



# Colombia

Peace Brigades International in Colombia. Quarterly Newsletter

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**The Black  
Eagles: ongoing  
threats to  
human rights  
defenders**

**Extrajudicial  
executions:  
new pattern?**

**Ten years of  
death and  
disappearance  
in the Chocó  
region**

**The San José  
de Apartadó  
Peace  
Community  
marks ten years  
of existence**

Ceremony held in Turbo's Stadium, in front of the monument that pays homage to those who were murdered and disappeared during Operation Genesis, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the displacement in Chocó



# Contents



CJL: concerned for lawyer Elkin Ramirez's personal safety



Extrajudicial executions: new pattern?



Seen as a thorn in the side of the authorities

3 The links between paramilitarism, politics and the economy are becoming clearer

4 Black Eagles: ongoing threats to human rights defenders

5 Seen as a thorn in the side of the authorities

6 The human rights situation continues to be critical in various regions of the country, UN informs

7 **CICR**: more disappearances in 2006

8 Retracing the steps of the displaced

9 Pilgrimage to the humanitarian zones in Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó

10 Justice comes down on the side of indigenous communities

10 Watching over the Victims' memories

11 **TPP**: "I have suffered all kinds of repression, but never anything like this"

## Colombia

12 Women, victims of the armed conflict

12 Katherine reappears

12 III Regional Meeting of Victims from the Magdalena Medio region

14 The San José de Apartadó Peace Community marks ten years of existence

14 Testimony against silence and impunity

14 Commemorating death and celebrating life

14 IPC 25th Anniversary

15 Testimony of a paramilitary commander in Barranquilla

15 Arauca, conflict zone

15 Walking the pathways of Freedom

## International

16 **PBI** prepares for UN change.

16 In the 127th ICHR audience, Iván Cepeda demands investigation of *Unión Patriótica* - Patriotic Union assassinations

17 Visit to the three PBI projects in Latin America

18 Motions of support for the work of PBI in the UK and Spain

## Personal

19 Life in PBI after being a volunteer

## PBI Colombia Funders

Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD) (through PBI Cataluña)  
Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) (through PBI Spain)  
Appletree Foundation (through PBI UK)  
City Council of Palencia (through Sodepaz)  
City Council of Vitoria (through PBI Vitoria Gasteiz)  
Broederlijk Delen  
Cafod  
Canadian Autoworkers (through PBI Canada)

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (through PBI Canada)  
Mensen met een Missie (CMC)  
Christian Aid  
Diakonia  
Diakonisches Werk  
Dienste in Übersee (through PBI Germany)  
Fons Mallorquí  
Government of Cantabria (through PBI Spain)  
Government of Navarra (through Aldea, Mugarik Gabe and PBI Nafarroa)  
Intermón-Oxfam  
Kerkinactie

Law Society (through PBI UK)  
Lonely Planet  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France (through PBI France)  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway (through PBI Norway)  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland (through PBI Switzerland)  
Misereor  
PBI Germany  
Project Counseling Service (Heks)  
Rausing Trust (through PBI UK)  
Zivilier Friedensdienst (through PBI Germany)  
Trocaire

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# Contextual analysis

## The links between paramilitarism, politics and the economy are becoming clearer

**L**inks between paramilitarism and Colombian politics continue to be the main topic in the mass media and within the country as a whole.

In March, Maria Consuelo Araujo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, resigned because of several scandals related to her family: the arrest of senator Álvaro Araújo, her brother; a warrant for arrest against her father, ex-minister Álvaro Araújo Noguera; and legal investigations against her cousin, Hernando Molina, governor of the Cesar region. All were accused of links with the paramilitaries.<sup>1</sup> Her replacement (no relation), Fernando Araújo Perdomo previously worked as Development Minister during the Pastrana government (1998-2002), during which time he was kidnapped by the FARC guerrilla and remained in their power for some six years. At the beginning of 2007, Araujo escaped during fighting between the army and this illegal armed group in the Bolívar region.<sup>2</sup>

In Congress, senator Gustavo Petro led a debate about paramilitarism in Antioquia, in which he pointed out the responsibility of president Uribe, previously governor of Antioquia, in creating Convivir, the private security firm accused of training and arming paramilitary groups.<sup>3</sup>

In the business sector, the multinational companies Chiquita Brands and Drummond were also accused of funding the paramilitaries in Colombia. Chiquita Brands International paid a 25 million dollar fine, for payments amounting to 1.7 million dollars made between 1997 and 2004 to the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), listed as a terrorist organization by the United States government since 2001. These payments were made through a *Convivir* private security cooperative, used as a facade for the AUC, and still operating in the region. One of Chiquita Brands' sister companies, Banadex, operating in the Urabá



Aerial view of the banana plantation in Urabá

region in the North East of Colombia, took charge of financial operations and was responsible for receiving and harbouring 3400 AK-47 rifles and four million 7.65 cartridges for four days, supplied by a well-known source of arms trafficking through Nicaragua to the AUC.<sup>4</sup>

**T**hese facts came to light during investigations carried out by the United States (US) Justice Department against the multinational, based on prior investigations by the US Securities and Exchange Commission and a report issued by the Organization of American States (OAS).

Accusations against the Drummond mining company are based

around the 2001 assassinations of three trade Unionists from the National Mining and Energy Workers Union: Valmore Locarno Rodríguez and Víctor Orcasita Amaya, President and Vice-President, and Gustavo Soler, Locarno's successor as Trade Union President. According to several witnesses, these crimes were committed by paramilitaries contracted by the company.<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the trial against Drummond is set to take place on the 14 May in Alabama.

**A**t the international level, Colombia received a visit from United States President, George W. Bush, who committed to working with the US Congress towards the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement and to maintaining US support in the war against drugs and the guerrilla. When asked about para-politics, Bush declared his complete confidence in the Colombian government and its Justice system, in contrast with US democrat congressman Jim McGovern, who also visited Colombia, a week before Bush. According to McGovern, "*if the Colombian government were doing its job well, there would be no need for international accompaniment for victims*".<sup>6</sup>

In its eighth report, the OAS Peace Process Support Mission (MAPP-OAS), officially responsible for monitoring the paramilitary demobilization process in Colombia, revealed the existence of 22 new armed structures in areas where demobilizations have taken place. The Mission reported that these new groups are an amalgam of various illegal sectors, rather than a homogenous phenomenon. The MAPP-OAS noted that although the government has declared war on these groups, effects have been limited and the civilian population in several regions does not feel that their security has improved.<sup>7</sup>

1 "Semana" 19 February 2007

2 BBC World 1 March 2007

3 "Semana" 11 April 2007

4 "Semana" 16 March 2007

5 "Semana" 13 April 2007

6 El Tiempo 3 March 2007

7 OAS/Ser.g CP/doc 4176/07 14 February 2007

## Organizations/Human Rights Defenders

### Black Eagles: ongoing threats to human rights defenders

At the end of 2006 and during the first months of 2007, human rights defenders and communities accompanied by PBI continued to live in a climate of fear in several regions of Colombia. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia drew attention to *"the importance of the Rule of Law and of the right of democratic society to peacefully defend and promote human rights, the right to work towards peace, and the right to work on behalf of victims"*.<sup>1</sup>

**In the city of Barranquilla, the Black Eagles** (*Águilas Negras*) paramilitary group sent written death threats against Franklin Castañeda, coordinator of the Atlántico regional office of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSPP), and other volunteer workers form the same organization, on 13 December 2006. (See interview, page 5)

On January 31st, Yolanda Izquierdo, victim of paramilitary groups operating in the Córdoba region, was assassinated in the city of Montería. During the testimony of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso in December she had spoken out publicly to claim victims' rights to the truth about crimes committed by the AUC.<sup>2</sup> The National Movement of Victims of State Crimes, of which several organisations accompanied by PBI are members, reported this crime, highlighting that Izquierdo represented more than 700 *campesino* farmers who were reclaiming their rights to lands the paramilitaries had forced them to sell.<sup>3</sup>

Just a few days later on 5 February, seventy social organisations received death threats, including organisations accompanied by PBI like the Manuel Cepeda Vargas Foundation, the "José Alvear Restrepo" Lawyers' Collective, the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners, the Inter-ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, the Luis Carlos Pérez Lawyers' Collective and the Grassroots Women's Organization (OFP), and others, including the Colombian Commission of Jurists and the Yira Castro Corporation.<sup>4</sup> The written threat, signed by New Generation Black Eagles, Central South Caribbean and North-Eastern Plains, threatened: *"we will finish with you through your families, your children and loved ones, they will*

*pay with their lives for your dirty acts, because of you cowards who do not show your faces, your families will pay dearly for your mistakes"*<sup>5</sup>, in an attempt to discredit human rights defenders' legitimate and essential work.

On 13 February in Barrancabermeja, Katherine González Torres, sister of OFP management committee member Sandra Gutiérrez Torres, was forcibly disappeared. According to the OFP, Katherine was released a month later because of pressure at the local, regional, national and international level. Although the Colombian authorities have not investigated this crime, it is significant that this disappearance occurred at the same time as the written death threats against various human rights organizations.

members of the IV Brigade of the Colombian state army in cases of extrajudicial executions carried out in the Antioquia region.

