



Monthly Information Pack Guatemala

Number 138 - March 2015

1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Monthly selection of news on the situation in Guatemala as highlighted by the press, related to the main thematic areas of PBI Guatemala's work: the fight against impunity, land issues and the negative effects of globalization on human rights.

Huehuetenango: closure of a community radio in Santa Eulalia, and the arrest of two representatives of the Plurinational Government of the Q'anjob'al, Chuj, Akateka, Popti and mestiza nations of Huehuetenango.

Last February 26, 3 members of the peaceful resistance of Barillas, Huehuetenango, were arrested when attending a public hearing. They were "accused of kidnapping, inciting crime, illegal protests amongst others, by the Hidro Santa Cruz Company, even though the only objective of the accused is to defend their land rights"¹. (for more information see MIP 137 February).

During the course of this month two serious incidents have been registered in Huehuetenango. On March 19, the Mayor of Santa Eulalia municipality, Diego Marcos, "stopped the reopening of the community radio Snuq Jolom Konob, using violent means. The owners of the radio station Snuq Jolom Konob, which was closed down by the Mayor in January, had planned a ceremony on the 19th of March to reopen their station. However, the Mayor and his party members prevented this from happening by insulting, intimidating and attacking community members and journalists present for the occasion. Lucía Ixchú, journalist for the Prensa Comunitaria, explained that some of the aggressors were armed. Radio station Snuq Jolom Konob has covered the conflicts related to the establishment of the hydroelectric company Hidro Santa Cruz in an area where indigenous communities mainly of maya, akateko, chuj, popti' y q'anjob'al decent, live. Media coverage of the indigenous communities' defence of their ancestral land angered the local authorities who are in favour of the companies' activities"². The organisation Journalists Without Borders (RSF) are alarmed by the repression the country's community based media are suffering.

The other incident was the arrest of Domingo Baltazar y Rigoberto Juárez -representatives of the Plurinational Government of the Q'anjob'al, Chuj, Akateka, Popti and mestiza nations of Huehuetenango-. Journalist María Aguilar described it in her column as follows: "Both leaders travelled to the capital on March 24, to file a complaint against the Mayor of Santa Eulalia, Diego Marcos Pedro (strong defender of the hydro-electric project) and his involvement in the aggressions committed to the ancestral authorities and journalists on March 19, during the reopening of the community radio Snuq Jolom Konob. After filing the complaint, the leaders were arbitrarily arrested under the charge of coercion, threats, causing fire and illegal detentions, for their opposition to the hydroelectric project. On the 27th of March, after being bound to the case and with house arrest, they were arrested again charged of kidnapping and inciting crime. It is the way the Guatemalan State operates in the 21st century: it criminalizes defenders of natural resources, and the more it aspires to 'modernize', the more it leaves it's citizens, particularly the indigenous, in misery"³.

¹ Radio Snuq Jolom Konob! *Situación en Barillas en calma*, 27.02.15
<https://comunitariapress.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/situacion-en-barillas-en-calma/>

² "Reprimen a la radio comunitaria Snuq Jolom Konob en Guatemala"
<http://www.criticapolitica.mx/109647>

³ "Autonomía territorial, Estado criminaliza a los defensores de los recursos naturales"
<http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20150330/opinion/10640/Autonom%C3%ADa-territorial.htm>

Three journalists assassinated this month.

On the 11th of March, at the central park in Mazatenango “Danilo López and Federico Salazar, reporters of the newspaper Prensa Libre and Radio Nuevo Mundo, respectively, were assassinated. Witnesses pointed out that the assassins travelled by motorbike and after committing the crime, they supposedly hid in the house of the Mayor, Óscar Roberto Lemus Gordillo, who denies the accusations”⁴. Three days later, on March 14 “20 year old cameraman and reporter of Intercable, Giovanni Villatoro, was killed by gunshots in the municipality of Chicacao, Suchitepéquez, in the south of Guatemala, which totals three journalists assassinated in four days”⁵.

