca del Río Cacarica \(Operación Génesis\) vs. Colombia](#), page 59. San José, Costa Rica/November 2013; Interview with Pedro Lázaro Pérez, Brigadista of PBI in Turbo, 1999/2000.

7. Interview with Pedro Lázaro Pérez, PBI Field Officer in Turbo, 1999/2000.

8. Zonas Humanitarias y Zonas de Biodiversidad: Espacios de dignidad para la población desplazada en Colombia por Danilo Rueda/Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz y Catherine Bouley/Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Bogotá 2009

9. Zonas Humanitarias y Zonas de Biodiversidad: Espacios de dignidad para la población desplazada en Colombia por Danilo Rueda/Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz y Catherine Bouley/Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Bogotá 2009

10. Interview with Pedro Lázaro Pérez, PBI Field Officer in Turbo, 1999/2000.

11. El Espectador: [Operación Génesis" al desnudo](#). J de Enero de 2014; La Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos: [Sentencia en el caso de las Comunidades Afrodescendientes Desplazadas de la Cuenca del Río Cacarica \(Operación Génesis\) vs. Colombia](#), Comunicado de Prensa, San José, Costa Rica/26 December 2013

12. La Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos: [Sentencia en el caso de las Comunidades Afrodescendientes Desplazadas de la Cuenca del Río Cacarica \(Operación Génesis\) vs. Colombia](#), Comunicado de Prensa, 26 of December 2013





# **Understanding the victims**



## Understanding the victims

# “A psychosocial dimension is key”

By: Carlos Beristain, volunteer from Spain, 1994-1995

PBI interviewed Dr. Beristain, originator of the work rebuilding the social fabric that the Colombia Project offers.

**PBI: How, in what context, and why did your work with PBI on reconstructing the social fabric begin?**

Carlos Beristain: In August 1989, as the war was intensifying, the PBI project in El Salvador first invited me to work to support local defenders in attending to torture victims. In those months, PBI's own teams had been attacked with two grenades, in the case of Guatemala, and an assault by a squadron dressed in camouflage uniforms and armed with assault rifles in El Salvador, during the same week.

Based on these experiences, this perspective was introduced into the training for volunteers – dealing with fear, strengthening the group, managing traumatic events – in terms of both personal preparation and the accompaniment work.

Evaluations with the people in both countries led to new visits and working sessions to do workshops and training activities, or to create spaces for mutual support with the defenders.

It was also useful for learning about these realities and valuing the ways to incorporate psychosocial perspectives and activities in the accompaniment work that PBI was already doing.

**PBI: Was it you who began to develop this area of work?**

CB: When PBI began working in Colombia, after it was invited by a number of organisations and soon after the team was set up, I did an initial trip to share experiences from Central America with organisations like Justice and Peace,<sup>1</sup> Asfaddes,<sup>2</sup> Credhos<sup>3</sup> or the OFP<sup>4</sup>

The idea was to test methodologies, better understand the Colombian context and enact some experiences to value whether they were useful or not in a country in which there were hardly any foreigners or international agencies, [a country] known for the stigma of drug trafficking, but about which in general little else was known.

The activities, at first, were done during trips every four months, and later became widespread. Only a long time after did these activities get a name, and later still to be considered as a formal “area of work”.

In 1994 there was almost no experience of this work in Colombia, except the treatment provided by Avre,<sup>5</sup> which had a more clinical approach.

The dialogue with NGOs and the experiences they facilitated with teams and victims was very important.

Without this trust building and direct work with the people, nothing would have been possible.

**PBI: What are the stories that you remember most from your psychosocial work with PBI?**

CB: One very impactful experience and that later turned out to be central, was that which led to the book *Affirmation and Resistance*, which brings together many methodologies, experiences and testimonies that we had developed in Central America and we that still use today. [This work] has had its stages and the people who make it happen. In Colombia, the work began via [local] NGOs, and through contact with the victims of Trujillo, and after [working in] Barrancabermeja or Urabá, we began learning other realities and collaborating in opening up a perspective of personal and community strengthening.

The most interesting [aspect] is how one story led to another, and the evaluations with participants began to each time to generate greater space and more requests.