In Urabá, PBI continues to provide an international presence amidst an atmosphere of hostility and threats. Since the creation last year of the humanitarian zone on Enrique Petro's farmlands, PBI has been accompanying the Inter-ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP) during their work in the area. In March, the CIJP reported<sup>6</sup> that one of Don Petro's sons received telephone threats in which a voice said: *"I am a member of the Black*

COMUNICADO A TODOS LOS ARRODILLADOS SERVIDORES CAMUFLADOS DE CIVIL  
COLOMBIA LIBRE DE COMUNISTAS BRAZO POLITICO ARMADO DE LAS EX-AUC  
FRENTE CAPITAL CENTRAL SUR CARIBE LLANOS NORORIENTE NUEVA GENERACION  
AGUILAS NEGRAS

Nos identificamos con la política de seguridad del presidente Alvaro Uribe Velez, estamos con el hasta la victoria final sobre los comunistas disfrazados y los camuflados de civil que siguen sirviendo a la insurgencia de las FARC, estamos a un paso de la realización de nuestro sueño de nuestro presidente que es la consolidación del estado y la división politicoadministrativa de Colombia, ese es el objetivo de la Nueva Generación de las Aguilas Negras.

Death threat sent to different NGOs

Meanwhile, on 5 February in the city of Medellín, the Corporation for Judicial Liberty (CJL) reported that civilians were following and monitoring the movements of lawyers Elkin Ramírez and Bayron Góngora, recalling similar threats in 2006. CJL fears for the security and personal integrity of these two members of the organization, which is currently involved in an investigation into the responsibility of

*Eagles. Don Enrique Petro and his family are twisted, we are going to finish you off (...) we know the son who lives with him on his farm, we know there are two sons who were killed on the farm, we know the whole story, we are going to finish you all off"*.

At the time of writing, the institutions responsible for investigating these crimes have offered no explanation for these threats.

1 Office of the High Commissioner for human rights in Colombia, "Condenan los hostigamientos a organizaciones no gubernamentales defensoras de los derechos humanos, organizaciones sindicales y sociales", 6 February 2007

2 Movement of Victims of Crimes against Humanity, "No existen garantías para que las víctimas exijan sus derechos", 01 February 2007

3 Ibid

4 Office of the High Commissioner for human rights in Colombia, "condenan los hostigamientos a organizaciones no gubernamentales defensoras de los derechos humanos, organizaciones sindicales y sociales", 6 February 2007.

5 "Message for all those down on their knees camouflaged as civilians. Colombia free of communists armed wing of the ex AUC", 5 February 2007

6 Interecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, Executive Report 81, 22 March 2007



## Organizations/Human Rights Defenders

### Seen as a thorn in the side of the authorities

**F**ranklin Castañeda suffered threats and attacks during 2006 for his work as a human rights defender in the regional office of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSPP) in Barranquilla, on the Atlantic coast. In December, his name appeared in a written death threat signed by the paramilitary group the *Black Eagles*. For this reason he moved to Bogotá, where he currently works as FCSPP General Secretary.

#### When did you start to work for the FCSPP?

I became a student leader during my time studying law at the Universidad del Atlántico in the year 2000. The years 2000-2002 saw the start of political repression against lecturers, trade union workers and some students, which left 23 people dead, with another 64 forced to leave the city and even the country. It became impossible to have the student movement inside the university, so we decided to work with the FCSPP, an organization who had always stood out for its work with student processes, especially in Barranquilla, with volunteers invok in Colombia and the importance of human rights organisations, we ended up falling in love with the Committee more and more. It was there that we learned mechanisms for the protection of our human rights, estigating and registering cases. As we began to understand the dynamics at wand had experiences that have made us the thorn in the side of the authorities.

#### Why did you have to leave Barranquilla, your native city?

**2**004 was a time of heavy repression against social and human rights organisations. Professor Alfredo Correa de Andreis was detained and then assassinated (see inset), just one example of what was happening to social leaders. The whole strategy of repression came directly from the State Security Department (DAS) in the Atlántico region and the II Brigade, which embodies democratic security put into practice. In 2005 while I was coordinating the regional office in Barranquilla there was a new wave of persecution against student leaders. In the Universidad del Atlántico students



Franklin Castañeda's name was included in the written threat sent by the Aguilas Negras

responded with peaceful marches and sit-ins. It first happened in April 2006, two people came up to me and started harrassing me. After that I left the city for 10 days. The second time was in the middle of July. My brother called me and told me they had tried to take him, by trapping him between several cars. A woman in one of the cars said, "that's not him, it's his brother". According to the Committee, this was an attempt to disappear or assassinate me.

#### What were the consequences for you and your colleagues in Barranquilla when the written threat was sent to you last December, signed by the Black Eagles?

I know that I can't go back to Barranquilla at the moment. Colleagues of mine are displaced all over the country. Those who stayed in Barranquilla are doing limited work, waiting to see what happens, with no protection from the State. It could seem like we are giving in under the presssure from the Black Eagles, but at the same time keeping a low profile means you stay alive.

#### Can you tell us what is going on in Barranquilla at the moment?

The Committee is being attacked and they are trying to destroy the whole social movement. They attack human rights defenders, on the one hand to stop us being an obstacle but also because Barranquilla is the scene of trials carried

out under the Justice and Peace law. It is very different for a national organization to go to the trials and issue a report, than for an NGO from the city itself to monitor what is going on.

#### What motivates you to continue working in the defense of human rights in the midst of all these threats and attacks?

I have learned that life is not just about breathing and physical functions, but also about dedicating yourself to deep changes in social structures. These challenges motivated me to start working in the Committee, to strengthen and expand our work, to work with the community. In one way or another we have to give the people tools to organize and defend themselves, and we have to give our knowledge to the social movement in the search for change, because the current system does not offer change, or respect for human rights.

University lecturer Alfredo Correa de Andreis, who worked in the Universidad del Norte and the Universidad Simón Bolívar, was shot dead together with his personal bodyguard, by two hired gunmen on a motorbike, just a few blocks from his home in Barranquilla on 17 September 2004. Previously Andreis had been falsely accused by the 36th Public Attorney's Office in Cartagena, Bolívar region, of being "the ideological leader of the Bloque Caribe of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC" and was arrested on the 17 June 2004 in Barranquilla. He was released in July, when no evidence was found against him, and after significant pressure at the national and international level. It is alleged that he was arrested on the basis of a report issued by the State Security Department (DAS), which itself was based on the testimony of an ex-guerrilla combatant who stated that a guerrilla ideological leader, known as 'Eulogio', had certain physical features similar to Andreis

Source: International Federation for Human Rights, "Asesinato de profesor y defensor de los derechos humanos", 18 September 2004

# Human Rights

## ICRC: more disappearances in 2006

In its 2006 annual report, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Colombia documented 1216 reported violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Of these infractions, 390 corresponded to new cases of forced disappearance (representing an increase of 317 new cases in comparison with the year 2005). To date the ICRC has documented more than 4000 such cases in Colombia. Both summary executions and threats against the civilian population are violations of IHL, and during 2006 the ICRC documented in detail 271 cases of summary executions. The organization also helped some 1728 threatened people to move to places of safety. This figure represents a sharp increase when compared with 2005 when they offered assistance to 1000 such people. The ICRC also registered 122 cases of hostage taking and throughout 2006 expressed concern over the fate of these prisoners. During 2006 just six hostages were handed over to the ICRC. Since 2005 the ICRC has reported a gradual increase in the number of displaced people who it has assisted.

The organization specifies that its figures are not exhaustive, but that they represent the most frequent violations suffered by the civilian population as a result of the armed conflict.

### The human rights situation continues to be critical in various regions in Colombia, UN informs. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) report on Colombia.

Fulfilling the part of its mandate related to observation, UNHCHR published its annual report in March on the situation of Human Rights in Colombia during 2006. PBI would like to highlight several parts of this report. Firstly, the Office considers that the human rights situation "remains



Children are among those most affected by the armed conflict © Jorge Mata/Surimages

critical in several regions of the country", and also points out that "the Ombudsman's Office recorded an increase in complaints of human rights violations attributed to members of the security forces, especially the army and the police" and that "high levels of impunity also persist". In terms of International Humanitarian Law, the report emphasises that "the armed conflict continues to have a harmful effect on the entire Colombian population, particularly peasants, women, children, and members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities" and that "the illegal armed groups continued to ignore the recommendations on IHL addressed to them by the High Commissioner in previous years". According to UNHCHR "most of these breaches were attributed to illegal armed groups, in other cases responsibility was attributed to members of the security forces".