In the case of the murder of Danilo López, “in an interview in February 2014, he expressed his fear for the threats and intimidations that he had been receiving. “When publishing the acts of corruption that exist in this municipality [San Lorenzo] is when the threats and intimidations start”, he affirmed. One year earlier, when López had filed a complaint at the office of the Public Prosecutor against the Mayor of San Lorenzo, José Linares Rojas, he was threatened. “I am in power and have the money to take the necessary actions against you; you, however, have nothing, so be aware of the consequences,” the Mayor had told him”⁶. These threats arose after “community members of the San Lorenzo municipality together with the Centre of Legal Assistance Against Corruption filed a complaint against their Mayor, José Linares Rojas, for spending Q2.8 million on construction works that never took place. Such a report was published by Danilo López, after which a process started to undo the Mayor of his immunity. Initially, this was accepted, but later rejected because the juridical authorities of Retalhuleu exempt him from guilt. The director of the Prensa Libre, Miguel Ángel Méndez, said he instructed Danilo López not to deal with cases which could put his own safety at risk. This comment (according to journalist Rosalinda Hernández Alarcón in her column) is most unfortunate, as it stimulates self-censorship when suggesting that in the very act of journalism, citizen’s voices are muffled when these express opinions that may inconvenience public servants or business people. Guaranteeing the safety of journalists in the regions definitely will not be obtained by censuring certain issues, but by recognising the conditions of high vulnerability in which the journalist find themselves working, compared with their colleagues in Guatemala City”⁷.

Sunday March 16, after the assassinations, “about hundred journalists gathered outside of the Ministry of Interior, where they demanded better protection for the press. “The truth cannot be killed by killing journalist”, it read on one of the signs. The reporters also demanded the resignation of the Minister of Interior, Mauricio López Bonilla, for his “inability” to guarantee the safety of journalists and the population in general. “What do we want? Justice”, they exclaimed. Bonilla, who received the group after having met with journalists from the department of Suchitepéquez—where the assassinations took place—, promised to find the ones responsible for the crimes and announced that one of his first steps will be to provide security to the families of journalists Danilo López y Federico Salazar. Moreover, he anticipated travelling to Suchitepéquez to personally verify the implementation of the security measures for media workers. The Interamerican Press Society (SIP) finds that journalists have been receiving too many promises. “Honestly, the promises made by government officials to abolish impunity seem to lose validity every time they are made, and at this stage, I could say they sound almost offensive”, noted Claudio Paolillo, president of the Free Press Committee of the SIP”⁸.

⁴ “Dos periodistas mueren a balazos en Mazatenango”.

<http://m.s21.com.gt/nacionales/2015/03/11/dos-periodistas-mueren-balazos-mazatenango>

⁵ “Guatemala: 3 periodistas asesinados en 4 días”

<http://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/lasclavesdeldia/822387-330/guatemala-3-periodistas-asesinados-en-4-d%C3%ADas>

⁶ “Periodistas exigen protección tras asesinatos en Guatemala”

<http://es.panampost.com/pep-balcarcel/2015/03/16/periodistas-exigen-proteccion-tras-asesinatos-en-guatemala/>

⁷ “Hay poderosos que silencian voces que les son incómodas”

<http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20150314/opinion/9896/Hay-poderosos-que-silencian-voces-que-les-son-inc%C3%B3modas.htm>

⁸ “Periodistas exigen protección tras asesinatos en Guatemala”

<http://es.panampost.com/pep-balcarcel/2015/03/16/periodistas-exigen-proteccion-tras-asesinatos-en-guatemala/>

2. ACCOMPANIMENT

PBI accompanies social organizations and individuals who have received threats for their work in the defence and promotion of human rights. In this context we are accompanying social processes in the fight against impunity, land inequality and the negative impacts of globalisation on human rights⁹.

In the month of May we have continued accompanying the **Council of the K'iche Peoples (CPK)**. On the 14th of March we observed a march commemorating the third anniversary of the popular consultation which resulted in a majority against mining in Chinque, Quiché. We also maintained weekly phone calls with the members of the organisation. In addition, we continued following the difficult situation facing Lolita Chavez, whose protective measures granted to her by the Interamerican Human Rights Commission (CIDH), have been withdrawn. We have also continued our accompaniment in the north of Quiché to the **Council of Communities of Cunén (CCC)** though weekly telephone calls with some of its members.