These tools and methodologies were built from the bottom up, from the evaluations done with the organisations and the victims, as was the case with Asfaddes, the Peace Communities or later with the Cauca Indigenous Guard, amongst many, as well as human rights NGOs.

Each time the accompaniment became more important, not just of processes with victims and survivors, but also for the defenders themselves with workshops on protection and security, team building, mutual support groups in crisis situations, as well as internal work that we always did to strengthen the work of PBI's teams.

**PBI: What are the psychosocial impacts of political repression, by way of threats, surveillance or physical attacks, against human rights defenders?**

CB: A psychosocial dimension is key to understanding the impacts because these aren't just individual reactions, they take place in a dialectic relationship with the social realm. And a social comprehension of the victims' experience is needed.

For example, fear is a strategy of terror. Therefore an understanding of the dynamic of violence and a comprehension of some of its impacts are sought in order to be able to resist, which was taught to me by communities of people in resistance in Guatemala: "When you know the face of repression you can deal with it better".

But it is also a defence mechanism and you must have a positive view of fear, and not an attitude that criminalises it, which makes people hide it or value people negatively.

And on the other hand, it does have many negative effects, which you have to understand and normalise in order to see how it can be faced with individually and collectively.

For me, that is the most important thing about this perspective and not so much the list of personal, family, collective or social impacts. Traumatic events create a rupture in the perception of life's continuity, and one has to learn to live with something unliveable, that can neither be forgotten nor remain as simply pain.

There are impacts related to society's response, the impact is not just pain but moral stigma, which looks down on or blames the victim or justifies the repression. So we are not just talking about fear or loss and grieving, and its impact on people or groups, but also about social conditions.

And this is what has to change to promote people's recovery. The accompaniment must function so that defenders can continue their work, but also to strengthen the collective processes that made it possible, and which are left when a [specific] project or an action comes to an end.

**PBI: What are the psychosocial tools that can be used by human rights defenders to continue their work?**

CB: The first thing is to have a good analysis of reality, to know what they are facing and to maintain conviction in a context in which they are being criminalised, doubted or threatened.

It is important for this work, which is centred on solidarity with others, to also be a form of learning and personal growth. To be flexible with oneself, because situations are



One of PBI's first accompaniments was with the victims of Trujillo.

demanding in ways that are far beyond our resources, and this means we need more strategies and ways of managing stress, be it reducing its sources where possible – reformulating the work, rotations, ways of dealing with a task, amongst others – and being conscious of when the effects of accumulated stress make our work suffer and carry an enormous personal cost. In these moments we must have the capacity to rethink things and avoid following the same dynamic that will end in personal burn-out.

Also, caring for group processes. Human rights organisations work in very difficult

contexts and mutual support is part of the capacity to resist.

Maintaining good communication, including when dealing with conflicts, is a fundamental tool for feeling united with others, working more efficiently and not losing a sense of the action's purpose.

Communicating with people of trust, not staying alone in their work, the defenders very often tend to accumulate [the burden of] many of the impacts on other people as well on themselves, and they need ways of processing the pain in order to stay as healthy as they can.





Fear is a strategy of terror. In order to resist, it is important to try and understand the dynamic of violence and some of its impacts.

Writing, doing things that have a purpose, as well as the right to rest and healthy pleasures are part of a strategy of resistance.

The work of defending human rights is an obstacle course as well as a marathon, and it is much longer than 42 kilometres.

For me the most gratifying experience is to work with people, and being able to accompany their processes has its burdens but it also contributes, I learn [from it] and this is one of the ways of creating meaning.

1. Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP).
2. Association of the Relatives of the Detained - Disappeared (Asfades).
3. Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (Credhos).
4. Women's Grassroots Organization (OFP)
5. Avre Corporation, Psychosocial Accompaniment and Mental Health Attention for Victims of Political Violence.

## Understanding the victims

# Weaving the social fabric

By Gabriela Vargas, volunteer from Bolivia, 2014-present

**T**he fourth central theme of PBI's work in Colombia is Support for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric (Apoyo a la Reconstrucción del Tejido Social—ARTS). For 20 years, we have been providing this type of accompaniment to human rights organisations, small farmers associations, and indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities affected by the conflict.