In terms of human rights defenders, the Office "recorded an increase in threats against human rights defenders, including trade union members, victims' and women's organisations, and community leaders – groups that also continue to be victims of murder, arbitrary or illegal arrest, and violations of due process. This situation affected in particular grass-roots leaders, especially those working in rural areas". The work of human rights defenders was seen to be especially affected in the regions of "Arauca, Atlántico and Norte de Santander, in the Magdalena Medio region and in the city of Bogotá." Meanwhile, "the ethnic groups, particularly indigenous and afro-Colombian populations are in a situation of great vulnerability as a result of the internal armed conflict. The FARC-EP, paramilitary groups and demobilized paramilitaries, are believed to be responsible for the murder of protected persons, threats, stigmatisation, forced displacement, hostage-taking, forced displacement, attacks against the civilian population, restrictions on the movement of food, medicines, fuel and people, and accidents and deaths resulting from anti-personnel mines. For their part, the security forces have been held responsible for extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, and identifying members of indigenous and afro-descendent communities as guerrillas. There were complaints of the security forces imposing restrictions on the movement of goods and persons and occupying civilian premises such as houses and schools. Information was received about cases of indigenous persons being arrested and not being allowed to perform their traditional practices".

PBI would like to reiterate concerns expressed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in relation to human rights defenders and afro-descendent communities. Because of their struggle for Truth and Justice and the respect for human rights, they are threatened, assassinated and intimidated, as described in other parts of this bulletin.

# Human Rights

## Extrajudicial executions: new pattern?

**T**he Colombia-Europe-United States

Coordinating Group (CCEEU) has just issued a report on extrajudicial executions in the East of Antioquia<sup>1</sup>. The introduction to the report states “any murder is extremely serious. When it is the state itself doing the killing, acting against everything established in the Constitution and the Law, murders are cause for even greater concern. Moreover, when extrajudicial executions committed against civilians are

presented as the positive results of the war against the guerrilla, serious crime is not only hidden, but in addition a criminal act is presented as success in the counterinsurgency strategy.” The CCEEU paper makes reference to a report released by the Public Ombudsman’s Office, which cited the figure of 157 extrajudicial executions in 2004, most carried out by the Colombian state army, in clear breach of the principal of distinction, one of the fundamental principles in International Humanitarian Law.<sup>2</sup>

The report opens with a short description of the political context in the East of Antioquia – the region where the investigation was carried out – and explains the legal framework surrounding the Right to Life. The paper then concentrates on Military Jurisdiction: one of the mechanisms which creates the conditions for extrajudicial executions to remain in impunity, “leaving investigations related to extrajudicial executions in the hands of military penal jurisdiction is part of a deliberate strategy to ensure that crimes committed by the state security forces remain in impunity. After each execution, the army issues a military operations report in which the victims are reported as killed in combat. This report is backed up by an operations order given by the battalion commander, or from commanders of the Fourth



More than 157 peasant farmers were victims of extrajudicial executions

Brigade who have jurisdiction in these towns. This procedure allows for investigations to be redirected and taken on by military penal jurisdiction.” This vision has been repeated by the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, who have stated that “when the state allows potentially implicated parties to investigate crimes, for example military authorities, independence and impartiality are clearly compromised. Military jurisdiction is not a competent body to judge human rights violations as army officials are often implicated in these violations”.<sup>3</sup>

■ Between August 2002 and June 2006 the Colombia-Europe-United States Coordinating Group received reports of 74 cases and 110 victims of extrajudicial executions in the East of Antioquia, committed by members of the Fourth Brigade of the Colombian army, during military operations known as: Marcial Norte (2003), Espartaco (2004), Ejemplar (2005) and Falange I (2006). These operations were carried out as

part of the “democratic security” policy of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Velez. Testimonies were collected all over the East of Antioquia, although cases are more frequent in the regions of Cocorná, Granada and San Luis.” Of the victims, 98 were men and 12 women, one of who was pregnant, and 12 of the victims were adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17. Most of the victims were agricultural labourers working on their own lands or on farms close to their homes. According to this report, part of the *Modus Operandi* of the army has been the following, “After execution, the victims’ bodies are clothed in uniforms and planted with weapons of war (guns, munitions, explosives, mines etc) in order to reinforce the idea of combat. The case of the hamlet El Brasil in the San Luis region is one concrete example of this kind of practice. On 2 July 2004, soldiers dressed one of their victims in camouflage trousers. During the legal inspection of the body, it was noted that the trousers were clean and without projectile holes, and yet the body had a bullet wound in the left thigh which had been bleeding”.

**It is important to highlight that annexed to the report are detailed descriptions of 38 of the 74 cases to which it refers.**

- 1 Observatory on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, Colombia-Europe-United States Coordination Group, “Ejecuciones extrajudiciales: el caso del oriente antioqueño”, March 2007
- 2 XII Human Rights Ombudsman’s Report to the Colombian Congress, Bogotá, 2005, p.66.
- 3 Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, Report n.° 54/01. Case 12.250. Massacre of Mapiripán, Colombia, 22 February 2001.



# Communities in Resistance

## Retracing the steps of the displaced



Sitting on the border between Panama and Colombia, Jeffer Chaverra, a young man of 17, relives a sad journey in front of a group of 50 people. Exactly a decade ago his family left behind their lands and possessions in the Cacarica river basin because of paramilitary threats. They walked for days through the *Tapón del Darién*, the thick, mountainous jungle which separates Colombia from Panama, in an attempt to recover their freedom, but when they crossed the border they were confronted by further disappointment. *"When the authorities saw us, they accused us of being guerrillas and they deported us to Colombia again"*, Jeffer recounts.

His story illustrates the beginnings of Operation Genesis, a military mission under the command of General Rito Alejo del Río, in collaboration with the paramilitaries<sup>1</sup> in the river basins of the Cacarica, Salaquí and Truandó rivers, which left in its wake more than four thousand displaced people and 86 dead in the Cacarica community alone. The majority of the survivors escaped to the town of Turbo, while others, like Jeffer, fled to Panama.

*"We got a warning, and so we went the day before the paras came to our home"* says Jeffer.

After more than 4 years displaced, one thousand five hundred people from Cacarica decided to return together, as the Community of Self-determination, Life and Dignity – CAVIDA, and they built two humanitarian zones, which they called *New Life* (Nueva Vida) and *Hope in God* (Esperanza en Dios). However, although they have recovered part of their lands, the community members know that the past cannot be forgotten. For this reason, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military operation the members of

CAVIDA decided to retrace the steps of their displacement, this time accompanied by visitors from different parts of the country and the world, committed to make known the consequences of this act of violence, as well as the new threats to the community in their lands from expanding economic projects and the construction of the Pan-American Highway<sup>2</sup>.



From the village of *New Hope*, around 110 people walked towards the Parque de los Katíos, decreed by the government to be a natural reserve in 1973. When the park was founded, some 400 indigenous Wounaan people who lived in the forest were displaced from their lands. For over 20 years many have suffered severe hunger and were unable to establish a new home, until 2003 when they decided to confront the government decision and return to *Juin Phubuur*, or "ancestral lands". *"The government took advantage of our ignorance because at that time we could not read, write or understand Spanish"* says Arquímedes Mambeche, one of the indigenous governor's councillors. *"Every day our people lose more of our*

*indigenous culture. We are at the point of disappearing entirely from the Atrato river region. The houses that you can see here are temporary, but little by little we are trying to recover what we once had"*

For now the government has given them permission to live on these lands but they are prohibited from carrying out any kind of farming activities. In spite of these difficulties, the Wounaan are determined to resist in their lands. *"We are not going anywhere. Our ancestors lived in these lands and our young people will continue to lead our struggle"*.

Although the Parque de los Katíos is currently closed to the public, the sound of chainsaws and the felled trees are testimony to nearby human presence and the cutting of wood. But this is not the only threat to these lands. Despite gaining recognition in 1983 from the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) as a world heritage site and biosphere reserve, this paradise on earth could have its days numbered. Conceived in the V International Conference of the Organization of American States in 1923, the Pan-American Highway – which will run from Alaska to Patagonia – is almost built, with the last 87 kilometres located right here in this area<sup>3</sup>, considered to be one of the largest biodiversity sites in the world.

In Palo de Letras, underneath a leafy tree marked with painted handprints, and the words "NO to the highway" around a hundred people mark the end of the pilgrimage, sharing stories of atrocious crimes from different parts of the country. *"What is so wrong with a farmer wanting to work his land? Why does the State have to answer with such cruelty?"*, asks a participant from the Valle del Cauca region. *"Help us, accompany us, listen to our cries. Help us to solve our problems, we are so tired of this war"* implores an indigenous man from Unghía.

1 Semana, "Un vistazo a los años en los que el paramilitarismo inundó de sangre a Antioquia", 31 January 2007  
Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, Report no 86/06, Petition 499-04, case of Marino López and others (Operation Génesis), Colombia, 21 October 2006  
2 Peoples' Permanent Tribunal, "TPP Colombia: dictamen final de la audiencia sobre biodiversidad"  
3 Colombian Ministry of Transport, <http://www.mintransporte.gov.co/Ministerio/Programas/Integracion/proyectos.htm>



## Communities in Resistance

### Pilgrimage to the humanitarian zones in Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó



Dutch volunteer Moritz Tenthoff, crossing the Jiguamiando river



Pilgrims visiting the communities in Curbarado y Jiguamiando

The massacre of five ordinary campesino farmers in Brisas, in the Curbaradó river basin in 1996 marked the beginning of ten years of assassinations, disappearances, economic blockades and forced displacement for the farmers in the area. Between 1997 and 1998 thousands of farmers fled from the Curbaradó and Jiguamiandó river basins towards urban centres in the region, and many went to Pavarandó, leaving everything behind. Although several attempts at return were made from 1998 onwards, human rights violations continued, and further displacements were frequent. Nevertheless, last year farmers from Curbaradó and Jiguamiandó began to organize again to return to their farmlands and villages.