During this month, we continued our accompaniment to the **Peaceful Resistance of La Puya** who celebrated its third anniversary in resistance. We have maintained frequent telephone contact with its members and have visited the permanent protest camp situated in front of the entrance to the mine's installations on three occasions. One of our visits took place on Tuesday March 10, due to an increased police presence as a result of the blocking of passage of trucks intending to enter the mine site with materials and machinery. During these events, representatives of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) were present. We observed that, after having dialogued, the protesters allowed the trucks with materials to enter the mine site. We have been present at the celebration of the third anniversary of the resistance which took place on March 1st.

*Third anniversary for the Peaceful Resistance of La Puya
1 de marzo de 2015. Foto PBI*

We continued the weekly visits to the office of Jorge Luis Morales, lawyer of the **Verapaz Union of Campesino Organisations (UVOC)**. We also visited Santa Cruz, Alta Verapaz, maintaining presence at the office of the UVOC. We have also kept regular contact by telephone with various members during the course of this month.

During the month of May we have also kept accompanying community members of the **Trementina hamlet in their process to defend the Merendon Massif (Zacapa)**. We have also maintained contact with the Lutheran minister rev. **Jose Pilar Alvarez Cabrera**. In addition to maintaining regular contact, we have observed a meeting in the People's Chamber, part of congress of the republic of Guatemala. In this meeting, public servants from the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) and members of various national and local organisations were present, adhering to the call of two representatives of congress. They met to discuss the situation surrounding the mountains of the Granadillas and the process to declare it a protected area. The meeting concluded that CONAP should accelerate the studies and process so that the mountains can be swiftly declared a protected zone, given the slow process which it finds itself in at the moment.

We have continued our international presence twice a week at the office of the **National Association of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA)** and have maintained weekly calls with their members. We have also continued our accompaniment to the **Association of Indigenous Women of Santa Maria Xalapán, Jalapa (AMISMAXAJ)**, maintaining a weekly telephone contact with their members, especially during their travel from different events around the region.

⁹Further general information on accompaniment and the organisations and people we accompany available on our website: <http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/field-projects/pbi-guatemala/who-we-accompany/>

We continued accompanying the members of **Ch'orti Nuevo Día Campesino Association (CCCND)** this month. Amongst other activities we accompanied them in their informative work, and in their support of the region's communities processes to become recognised as Maya Ch'ortí indigenous communities. Therefore, we were present at the organisation's headquarters in Camotan, Chiquimula on the 19th and 20th of March. We also accompanied them to a Rural Development workshop they facilitated in the municipality of Jocotán. As well as to the celebration of the communities recognition as an indigenous community of Guareruche. This recognition has been granted to 5 other communities, after a long bureaucratic process.

*Demonstration to re-vindicate the Inscription of 7 Ch'ortí communities
February 17, 2015. Foto PBI*



We continue to accompany the **Human Rights Law Office and their lawyers**. We accompanied the lawyer **Edgar Perez Archila** in his travels and have payed weekly visits to the office.

3. INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION

PBI Guatemala provides international observation of those public events in which Guatemalan social organizations request it, to show international attention and interest and to communicate outside the country what we observe.

During this month we have continued paying attention to the situation of the **Monte Olivo** communities. Apart from maintaining phone contact with various community members, we have also assisted to the hearing of Timoteo Chen, inhabitant of Monte Olivo, in the Second Sentencing Court in Coban, Alta Verapaz. This hearing was canceled due to the lack of a National Civil Police (PNC) vehicle to transfer Timoteo Chen from his cell to the hearing. Despite the cancellation, minutes after the hearing was postponed, the PNC arrived with Timoteo.

We have also continued our contact with the **Campesino Asociation of Camotan (ACC)** through regular phone calls to two of their members and a visit to the community Lelá Chancó. During this visit, apart from providing presence in the community, we were able to hear the main concerns of the inhabitants. Some of these concerns revolved around the technological corridor project; the environmental problems and deforestation in the Zacapa area because of the logging industry; and the existence of a logging license for one of the mountains close to the community. Many people expressed their deep concern about the implementation of the technological corridor project and fear reprises if they don't accept the project.

4. POLITICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Meetings and other contact with the diplomatic bodies, international organisations and Guatemalan authorities

Meetings with national and international authorities are an important way for PBI to make known what we do and what our objectives are. Through these meetings, where necessary and in a reserved manner, we share our concerns about worrying situations that we have witnessed first hand from the work we do in the field.

