



# Women human rights defenders speak out

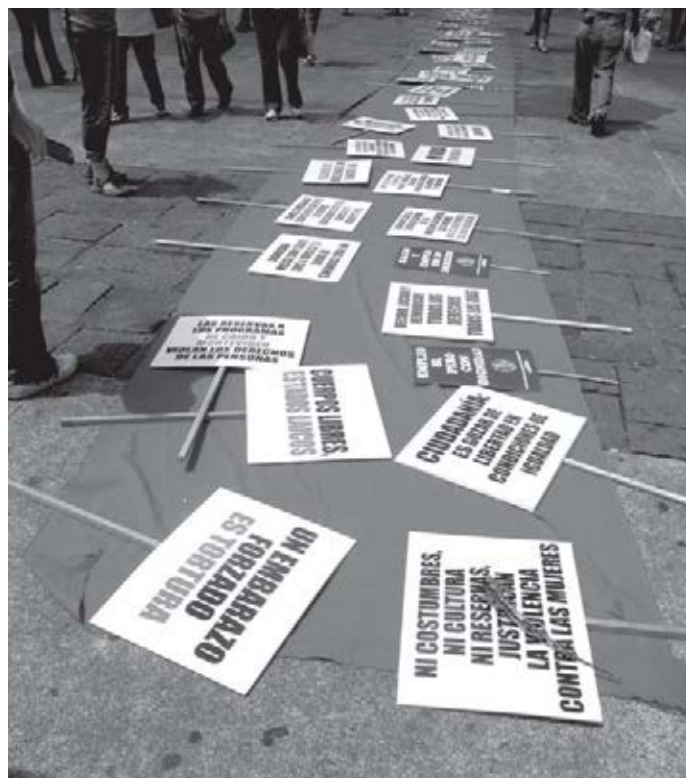
**Aura Lolita Chávez:** *A human rights defender is a person who loves life, and through this love of life is defending our rights as individuals, in order to live a decent life without violence, strengthening the defence of our individual and collective rights within a framework of co-existence and diversity, not inequality<sup>1</sup>.*

Since the year 2000, the number of attacks against human rights defenders has risen sharply. In 2000, the Protection Unit of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFE-GUA) counted 59 attacks against human rights defenders, in 2013 it recorded no less than 657, and among them, 61 judicial complaints characterised by UDEFEGUA as cases of criminalisation.<sup>2</sup>

Criminalisation is generally perceived as a phenomenon that affects men and women equally. However women human rights defenders, for the very fact that they are women, suffer particular repression for their work in defending human rights. They stress that their struggles are ignored, and that criminalisation and violence is suffered, despite measures to defend human rights and women existing at national and international levels.<sup>3</sup>

According to Lorena Cabnal, a member of the Association of Indigenous Women of Santa María Xalapán Jalapa (AMIS-MAXAJ), a woman human rights defender is any woman *who takes on and integrates the defence of their rights and the rights of the community.*<sup>4</sup>

In 2013, at least 142 Guatemalan women human rights defenders were attacked; the types of attacks that affected them were defamation (37 cases) and written threats (41 cases); defenders of justice suffered the majority of attacks registered by UDEFEGUA.<sup>5</sup> In 2012, a total of 67 attacks against women defenders were counted<sup>6</sup>. The 142 attacks in 2013 represent an increase of approximately 200% over the previous year. However, this significant increase seems to go unnoticed, according to defenders interviewed.



Protest on International Women's Day, Guatemala City, 08.03.2014

Photo PBI 2014

**Aura Lolita Chávez:** *As women defenders, in the history of Guatemala, we do not exist. Least of all as indigenous women. The statistics do not talk about our situation.*

Human rights organisations, women, and feminists have referred to this indifference as being rooted in the patriarchal system. According to UDEFEGUA, the *patriarchal* system is conceptualised as a hierarchical system that promotes unequal power relations between women and men, and has created a dynamic in which built-in gender identity is assigned to each specific role in society<sup>7</sup>. In this structure, women remain in the private sphere, assigned a role of carers, called reproductive work; while on the other hand, men are assigned the

1 PBI interview with Aurora Lolita Chávez, member of Consejo de Pueblos K'iche's (CPK), Guatemala, 29.04.2014.

2 UDEFEGUA, *El silencio es historia: Informe sobre situación de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos*, January-December 2013, Guatemala, January 2014.