In response to hundreds of human rights violations and infractions of international humanitarian law, committed in the main by the army and paramilitary groups as shown in a variety of reports<sup>2</sup>, over the years the civilian population learned ways of protecting themselves. In the Humanitarian Zones farmers demand respect for the civilian population in the midst of the armed conflict. In the Biodiversity Zones farmers look to recovering and safeguarding the right to their traditional use of the land as an alternative to the massive African palm plantations.

In remembrance of these ten years of violence, and to strengthen the return process in the Jiguamiandó and

Curbaradó river basins, the community councils and the Inter-ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace organized a walk, and a series of symbolic ceremonies at the end of February. The route went from the Biodiversity Zone in Cetino to the Embera Katío community in Coredorcito. During the eight days the walk lasted, delegates visited the Caño Claro and El Tesoro Humanitarian Zones in the Curbaradó river basin and the Nueva Esperanza and Pueblo Nuevo Humanitarian Zones in Jiguamiandó.

The national and international delegates were able to verify that the thick forest in the Curbaradó collective lands have been devastated by vast plantations of African palm. Upon arrival at the indigenous community of Coredorcito, situated on the slopes of the Cerro Careperro mountain, they also witnessed the exploration and exploitation of precious minerals by the Muriel Mining Company, a mining project which is threatening seven indigenous and afro-colombian communities, including communities in Jiguamiandó and Carmen del Darién, in both the Chocó and Antioquia regions, as the mining concessions are located within their lands.<sup>3</sup> In November last year the Peoples' Permanent Tribunal heard accusations against the company for "its responsibility in the violation of the land rights of indigenous, afro-Colombian and mixed race communities" and for "intentional omission in carrying out Prior Consultation for the implementation of massive infrastructure projects which affect or have an impact upon native communities".<sup>4</sup>

During the walk the different communities forged new, stronger links with each other. It also helped to reopen pathways and break down barriers of fear caused by the constant threats and violations suffered by these communities.



PBI was present at the burial of Marino López in February 2007, in the Nueva Esperanza humanitarian zone in Cacarica. Ten years after his assassination, his remains were finally discovered and his loved ones were able to lay him to rest. Marino was brutally murdered by paramilitaries during the Operation Genesis military campaign carried out by the Colombian state army in the lower Atrato region a decade ago.

1 Interecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, "Sin Olvido: 20 asesinados y 11 desaparecidos forzosamente en Jiguamiandó y Curbaradó (bajo atrato chocóano entre el 5 y el 31 de diciembre de 1997)", 30 September 2006  
2 Noche y Niebla, "La Tramoia", October 2005  
3 El Colombiano, "Careperro: un territorio Sagrado", 15 April 2007  
4 Peoples' Permanent Tribunal "TPP Colombia: sesión minera - Resolución del jurado", 19 November 2006

## Communities in Resistance

### Justice comes down on the side of indigenous peoples

Over the last few months both national and international justice has come down in favour of indigenous peoples. In spite of this, attacks against these communities have continued.

After listening to arguments presented by the Colombian state and representatives of the Kankuamo people, the Inter American Court of Human Rights decided on 30 January 2007 to reiterate the need for protective measures to guarantee their safety, also emphasising the need to investigate the facts, and the importance of full participation of the Kankuamos in the design and implementation of these measures. While the Court recognised that the number of assassinations against this ethnic group have decreased, they also highlighted

twenty recent assassinations of community members and four cases of forced disappearance. The Court also insisted in the need for *“a perspective which includes cultural identity and takes into account the intimate relationship that the Kankuamo people have with their ancestral lands.”* In response to the Colombian state, the Court declared that advances in investigations had been scarce, and that *“there is still a serious state of impunity which could lead to a repetition of violations”*. Despite protection measures, the Kankuamo people and their leaders continue to suffer serious attacks as in the case of Kankuamo Daniel Maestre Villazón, former secretary of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes. On 9 March Villazón received a call from an untraceable number in which a voice said,

*“be careful son of a bitch, we are watching you”*. Two days later he received another call *“if you give us the opportunity today in the demo we’ll disappear you”*.

Meanwhile, the Constitutional Court found in favour of the protection and safeguarding of the Fundamental and Constitutional Collective Rights of the indigenous Motilón Bari people, who live in the Catatumbo river basin in the North of Santander. The Motilón Bari were disputing oil exploration on their traditional and ancestral lands, carried out by the Colombian state oil company ECOPEPETROL since 16 May 2005, when the license was granted for the controversial POZO ÁLAMO I oil project. With this sentence, the Constitutional Court recognised the continuous disrespect and disregard for the collective and individual rights of the Barí people, as well as their rights to prior consultation, participation, lands, ethnic and cultural integrity and autonomy.

## IMPUNITY

### Watching over the victims' memories



the Chocó region, San Onofre in the Sucre region and Barrancabermeja in Santander, where they were able to listen to the victims' personal testimonies. “The victims say that the Colombian state offers them no space and no guarantees to share their memories,” said Carlos Fazio, Mexican professor and member of the Commission. “We

will try to take these statements and place them before international public opinion to avoid the crime of silence committed in other South American countries”.

US democrat senator James McGovern participated in the event, stating, “we have a new North American congress and the victims should know that they are not alone. That is why I am here, to accompany the victims”.

#### The members of the Ethical Commission:

Renowned lawyers, academics and members of victims' associations from several countries launched the International Ethical Commission in Colombia on 20 February. The Commission's mandate is to safeguard the memory of victims of state violence in Colombia and is set to meet for the next ten years, collecting evidence and testimonies from all over the country to guarantee that the victims' memories are heard, thus guaranteeing truth, justice and reparation in their cases. The starting point for this work will be a diagnosis of the situation; followed by the construction of forms of reparation for the victims, in line with their beliefs on ways they can achieve justice. Before the Commission's official launch, eight of its fifteen members travelled to Cacarica in

Mirta Baravalle, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Founding Line, Argentina  
 Libertad Sánchez Gil, Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Mérida and Comarca, Spain  
 Enrique Nuñez, Ethical Commission against Torture, Chile  
 Lorenzo Loncón, Mapuche Indigenous People, Chile  
 Francine Damasceno Pinheiro, Landless Workers' Movement, Brazil  
 Carlos Fazio, investigative professor, UACM and UNAM, Mexico  
 Alberto Giraldez, Community of Saint Thomas of Madrid, España  
 Bernardine Dohrn, lawyer and expert on children's rights, professor at Northwestern University, Chicago, United States  
 Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Prize winner  
 François Houtart, director of CETRI in Belgium and founding member of the World Social Forum  
 Thomas Gumbleton, emeritus bishop from Detroit, United States  
 Gilberto López y Rivas, director of Ethnology and Anthropology at UNAM, Mexico  
 Miguel Álvarez, expert in Peace and conflict negotiation, member of Serapaz, Mexico  
 Paolo Romo, expert in Peace and conflict negotiation, member of Serapaz, Mexico  
 Elizabeth Deligio, member of the movement for the closure of the School of the Americas (SOA Watch)

“The Ethical Commission is extremely important as it can show the world what is happening in Colombia, and show solidarity with the Colombian people, thus maintaining hope of achieving truth, justice and reparation. The case that has had the most impact on me during my visit to Colombia was the crime carried out by paramilitaries and the army when they took the life of Marino Lopez. What really shocked me was that after ten years, the Colombian Justice system has not acted. This shows the deepest governmental negligence”, Francine Damasceno Pinheiro, Landless Workers' Movement, Brazil



# Human rights violations for economic interests

"I have lived through all kinds of repression, but nothing like this"



Enrique Petro, from Curbaradó, tells the judge about the illegal African palm plantation on his land.

*"This Tribunal is the beginning of the justice that will come, sooner or later. This meeting of communities is a definite step towards the peace and justice that you all deserve".* With these words, writer and journalist Alfredo Molano rounded off his role as judge in the third session of the People's Permanent Tribunal – Colombian chapter on Biodiversity. This hearing took place in the Choco jungle region, one of the most diverse environments on the planet and, for this reason, so threatened and highly valued at present.

More than 300 people from many parts of the world met in the *Nueva Esperanza* – New Hope settlement in the Cacarcia river basin on 15 and 16 February to listen to witnesses from different parts of Colombia who described violations against the environment and their fundamental rights, committed by the following companies: Smurfit Kapa - Carbón de Colombia, Multifruits S.A, Pizano S.A and its sister company Maderas del Darién, Urapalma S.A., Monsanto and Dyncorp. The accusations detailed cases of forced displacement from ancestral territories, participation in crimes against humanity, substitution of subsistence agriculture for massive industrial plantations, transformation of immensely biodiverse areas into green deserts of just one plant species, and the massive and indiscriminate application of chemical mixtures which cause irreversible damage to fauna and flora, water resources and the health of the local population<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to statements from witnesses, victims, lawyers, NGOs and academics, some of the judges saw the environmental impacts with their own eyes during their participation in pilgrimages in the region, in the days before the hearing. The judges crossed through areas of African palm

plantation, illegally planted within collective lands belonging to Afro-Colombian communities, where before tropical forests flourished. The judges also walked to the border with Panama through the Darien jungle, thereby witnessing the potential environmental destruction that the last stretch of the Pan-American Highway will cause, planned for this very area. They also participated in a verification visit to La Balsa, an area comprising 22 thousand hectares of land violently stolen from campesino farmers during "Operación Génesis"<sup>2</sup> and currently planted with bananas belonging to the Multifruits company, sister company of the north American multinational Delmonte<sup>3</sup>.