In March we have met with two representatives of the diplomatic corps and the international community: Jennifer Echeverría, in charge of **Cooperation and the Human Rights Program for the Embassy of the European Union**, and with Iñigo Febrel Benlloch, in charge of **Human Rights for the Spanish Embassy**.

At the national level, we held a meeting with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala**. Present in that meeting were Verónica Jimenez, personal **Responsible for Human Rights**, Angel Chan, responsible for **Indigenous Issues**, and Marta Estrada, **Vice-minister for Foreign Affairs**.

Also this month, we have met with Mgr Oscar Julio Vian Morales, **Metropolitan Archbishop of Santiago of Guatemala**.

Meetings with civil society

The field team meets regularly with civil society in order to monitor the situation of human rights defenders, human rights, inform each other about the work being done and to gather information to help analyse the internal situation. We maintain opportunities for co-ordination in the field of international accompaniment.

We continued our regular meetings with the **Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEUGUA)** to share our concerns and stay informed about the work of the human rights defenders. We periodically visited their office, along with the offices of the **Madre Selva collective** and the **Women's Sector**.

Furthermore, we held meetings with international organisations within Guatemala. We have had continuous contact with the **Coordination of International Accompaniment in Guatemala (ACOGUATE)**, the **Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC)**, **Protection International (PI)**, the **Forum of International Non-governmental Organisations (FONGI)** and the **International Platform against Impunity**.

5. ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA OUTSIDE GUATEMALA

Outside the country we constantly develop and strengthen the network of support for the Guatemalan PBI project, as this is one of the essential tools necessary to protect defenders of human rights. Regional Representatives, the Project Office Coordinator and other members of the committee and the Project Office and national groups of PBI, conduct public relations campaigns with many NGOs, agencies and national governments, parliamentarians and others. In this context we develop actions and public relations campaigns, and / or advocacy aimed at protecting defenders of human rights.

The European representative of the Guatemala project participated in a meeting with Tessa Bijvank, **responsible for Human Rights in the permanent representation for The Netherlands** on the 17th of March in Brussels.

On the 18th, she assisted in a meeting with Michel Forst, **Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for the United Nations**. On March 25th, the European Representative met with Sylvain Schultze, the **new desk for the Guatemala European External Action Service (EEAS)**. She also met with the Judith Kirton-Darling, **British MEP and member for the Commission on International Commerce for the European Parliament and EuroLat**, in the parliamentary bi-regional congress between Europe and Latin America.

Lastly, on the 25th of March, the PBI Guatemala Project, along with the World Organisation Against Torture (OMTC) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), gave a presentation under the

Observatory for the Protection of Human Right Defenders at the **28th session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations.**

6. NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In this section we publish statements (some abbreviated) from human rights organisations in which they express their concerns regarding recent events.

NO ES EL ÁRBOL, ES EL BOSQUE

Quienes firmamos estas palabras contenidas en este texto: resulta de nuestro dolor e indignación, sabemos que ante la afrenta que sufrimos como Pueblos, hombres, mujeres, niños, niñas, agua, ríos, bosques, montañas, caminos y la madre tierra; solo nos queda la certeza de estar vivas para denunciar a quienes desde sus pulcros escritorios y amparados en los cargos que ostentan se arrogan el derecho a decidir qué es bueno para nuestros territorios.

Hoy nuevamente nos reunimos, nos auto convocamos y hacemos un círculo grande con el cual exigimos la protección y respeto a la integridad de nuestros hermanos, amigos, compañeros de sueños que hoy están encarcelados por defender la tierra donde nacimos. Venimos de trayectorias de lucha donde cada una ha puesto granitos de arena, de maíz, de semillas, donde hemos tejido hilos y palabras, risas y ternura, porque hemos creído que es posible vivir en este país donde el Universo nos puso para existir. Por esta sencilla razón nos sentimos autorizadas a demandar al Estado de Guatemala que cese en su campaña de criminalizar a nuestros hermanos que defienden la vida.