The methods for this work have been adapted to the necessities of those communities and organisations, and, of course, to the resources of the PBI Colombia project. Initially, the work was done through periodic visits by international specialists in the area. Later, it was deemed necessary to incorporate the work more permanently into PBI's team in Colombia.

The current work of ARTS has been woven with the different threads of those that have been a part of this work throughout the years, allowing the sphere of accompaniment to expand beyond the physical and political. The goal has remained the same, however: to accompany human rights defenders in a holistic way.

This type of protection requires an acute understanding of the context in which defenders work, and an ability to build trust and common objectives between and among organisations. It also relies on a thorough look into the life of each defender, community

leader and victim of the social and political violence that has ravaged this country.

ARTS workshops are offered at the request of defenders, their organisations and communities, and they are the ones that define the thematic focuses of this type of accompaniment, and in which moments it is most necessary.

When the ARTS team is with defenders, the objective is to examine non-violent protection strategies, always searching to adapt analytical tools to the needs of the group so that they can collectively identify how to continue with their work while taking into account the myriad of risks that this implies in their country.

The experts are really the defenders themselves, as they are the ones that have continued their resistance throughout the years. However, this exchange of ideas in the workshop format allows for collective learning and a strengthening of defence internal strategies.

This type of accompaniment would be insufficient without a psycho-social lens. This implies providing spaces to examine how socio-political violence in Colombia penetrates each individual, and often extends to affect families, organisations and entire communities.

We work with the fears, the mourning, the memory and the guilt that may arise, allowing those emotions, pain and sadness to surface—but also focusing on the strength



**Rebuilding the social fabric happens with human rights defender.**

that each defender exhibits. In each workshop, defenders themselves always touch on the fact that despite being confronted with many difficult experiences, they remain hopeful, and that hope can be transformed into action that feeds resistance, and ultimately, transformation.

We cannot resolve the fundamental difficulties to which each individual defender is subject—we cannot eliminate their fear and guilt, nor will we evade mourning when a loved one has been taken from us. However, through ARTS, we will work to find the best ways to live with the emotions that arise and to keep moving forward, resisting.

The diversity of workshop participants themselves requires us to utilise differential analyses and methods that take into consideration gender and culture. For instance, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities confront socio-political violence from the perspective of their identity, their very culture, and this is reflected in their relationship with

nature as the source of life.

Women from all cultures—Afro-Colombian, indigenous and mixed heritage—have been victims of the conflict in a way that may affect them emotionally, mentally, physically and sexually.

Many have had to abandon their work as human rights defenders given their status as youth, women, mothers or wives. Nevertheless, they have brought light to many injustices, speaking out against rights violations and demanding truth, justice and comprehensive reparations.

The reconstruction of the social fabric of society is woven of the threads of each human rights defender, each act of resistance interweaving with others and making the social fabric more resistant thanks to the work of those valiant individuals that we are fortunate to accompany.