To date, the communities who originally lived on these lands have not been able to return. "La Balsa is a representative place, several paramilitary incursions started here", one witness declared. The magazine *Semana* attributes several crimes carried out in the region to Fredy Rendón, paramilitary boss of the Élmér Cárdenas Front, including the assassination and decapitation of Marino López, inhabitant of the Cacarcia river basin<sup>4</sup>. "Fredy Rendón, alias 'el Alemán', once said that the communities had let the guerrilla onto their lands, and because the paramilitaries had liberated them, they belong to the paramilitaries now", one witness affirmed.

"It is no secret, especially in the Urapá region, that multinational companies paid the paramilitaries for security through a private corporation", Rendón declared to the *El Tiempo* newspaper when the scandal emerged relating to payments made by the *Chiquita Brands* banana multinational to the paramilitaries<sup>5</sup>.

The *Multifruits* case was not the only multinational under examination by the Tribunal. The judges heard statements on how the

companies mentioned in this article used paramilitaries to disappear, attack, torture and displace campesino farmers and in doing so implement an economic model using large-scale plantations of single crops in different parts of the country. Jorge Elías López, María Lúcia Echaverría and Enrique Petro, three campesino farmers from the Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó river basins, told of how the mass production of African palm in their regions by the *Urapalma* company and others, with government permission, led to their displacement from their lands and the death of many of their loved ones. "African Palm is fertilized with the blood of our brothers and sisters, friends and family members", said Echaverría. "We have nowhere to work because our lands are sown with palm"<sup>6</sup>.

The seven judges participating in the Tribunal concluded that "the policies promoted by the Colombian state show a generalized and systematic violation of fundamental human rights, within a brutal reorganization of Colombian society, destroying its social fabric, in favour of an economic and social project designed to benefit transnational companies (...) The evidence brought to this Tribunal clearly demonstrates the responsibility of each of the companies under accusation, including their headquarters and the Colombian state."<sup>7</sup>

"I have lived through all kinds of repression, but nothing like this. At the same time, I feel hope when I talk to people and listen to their life plans, people who have convictions and who are struggling to conserve biodiversity", were the parting words of judge Ricardo Carrere.



Peoples' Permanent Tribunal judges read the environmental impact final ruling

1 Peoples' Permanent Tribunal, "TPP Colombia: dictamen final de la audiencia sobre biodiversidad"

2 Intereclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, "Sin Olvido 47: Operación Génesis: 9 años de arrasamiento en la 'impunidad'", 24 February 2006

3 Accusation presented by the Intereclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace to the Judges of the Peoples' Permanent Tribunal – Biodiversidad, 16 February 2007

4 *Semana*, "El Führer de Urapá", 29 July 2006

5 *El Tiempo*, "Jefe paramilitar 'El Alemán' admite pagos de multinacionales bananeras en Urapá", 03 April 2007

6 Peoples' Permanent Tribunal "TPP Colombia: dictamen final de la audiencia sobre biodiversidad"

7 Ibid

# Peace Brigades International

## Women, victims of the armed conflict

**T**he International Women's day celebrations on 8 March have their origins in a tragic fire in a textiles factory, which killed 146 women workers. Nevertheless, since 1911 when this homage to women was established<sup>1</sup> every year women from different countries have taken to the streets to celebrate how far they have come, and to claim the fundamental rights that they have not yet won. "Violence against women and girls, including domestic and sexual violence, is on the increase the world over. In recent international conflicts, sexual violence has been used as a tool to attack not only individual women but also their communities", declared the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>2</sup>. In Colombia, which has been in conflict for more than 40 years now, women and girls are made victims of different kinds of violence carried out by the armed actors in the hostilities<sup>3</sup>.

On 8th March the PBI volunteers also took to the streets, to accompany women in three different regions. In Bogotá, PBI was present during a ceremony in the Corporation for Colombian Theatre organized by the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes. From one photo hanging on the wall smiled Irina, a young 15-year-old woman who was assassinated in the Guajira region in 2001. Lower down on the wall were further photos of her body after she had been raped and murdered, according to her mother's witness statement, by paramilitaries working in collaboration with state security agents.

Irina's mother, surrounded by other women, told of how she coped with the death of her child and her subsequent displacement to Bogotá. "Nobody can imagine the pain you suffer deep within your soul, when you lose a daughter or a mother", she said.

In Barrancabermeja, the volunteers accompanied women from the OFP during a symbolic event in the Inmaculada Church. To the peals of the church bells, 70 women rang small bells to express, "the beating of our hearts and the sounds of our wombs; our bodies are crying out because we

women of Barrancabermeja and the Magdalena Medio region will never be accustomed to death and so we reject the war with all our strength"<sup>4</sup>. In the evening, the team accompanied around 450 women from Neiva, Bogotá, Yondó, San Pablo, Paturia, Cantagallo, Puerto Wilches and Barrancabermeja in an event to talk about the women's movement. In Medellín, the volunteers accompanied the NGO Vamos Mujer in a grand march through the city, and they were at their sides during a vigil in the Belén neighbourhood, in protest at several murders in the area in the weeks before the 8 March.

## Barrancabermeja

### Katherine appears

**O**n 12 March 2007 the re-appearance of Katherine González heralded a happy ending to 27 days of anguish, during which time people had begun to lose all hope of her return. Katherine is the sister of Sandra González, one of the members of the executive committee of the Grassroots Women's Organization (OFP). The PBI team in Barrancabermeja accompanied the organization throughout the search process, which began with a "search party" one day after she disappeared, and which included members of the Regional Corporation for Human Rights (CREDHOS), and the church, accompanied by cries of "they took her alive, and we want her back alive!" The caravan ended in one of the main streets in Barrancabermeja where a strike had been called in reaction to the disappearance. Hundreds of women participated dressed in black, carrying candles and saying prayers, asking for Katherine's return.



Irina's mother remember her daughter's death. She was allegedly murder by paramilitaries

**D**uring her disappearance there were many difficult moments, like going to identify a body after a call was received two days after she disappeared, which turned out to be a false alarm. There were also important events, like the mass in the Parroquia San Martín Church where a portrait of Katherine was placed on the altar, candles were lit and rosaries said, to ask for her return. As the days passed, everyone began to lose hope of finding Katherine alive.

Fortunately, on 12 April at five o'clock in the morning the PBI Barrancabermeja team were able to share in the joy at the news of her appearance. PBI volunteers accompanied Sandra and OFP director Yolanda Becerra, to meet Katherine in the bus station in Bucaramanga.

1 Hoja Informativa No. 1 - Violencia contra mujeres y niñas, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 08 March 2007

2 ColomPBIa no 2, [www.pbicolumbia.net/publicaciones/boletin/ColomPBIa2esp.pdf](http://www.pbicolumbia.net/publicaciones/boletin/ColomPBIa2esp.pdf)  
Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, "Las mujeres frente a la violencia y discriminación derivadas del conflicto armado en Colombia", October 2006.

3 Grassroots Women's Organization (OFP), "Escucha el campanazo por la vida y enciende una luz por los derechos humanos de la mujer", 08 March 2007



# Peace Brigades International

## Barrancabermeja

### III Magdalena Medio Regional Meeting of Victims

**P**BI accompanied CREDHOS during the III Regional Meeting of Victims, which took place on 28 February in Barrancabermeja, organized by the Magdalena Medio Regional Association of Victims (ASORVIM). The main objective of the meeting was to spread the word nationally and internationally about state responsibility in crimes against humanity, and to demand guarantees from the Colombian state for the rights of the victims of these crimes. The event also aimed to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis in the region, concentrating, above all, on the need to establish the truth for the dignity of the

victims, and apply the necessary justice to achieve the reparation they deserve.

In the meeting the victims were remembered, such as those from the 16 May Massacre in 1998, in which seven people were assassinated and 25 were disappeared. The organisers also collected multiple testimonies from the victims of state crimes in the Magdalena Medio region, made a final declaration and invited participants to the IV National Meeting of Victims of State Crimes, to be held in June 2007 in Bogotá.