En menos de tres años hemos sido testigas de cómo nuestros territorios, es decir, nuestras vidas se han visto violentadas por el gobierno actual quien actúa impunemente para proteger a las empresas extractivas que buscan asentarse en nuestros pueblos y territorio lo cual ha provocado desazón, miedo, confrontación. Este gobierno nos volvió, no sólo a recordar, sino a hacer vivir y sentir el terror que causó el conflicto armado interno. Hemos vivido el secuestro y asesinato de Daniel Pedro, de Andrés Francisco Miguel. El encarcelamiento injusto de catorce hombres inocentes. Hemos sentido la impotencia de ver presos a Rubén Herrera, Saúl Méndez, Rogelio Velásquez, Adalberto Villatoro, Francisco Juan, Arturo Pablo y hoy asistimos a la captura de Don Rigoberto Juárez y don Domingo Baltazar .

Para nosotras es doloroso porque comprendemos que no quieren un árbol, quieren el bosque . Cada uno de los compañeros encarcelados y los que habitamos el norte de Huehuetenango venimos de un pasado glorioso, somos parte de pueblos aguerridos, vaya si no hemos tenido que ser aguerridos para vivir aún en medio del racismo y abandono de un Estado que nos ha irrespetado siempre.

Nuestros territorios no están en venta, aceptarlo es como ofrendar nuestra vida a un modelo de desarrollo depredador, rapaz que devasta todo lo que insufla energía y belleza; cómo no vamos a defender el agua, las montañas, los bosques, los ríos, los animales, las flores si es lo que nos permite vivir.

¿Por qué deberíamos de permitir que lleguen proyectos como Hidro Santa Cruz, Hidro San Luis, Proyecto de Desarrollo Hídrico, que solamente devastan lo bueno y sagrado que tenemos?

Estamos aquí, estamos vivas, tenemos voz, tenemos fuerza para seguir demandando respeto a nuestros pueblos, demandando respeto a la vida de nuestros hermanos y compañeros. Porque las mañanas que nos han visto caminar en nuestro afán de labrarnos un presente y un futuro para vivir en paz y con dignidad.

Exigimos la inmediata y pronta libertad para nuestros presos políticos: Saúl Méndez, Rogelio Velásquez, Adalberto Villatoro, Francisco Juan, Arturo Pablo y Rigoberto Juárez. Ellos son parte de nuestro bosque y no dejaremos que se los lleven.

Guatemala, 27 de marzo de 2015

ORGANIZACIÓN DE MUJERES MAMA MAQUIN, ASOCIACIÓN DE MUJERES AQ'AB'AL, ORGANIZACIÓN DE MUJERES PIXAN KONOB', CHMOLB'E, ADIMSACH, RED DE MUJERES TZ'ULUMA, ALBA CECILIA MÉRIDA, RED DE ORGANIZACIONES DE MUJERES DE SAN ANTONIO HUISTA Y RED DE MUJERES IXTATEKAS.

PBI team in Guatemala: Annemieke van Opheusden (The Netherlands), Andrea Czollner (Austria/ Hungary), Roberto Romero García (Mexico), Silvia Parmeggiani (Italy), Eva Virgili Recasens (Spanish State), Anja Nielsen (Norway), Tamara Castro Pousa (Spanish State) y Yolanda Garzón Montero (Colombia).

The following people voluntarily contributed in translating this publication into English: Danilo Guerrero Diaz and Sanne de Swart.

PBI GUATEMALA DOES NOT NECESSARILY IDENTIFY WITH THE OPINIONS AND CONTENT OF THE REPRODUCED ARTICLES AND MEDIA RELEASES. THE FIRST PART OF THE CURRENT SITUATION ARE NOT A LITERAL COPY OF THE SOURCES CONSULTED: THE WRITING OF THE ORIGINAL ARTICLES HAS BEEN SIMPLIFIED AND EDITED.

GUATEMALA PROJECT

PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL

Office of the Team in Guatemala

3^a Avenida "A" 3-51, Zona 1
Guatemala City, Guatemala
Telephone/fax: (+502) 2220 1032
Email: equipo@pbi-guatemala.org
Website: www.pbi-guatemala.org

Office of the Project coordination

Avenida Entrevías 76, 4^o B
28053 Madrid, Spain
Telephone: (+34) 918 543 150
E-mail: coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org