# Tireless defenders of life



→ Andres

→ PAULINE

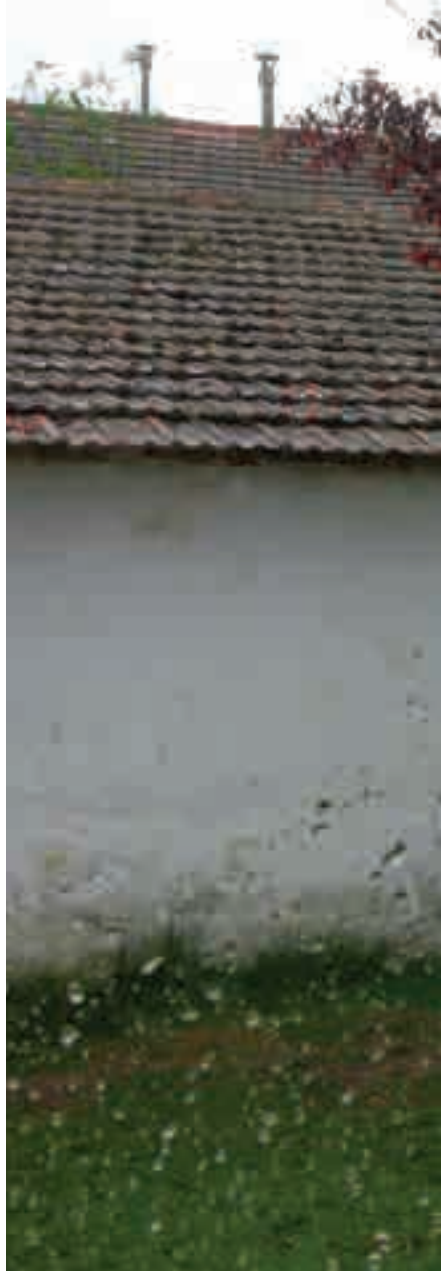
→ MARIO Anne

→ Isabel

→ Vicky











# Training “brigadistas”

By: José Serrano, volunteer from Spain, 2008-present

The volunteers who serve with PBI Colombia as *brigadistas* undergo an extensive selection and training process carried out in multiple phases. The goal of this process is to train individuals committed to the protection of human rights defenders in the work of PBI, with the ability to live and work in a group and deal with both the necessities and characteristics of the conflict in Colombia as well as those of PBI as a human rights accompaniment organization.

Being a PBI volunteer requires committing oneself to a way of seeing and understanding the world, based on the principles that underlie PBI’s identity: non-partisanship, nonviolence, a non-hierarchical structure, and internationalism.

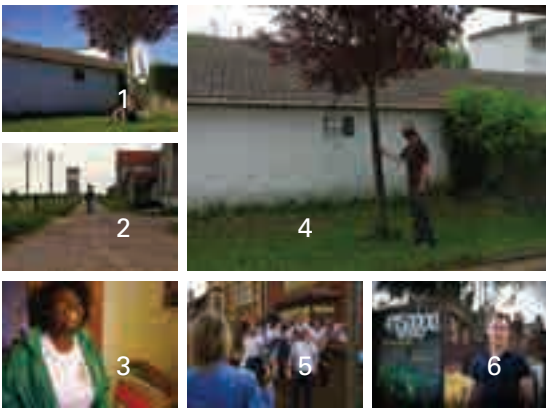
Strengthening and identifying with these principles and values of PBI, is also central to the selection and training of the *brigadistas* who become part of our organization.

We aspire to promote a more just world through the commitment and experiences of the *brigadistas* who have been trained by and been a part of our organization.

More than 450 *brigadistas* from 31 countries have served with us during the last twenty years, passing first through the training process and later forming part of the field teams for months or years at a time. These *brigadistas* could tell millions of stories.

For many, the experience has marked a turning point in their lives. Each one of the individuals who have been part of the PBI Colombia project is also a human rights defender.

Their courage and commitment to building a more just world is the essence of our organization.





**OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, VOLUNTEERS FROM 31 COUNTRIES  
AND FIVE CONTINENTS HAVE BEEN PART OF PBI.**

Photos from previous page: (1/2) Training workshop for future volunteers in Spain. (3/5) New volunteers arrive in Bogotá. (4) A volunteer learns how to manage fear during training. (6) José Serrano, training coordinator.



# The nightingales

By: David Ravelo Crespo

Human rights defender, sentenced to more than 18 years in prison after a trial riddled with irregularities.

Brigadistas, men and women of the world,  
internationalists in solidarity and accompaniment,  
builders of peace throughout the world,  
sowing profound changes in society.

Organization of people with a noble cause,  
representing races of all colors,  
full of energy like the nightingales,  
tireless defenders of life.

The international brigades, brigades of peace,  
a way of thinking, a philosophy,  
are in Colombia providing us with company,  
twenty years without losing their way.

In these twenty years of presence,  
they are the light in the darkness  
they are the guide for building freedom,  
they are the courage for our persistence.

The friends of [peace] brigades,  
with valor defend human rights,  
they support us and are our brothers.  
Congratulations! I bow before the work of so many days.

Friends,  
Many thanks for the support, for the courage  
of being in these lands, providing solidarity and friendship.

Congratulations, and onward!





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# PBI Colombia

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# PBI: making space for peace in Colombia

Peace Brigades International is a non-governmental organisation recognised by the United Nations, which has maintained a team of international observers/accompaniers in Colombia on an ongoing basis since 1994. PBI's mission is to protect the working environment of human rights defenders, who face repression due to their nonviolent human rights activities.

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