Spanish volunteer Javier Pérez accompanies victims from Magdalena Medio

## Urabá

### The San José de Apartadó Peace Community marks a decade of existence

**O**n 23 March 1997, in the face of multiple attacks from the armed actors in the Colombian conflict, the women and men from the farming community of San José de Apartadó declared their lands as a Peace Community. A major factor in this decision was the infamous "Operation Genesis", the military campaign that caused the displacement of thousands of people in the Urabá and Lower Atrato regions. Both the Interamerican Court and the Commission of Human Rights have asked the Colombian State to adopt protection measures on behalf of the Peace Community, yet to date steps have not been taken to implement them. Reality has sadly shown that the members of the Community have continued to suffer systematic violations of their rights, including massacres, disappearances, assassinations and threats.<sup>1</sup>

The 10th anniversary celebrations consisted of a ceremony to remember all the assassinations over the last decade and a celebration of the life and solidarity, which have sprung up in the midst of this tragedy. On 23 February, accompanied by delegates from 14 countries, 15 communities and national organisations,



To date, 178 community members have been killed

the Community held a silent march to the town of Apartadó. After visiting the cemetery, they left 178 coffins – one for each person assassinated – outside the District Attorney's office as a protest at the total impunity in which these hundreds of cases remain. The pilgrimage ended at the village of San José de Apartadó opposite the school,

where ten years ago the Peace Community declaration was signed. "This ten year anniversary has been really important for our community, because we have been able to remember the process that has brought us here today, constructing alternatives to the conflict", the Community declared in a public communiqué.

# Peace Brigades International

## Medellín

### Memory against silence and impunity

On 27 February PBI accompanied the Association of Family Members of the Detained-Disappeared (Asfaddes), during the launch of their campaign “Memory against silence and impunity – no more state crimes” in the city of Medellín. This regional campaign was created by several social and victims’ organisations from Medellín to remember crimes against humanity from the victims’ standpoint. During the event, the NGOs organized a photographic gallery in the *Plaza de Dignidad* in front of the Palace of Justice, and marched through the city. The organisers of this campaign hope to continue their struggle to overcome impunity, demanding the right to know

the truth, so that the victims’ stories become a reference point for the construction of collective memory.

On the same day NGOs also commemorated the assassination of human rights defender Jesús María Valle on 27 February 1998. Valle was president of the ‘Héctor Abad Gómez Human Rights Committee’ when he was assassinated for his investigations which linked the Army and the Police to massacres carried out in the villages of El Aro and la Granja, near the town of Ituango (Antioquia region). According to the magazine *Semana*, one day before his death Valle had testified against members of the Army who accused him of slander and defamation. His legal investigations, which cost him legal proceedings and then his life, were finally heard by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights, which found the state guilty of military collaboration in these massacres.



Canadian volunteer Philippe Page accompanies the campaign launch

## IPC celebrates 25 years



Jose Giron, president of IPC, during his speech for the Institution's 25th anniversary

On 23 February the Grassroots Training Institute (IPC) celebrated its 25th anniversary. This organization is accompanied by PBI and although it was founded in Bogotá on 23 January 1982, the majority of its work has been carried out in Medellín.

The IPC carries out investigative, educational and training activities, public actions, legal aid, consultancy, accompaniment. They also work with communities, political and social movements, and the communications media to promote rights in Medellín, the Valle de Aburrá (Medellín municipal area) and other towns in the Antioquia region.

Nevertheless, the organization has suffered serious consequences for the simple fact of having carried out its

legitimate work. On January 28<sup>th</sup> 1999, members of the paramilitary organization United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) entered the IPC offices and kidnapped workers Jairo Bedoya, Olga Rodas, Claudia Tamayo and Jorge Salazar. Olga Rodas and Claudia Tamayo were freed on 8 February and Jairo Bedoya and Jorge Salazar on February 17<sup>th</sup>, after national and international outcry over this crime. In August of the same year a bomb exploded in the office doorway. These incidents led the IPC to ask for PBI's accompaniment.

*“It is not easy to survive and keep growing in a context where the voices who criticise the establishment have had no space in our democracy”,* said IPC President José Girón, during his speech at the event.

PBI took part in the celebration, and spoke about key moments that have marked the trajectory of the IPC and its members. The event also paid homage to IPC members and workers who have been killed or sent into exile as a result of their commitment to the social causes which the IPC supports.

## Remembering death and celebrating life



Homage to Jesus Puerta (Chucho) and Julio Ernesto, FCSPP members, who were murdered in 1999

Eight years ago Everardo de Jesús Puerta and Julio Ernesto González, two active members of the Medellín sub-office of the FCSPP, were assassinated as they travelled to a meeting by bus to Bogotá. Paramilitaries stopped the vehicle near the town of Doradal, Antioquia region, and shot them dead by the side of the motorway.<sup>1</sup> To date, there have been no advances in the investigations into the murders of these two organization members, and the case remains in impunity. PBI was present in the ceremony, which took place on 31 January 2007 in Medellín, in which the FCSPP remembered the two men by telling the story of their lives and remembering the importance of their work.

1 Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners, February 1999

2 Amnesty International, “Colombia: human rights defenders’ offices close amidst climate of terror”, 19 February 1999



# Peace Brigades International

## Bogotá

### Testimony of a paramilitary commander in Barranquilla

**P**BI accompanied the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (CCAJAR) to the Justice and Peace Trial in Barranquilla where the demobilised paramilitary commander Juan Francisco Prado was giving testimony, in February and April 2007. Prado led the *Héctor Julio Peinado Becerra* Front and has been condemned to 32 years in prison for the assassinations of Aída Cecilia Lasso, mayoral candidate in San Alberto (Cesar), and her daughter. He could now be absolved of these crimes under the Justice and Peace Law, if he tells the truth about his actions. CCAJAR, who are representing Lasso's family members in the case, was present in the victims' room,



Mexican volunteer Andrea Vera, accompanying a CCAJAR lawyer

where the hearing was transmitted live by television. In the first part of his confession, the accused confirmed that his Front had become *"the real authority in the area"*. Prado also said he had met with Carlos Castaño, leader of the paramilitary organization AUC, on two occasions, and he had apparently told him he did not want to see any *"massacres or drugs trafficking"*. Prado is accused of at least one thousand crimes, however, according to the *El Heraldo* newspaper, in his trial he only confessed to the murder of trade unionist Pablo Padilla.

## Walking the pathways of Freedom

The province of La Libertad (Freedom) is situated on the border between Casanare and Boyacá. At the beginning of April PBI Bogotá accompanied the FCSPP on a five-day journey through several villages and hamlets in this mountainous region. Together with the Social Corporation for Community Training and Legal Aid (COS-PACC), and the Norman Pérez Bello Claretian Corporation (CCNPB), the FCSPP have begun to monitor the human rights situation in La Libertad, where most of the inhabitants live without access to electricity, health care, and communication with the outside world. For more than 20 years there has been an insurgency movement in the region. From the end of the nineties, the state has maintained a military presence, in several villages.



*"Sometimes I come across soldiers, sometimes the guerrilla"*, a child told PBI, as she walked barefoot in the mud towards her school. The civilian population is caught in the crossfire – as in many regions in the country – and is placed under pressure by the different legal and illegal armed actors. PBI met with one local authority worker who explained that the simple fact of coming from the region or working there means that you are accused of being a guerrilla collaborator. During the trip, members of the FCSPP, COS-PACC and CCNPB met with communities and took over 50 witness statements in order to prepare an Accompaniment Mission to the region. Previously, serious human rights violations have been reported in the region, such as forced displacement, threats, physical and psychological torture, mass and arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial executions. The NGOs' current objectives are to continue to show the rest of society the problems faced by these communities, and to begin an organizational process for the victims of violence in the region.

## Arauca, conflict zone

**A**rauca, a region lying on the border with Venezuela, is highly representative of the Colombian conflict because of strong presence of the Colombian state army, the paramilitaries, and two guerrilla groups; the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). As a result of this critical situation, social organisations in the region have suffered violations of their rights at the hands of all the armed actors present. According to a report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, restrictions to the work of human rights defenders are of particular concern in Arauca<sup>1</sup>. In January PBI volunteers accompanied the FCSPP to the region to gather information from witnesses who were reporting extrajudicial executions carried out by the state army. The Social Corporation for Community Training and Legal Aid (COS-PACC) and local organization the Joel Sierra Human Rights Committee, also took part in this mission.

Members of the Joel Sierra Human Rights Committee told PBI that according to witnesses the army had planted false evidence to show that *"the two dead farmers had been*

*carrying firearms and that they were combatants, and in media reports these farmers are described as terrorists killed in combat"*.

**I**n spite of the tense situation in Arauca, the mission was successful in gathering details about human rights violations in two hamlets. Unfortunately, reports of extrajudicial executions in the region have continued. According to a public communiqué issued by the Joel Sierra Human Rights Committee on 23 April, another four farmers were assassinated during that month alone. *"These episodes bring the figure to 13 assassinations by extrajudicial execution carried out by the Colombian state army"* in 2007, the NGO reported.<sup>2</sup> The FCSPP is collecting information on similar cases in the regions of Boyacá and Casanare. PBI is monitoring the situation, and is ready to return to the region accompanying the FCSPP and other organizations who work towards the respect of human rights in the Arauca region.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia", 15 March 2007

<sup>2</sup> Joel Sierra Human Rights Foundation, "Ejército ejecuta a 13 campesinos y los presenta como guerrilleros en Arauca", 23 April 2007

# Peace Brigades International



## European Representative

### PBI prepares for UN changes



Representatives from all parts of PBI met in Geneva to study the new Human Rights Council, one of the changes resulting from the reform of the United Nations System (UN).

**R**epresentatives from the five PBI projects, the International Committee and several PBI National Groups, met in Geneva in

January to see first hand how the new Human Rights Council is evolving. Almost one year after the disappearance of the Human Rights Commission, the panorama is still somewhat confusing for the international human rights community the world over, as we wait for the new Council to agree upon its procedures and working tools.

PBI held a two-day internal seminar in the international conference centre *Mandat*, in Geneva. On the first day participants heard presentations from the International Commission of Jurists and the International Service for Human Rights, who presented the main advances in the Council training process. Both speakers were critical and sceptical of existing policies within the Council and underlined the great risks these policies could mean for the construction of a serious and legitimate

mechanism able to independently evaluate and assess the human rights situation all over the world. During the second day, PBI representatives discussed the risks and opportunities which changes in the UN could bring to PBI and its accompanied organizations in countries such as Colombia, Guatemala and Nepal.

PBI is particularly concerned about the questioning of the special procedures within the Council, as they are currently a fundamental and independent tool to assess the situation of sectors of population living under extreme risk throughout the world, such as human rights defenders and internally displaced people. PBI hopes that the establishment of a code of conduct for these procedures represents a step further in ensuring their independence and thus strengthens the new Council, through participation in the Universal Periodic Review and other processes.

## United States Representative

### In the 127th ICHR hearing Iván Cepeda requests investigation into assassination of members of the Patriotic Union Party

**O**n March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 the Colombian state admitted its responsibility before the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights (ICHR) in Washington "for action and omission" in the 1994 assassination of Senator Manuel Cepeda Vargas, representative of the Patriotic Union Party. This was the first time that the state had recognised its part in the death of one of over 3000 members of this political party, founded in 1985 during peace accords between the government of Belisario Betancourt and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia guerrilla group (FARC-EP)<sup>1</sup>.

For Iván Cepeda, son of the murdered politician and director of the Manuel Cepeda Foundation, the state's admission is by no means the end of this story of genocide and impunity. "This is an important yet extremely insufficient result", he declared during the 127th ordinary period of ICHR sessions, held on the March 6th. "I would like to emphasise that the Manuel Cepeda Vargas murder is not an isolated case; it must be recognised as part of a process of political extermination and genocide, carried out over the past two decades against the Patriotic Union political opposition movement"<sup>2</sup>.

According to daily newspaper *El Tiempo*<sup>3</sup>, the Colombian state admitted its part in the assassination in an attempt to avoid the case being heard in the Interamerican Court of Human Rights, in Costa Rica, and to thus escape international condemnation and high indemnization costs.

**D**uring the hearing, Cepeda asked for an investigation to determine who had planned the crime, referring to the participation of paramilitary leader Vicente Castaño, who is currently on the run from justice, and his two dead brothers, Carlos and Fidel Castaño. He also demanded investigation into the group of "six" or "eight", "Colombian citizens who gave the orders to paramilitary bosses", referred to on several occasions by paramilitary commanders Carlos Castaño and Salvatore Mancuso.<sup>4</sup> Although Carlos Castaño declared in his book "My Confession" that he had ordered the assassination of Manuel Cepeda, the

Supreme Court of Justice decided not to take this confession as valid proof<sup>5</sup>.

Cepeda also asked for investigations into the existence of the *Golpe de Gracia* Plan "which we believe was used as the structure to plan this magnicide", and investigation into the "links between state agents from all ranks who carried out this crime in coordination with the paramilitaries"<sup>6</sup>.

In an interview on Caracol radio, Cepeda reminded listeners that two low ranking officials were placed on trial and sentenced to 43 years in prison for his father's murder, and yet the persecution of his family has not ended after their sentence. After the soldiers were tried, Cepeda and his wife received a series of threats against their lives and they were forced to go into exile. "Thanks to the accompaniment of Peace Brigades International we are able to live in the country again", he declared in the radio interview<sup>7</sup>. In 2006, the ICHR granted precautionary measures to Iván Cepeda, Claudia Girón and Emberth Barrios Guzmán, members of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas Foundation.

1 Manuel Cepeda Foundation, "El genocidio de la Unión Patriótica", 29 May 2004

2 Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, 127<sup>th</sup> ordinary period, Case 12.531 – Manuel Cepeda Vargas, Colombia, 06 March 2007. <http://www.cidh.org/audiencias/audios%20audiencias%20127%20ps.htm>

3 El Tiempo, "El estado admite culpa en crimen de Cepeda", 06 March 2007

4 Ibid

5 El Tiempo, "El estado admite culpa en crimen de Cepeda", 06 March 2007

6 Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, 127<sup>th</sup> ordinary period, Case 12.531 – Manuel Cepeda Vargas, Colombia, 06 March 2007.

7 Interview with Radio Caracol, "El Estado reconoce su responsabilidad en el asesinato de Manuel Cepeda Vargas", 06 March 2007



# Peace Brigades International

## Intercambio de proyectos

### A visit to the three PBI Projects in Latin America



Visit to the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community, Colombia



In Mexico, searching for the PBI work zones in this country



A peasant farmers meeting in Guatemala

Since 2003 Peace Brigades International has had three projects running concurrently in Latin America: in Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia. Over the years the members of these projects have felt the need to share their experiences, something that was made possible in April through an interproject meeting. For three weeks, representatives from each project travelled through the three countries, with the aim of increasing their knowledge of the Latin American context, the way their sister projects work, and the key issues facing human rights defenders.

The delegation focused on the situation for displaced communities and indigenous peoples, with a particular emphasis on human rights violations for economic reasons.

The participants met in Bogotá, Colombia on March 24th, and travelled to San José de Apartadó, a peace community accompanied by PBI Colombia, to take part in the 10-year anniversary of the community, in the *La Unión* humanitarian zone and surrounding villages. The commemoration was marked by remembrance of the 2005 massacre in which community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra was assassinated, a crime that has yet to be resolved.

The team took advantage of their stay in Colombia to meet with different human rights organisations such as the Corporation for Judicial Freedom (CJL), the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (CCAJAR), and the Inter-ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP), learning from their analysis of the political situation in the country, and their perspective on the situation for human rights defenders in Colombia.

Mexico was the next destination for the participants, to be more precise the Guerrero region. This is one of the poorest states in the country, with a majority indigenous population, rich in natural resources and home to the PBI team. In Tlapa, indigenous communities have organized to keep their lands, faced with massive infrastructure projects such as the construction of dams or mines for mineral extraction, projects that are often implemented without Prior Consultation. State response is generally characterized by intense repression and the militarization of these communities, who as a result have begun a mass emigration to the north of the country and even to the United States, and who are constantly accused of participating in drug trafficking and illegal crops. The Montaña de Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre, accompanied by PBI, have been helping these communities for some 13 years, through education programs and legal assistance. Together with the PBI team based in Chilpancingo, the delegation studied the situation for defenders in the area, who are threatened and are victims of judicial actions against them without just cause.

In Guatemala, the group visited the village of El Estor, on the banks of Lake Izabal, a natural beauty spot in the country, and for this reason, of interest to multiple investors. The Association of Friends of Lake Izabal assists local communities under threat of displacement because of the arrival of mining companies to the area, and the lack of legal certainty over their land titles, making their resistance more difficult. For this same reason, thousands of farmers end up leaving their lands and becoming displaced to different cities in the country. In the capital city the delegation met some displaced communities who have settled on the outskirts, and are organizing in precarious conditions to demand their rights with the support of the National Coordinating Body for People in Marginal Areas of Guatemala (Conapamg).

Many serious problems cropped up again and again in each country: legal proceedings against leaders, smear campaigns and accusations against the human rights movement, militarization of civilian life, legal uncertainty over land titles, forced displacements. This is no coincidence, but rather signals of the extreme repression facing the human rights movement and peaceful resistance initiatives. The struggle for dignified ways to sustainably end armed conflict was a crucial subject in all three countries, where impunity prevails and prevents any kind of peaceful reconstruction of society. For all of the defenders consulted, the perspective of achieving lasting peace must not be separated from the need to establish truth and justice. All emphasised their thanks to and called upon the international community to come out publicly in solidarity with human rights defenders.

The journey ended with a final week in Guatemala City where the delegates discussed strategies like exchanging ways of working in the field, contextual analysis, and internal issues facing each project. Also up for discussion were experiences of team work and tricks of the trade to make this more sustainable, such as communication strategies, decision-making processes, psychosocial support to teams, training, and other issues subjects for PBI teams, which can all be greatly improved by learning from the experiences of others.

The representatives returned to their project countries enthused and excited to be part of a wider experience, having at last put faces to members of other projects, firmly resolving to share this first exchange and to take advantage of the opportunity to start a long lasting and effective inter-project relationship.

# Peace Brigades International

## European Office (BEO)

### European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights gives greater importance to human rights defenders

**P**BI-BEO took part in a consultancy process with the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights on their new external policy for the period 2007-2013. This policy will allow funds to be given directly to civil society projects, without having to count on the support of the government of the country where the project is based. In this consultancy PBI-BEO emphasised concerns relating to insufficient support for the work of human rights defenders. As a consequence, the focus of EU support was widened from assistance in emergency cases to more consistent support, dedicated to strengthening the status of human rights defenders and supporting their work

against impunity in cases of human rights violations. In addition, the EU has proposed as project indicators, clear improvement in the protection of at-risk defenders and greater recognition for their work, something we view as an expression of political commitment on behalf of the EU.

### Security and Protection Workshops in Brazil and Peru

**T**he Research and Training Section (UIF) of PBI-BEO carried out a series of workshops with over 80 human rights defenders in Brazil and Peru, on request from local organisations and with funding from PBI Germany (ZED German government cooperation).

Working with human rights defenders from different sectors of Brazilian society, PBI noted that threats made against them differ in rural and urban areas. In the first

case, threats are linked to land ownership and the use of natural resources, while in the cities, they occur in areas under the power of land owners and where the state has hardly any presence, and are linked to social stigmatisation (homophobia, marginalized social sectors), and political violence carried out by the police and the militias. The UIF concludes that there is a need to contribute to training in security and protection for human rights defenders in this country.

In Peru, the BEO worked with organisations like Paz y Esperanza, COMISEDH and others who had reported security incidents. One workshop, organized by the National Human Rights Coordination, offered an excellent opportunity for environmentalists to meet and exchange experiences, as these defenders are suffering increasing attacks for their work to protect natural resources (mining, gas, and oil). The BEO arranged to carry out a follow up visit to monitor training needs and establish protection strategies.

## National Groups

### Speaking tour on the work of PBI Colombia in Australia

**J**odie Martire, ex-volunteer from the Turbo and Bogotá teams, left the project at the beginning of December 2006. Upon return to her home in Australia, and with the support of PBI Australia, Jodie went on a speaking tour between January and April 2007. She visited 15 cities all over the country, giving talks on PBI-Colombia and its accompanied organisations and communities in some 45 events, including seminars, meetings,

workshops, public presentations, and giving around 30 interviews with radio stations and television channels, with the written media and on the internet. In addition, Jodie met with some twenty members of the PBI Australia support network, and as a result gained a firm commitment from the Senate to present a Motion of support during parliament sessions in June. As a result of her work, Jodie helped to strengthen the Support Network in Australia and inform many groups on the work of PBI in Colombia.



Jodie Martire, during her awareness raising tour in Australia

### Motions of support for the work of PBI in the United Kingdom and Spain

**T**he town of Palencia in Spain approved a motion presented by the *Partido Popular*, *Izquierda Unida* and *Partido Socialista*. Parties in support of the Humanitarian Zones in Cacarica, Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó, and the San José de Apartadó Peace Community in Colombia, for their “right as civilians not to participate in the conflict”. The town council asked the Spanish government to “insist that the Colombian authorities respect the CIDH measures which call for protection for these communities, that these protection measures are agreed with the communities, and that those responsible for

violations of their human rights are brought to justice”. The motion also called upon the Colombian government and the other actors in the armed conflict to work towards “peace through dialogue and negotiation”. Moreover, the town of Palencia publicly voiced its support for the work of the Inter-ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, and for the protection work carried out by PBI in the country.

This follows on from a resolution of support last year issued by the parliament in the state of Navarra, for the Humanitarian Zones and Peace Communities in Colombia, recognising them as non-violent initiatives. There are also a number of direct support groups for these communities, such as solidarity projects between cities in Europe and the San José de Apartadó Peace Community.

Meanwhile, to mark the 25th anniversary of PBI, the British Parliament approved an early day motion of support to the organization for its work “in providing protective accompaniment to non-violent human rights defenders around the world”. They also stated that the House “recognises and applauds both the courageous human rights defenders that PBI protects and the commitment of its volunteers in their efforts to promote respect for human rights, justice and for international humanitarian law”. In the motion, approved last November, the British House of Lords emphasised its “support for their valuable work” and asked the British government to “assist the project in whatever way it is able to so that it can continue to do its lifesaving and vital work in the search for peace.”



# Life in PBI after being a volunteer

## Personal

*Being a volunteer in the Colombia Project requires a commitment of one year working for the organization within the country. During this period the 32 volunteers learn more about Colombia every day: both its beauty and its conflict, aggressions suffered, methods of protection, and the legitimate struggle of human rights defenders. Yet what becomes of our volunteers when their time comes to close this chapter of their lives in PBI Colombia? Volunteers Roland Buth from Germany, and Guro Nilsen from Norway, share their experiences and tell us about ways that they are continuing to support the work of PBI and Colombian human rights defenders.*

After two years in Urabá and Bogotá, Guro Nilsen travelled to Brussels to begin a new chapter in her life with Peace Brigades International. Since March, the Norwegian ex-volunteer has been working as European Representative for the Colombia Project, her mission to alert European MPs and members of the UN human rights council in Geneva on PBI's concerns on the risks suffered by accompanied human rights defenders.

In PBI Colombia I learned what it really means to work as part of a team. How to struggle for what I believe in, and ignore the unimportant things. I learned a great deal about security and protection, and I think this is what we do really well in PBI. Everything I know about Colombia I learned in PBI. I learned about war and peace, and what it is like for people to live within an armed conflict. I learned about displacement and the strength of human beings. I learned to detest seeing weapons in public spaces. I learned about hope.

I believe that the combination of my experiences in the Urabá and Bogotá PBI teams has given me a wide vision of the work of human rights defenders at both the regional and national level. As European Representative I will be responsible for PBI Colombia's political advocacy work with the European Union and the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. I will also coordinate political work with PBI's national groups in Europe and I will

help accompanied Colombian organisations on European speaking tours. My office is in Brussels, but I will also travel to Geneva, as part of my work will be based there. And of course, I will continue to visit Colombia, so that I am always up to date on our work in the field and the Colombian political context, and to maintain contact with the sub-teams.

It is a great challenge to work on a situation... representative" por "It is a great challenge to work in a situation as complex as that of Colombia. I am slightly nervous of managing my first emergency situation as representative. It is awful to think that it will certainly happen. I have a lot of faith in the team that will be supporting me from Colombia, and in the creative and effective work of the organizations we accompany. I really believe that it is worthwhile supporting this work. A great hope of mine is that one day the Mulatos massacre in San José de Apartado will be brought to justice.



The banana-growing region of Urabá, near the border with Panama, was home for a year and a half to Roland Buth. Slomo, as he likes to be known, split his time between accompaniments in the San José de Apartado Peace Community, the Communities for Self Determination, Life and Dignity (CAVIDA) in the Cacarica river basin, and the Caño Claro Humanitarian Zone in the Curbaradó river basin. And although he still feels nostalgia for his days in the field, he is now back in his home country. Slomo hopes that the opportunity he now has to work in the German national

group will allow him to convince others to support the work of human rights defenders and PBI.

In Germany, when we return from a PBI field project we have the chance to apply for a part – time position as project representative in the PBI national group. While I was still with my beloved team in Turbo/Urabá, I made the decision to leave the project after a year and a half. I had given what I could and I felt that there is also interesting and important work to be done outside of Colombia, of benefit both on a personal level and for our accompanied organizations.

And so recently I started working in the office of the PBI German national group in Hamburg, "gateway to the world" as the car people like to say. This evening the temperature fell to almost below zero, but during the day the sun lights up my little room and I feel happy here.

Some of what we do here is similar to the work in Colombia, visiting organisations and people who are members of the support network and politicians in Berlin, and accompanying volunteers who are about to leave for the projects, and those who are just arriving home again. At other times I have the chance to share what I lived through in Colombia, for example in presentations for regional groups in Germany, and during orientation meetings which German people attend before signing up for the volunteer training process.

I spend quiet moments and times when I am alone, which have been few and far between since I left the project three weeks ago, looking through the thousands of photos I brought back with me, or looking out onto the horizon when the sun goes down over the north sea, just like on the beach in Turbo or over the African palm in Curbaradó. Nostalgia overcomes me and I shed a tear or two thinking about the physical distance... At these times I close my eyes and I feel close once again to the communities and human rights defenders, and to my PBI people – with a sigh I imagine them and I watch the sun disappearing for a few hours, and I know that I am continuing this long journey with my PBI friends, and I know that none of us is alone.



[www.peacebrigades.org/colombia](http://www.peacebrigades.org/colombia)



Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a Non Governmental Organization registered with the United Nations which since 1994 has a permanent team of international observers/accompaniment in Colombia. Its aim is to protect the space of legally recognized human rights defenders, who suffer repression for their non violent work on behalf of human rights.

To achieve this objective, the PBI Colombia Team, accompanies (always through local petition) people or organizations who are threatened, distributes information on the evolution of the conflict, and carries out advocacy and lobbying activities with civil and military authorities, as well as with state organisms, NGOs, the Church, diplomats and other organizations, promoting international action.

If you consider that PBI's presence is useful to protect the persons who who on behalf of human rights, you could:

- support us financially, as an individual or through an organization
- join the PBI group closest to you. Support the international network from your city
- become a PBI volunteer (regardless of origin, race, sexual orientation or religion)

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