3 According to records of *la Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos*, only during 2012 a total of 414 attacks against women defenders were recorded in the region; 30% of the incidents registered were in Guatemala.

4 PBI interview with Lorena Cabnal, member of AMISMAXAJ, Guatemala, 01.05.2014.

5 UDEFEGUA, Cit. 2014.

6 UDEFEGUA, *Quitémonos el Tabú: Informe sobre situación de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos*, Enero a Diciembre de 2012, Guatemala, January 2013.

7 UDEFEGUA, *Herramienta para la protección de defensoras de derechos humanos*, Guatemala, 2012.

public sphere and economic activities, called *productive activities*. This social and sexual division of labour supports the hierarchical relationship between men and women, placing women in a subordinate position.<sup>8</sup>

The women human rights defenders, in demanding respect and enforcement of these rights, come out of the private sphere. This break from the traditional scheme can be a cause of rejection by those who had already internalised and accepted the social division of labour between the sexes, sometimes by people from the same community, family or organisation.

**Sandra Morán:** *Women Human rights defenders break the social scheme that women have to have. When women are put in the front line, it breaks the pattern that women do not have the strength, they are not for that. Then there is greater punishment, maybe from the same community, maybe the same people who disagree. [...] When women are in the fight, [it is said that] we are looking for men. Generally women are put down for their sexuality.*<sup>9</sup>

**Aura Lolita Chávez:** *In my case, I have faced many barriers because I'm defending, I'm Maya and I'm a woman ... they do not accept that we, the people, exercise our right to self-determination and that we make decisions, and we won't be repressed. For women this goes deeper because this repression is also directed toward our bodies.*

Indigenous defenders face criticism, defamation and specific violence, linked to their status as women, for their work. They aren't generally perceived or recognised as capable of leading the fight for human rights, as the traditional view is that these activities are typically male ones. Also advocates we interviewed believe that human rights defenders who are at the forefront of social protest are often denigrated, and regret that they are identified by such aspects as neglecting family care or looking for male partners, instead of participating in processes; men are not usually affected in this way.<sup>10</sup>

**Lorena Cabnal:** *I think the interpretation made at the level of state institutions, seeing women defenders as troublemakers, or provocative instigators, is a rather complex stigma, which once again places women inside the patriarchal model; it appears that women historically serve to create confrontations not solutions. Our defence of the land is linked to that, as women, historically we have been excluded from natural and economic assets. And the fact that the few assets we have to protect the lives of families are being invaded and expropriated, obviously raises up women's movements, although we are still playing a historic domestic role.*

## How women specifically are affected by criminalisation

Gender is a social construction that provides unequal power relations between men and women. According to interviewees criminalisation has different and specific characteristics when it comes to women defenders.

**Lorena Cabnal:** *The way that being a woman is affected by criminalisation involves several dimensions: First, you have to bear in mind that a woman advocate, when criminalised, will be impacted from various elements within her community, her family, where often her work is not recognised. Thus, the life of women is affected in terms of organisation and in economic terms.*

The main concerns of women human rights defenders are: violence against women, arrest warrants, abduction of daughters or sons, femicide, family separation, the murder of a family member, attacks on the resistance/organisation, repression, guilt, stigmatisation and defamation, sexual violence, isolation and lack of resources. The economic burden of women is a clear and direct effect on the defenders, mainly due to their economic dependence linked to the private sphere of life. With this economic violence as one of the consequences suffered by defenders, a lack

8 According to the Project "Género, Pobreza y Empleo para América Latina", [http://white.oit.org.pe/gpe/ver\\_definicion.php?gloCodigo=182](http://white.oit.org.pe/gpe/ver_definicion.php?gloCodigo=182), consulted on 09.06.2014.

9 PBI interview with Sandra Morán, member of the Sector de Mujeres, Guatemala, 30.04.2014.

10 PBI interview with Carlos Aragón, member of the New Day Chorti Peasant Coordination, Guatemala, 21.04.2014.

of access to resources, lack of freedom are a reasonable assumption.<sup>11</sup>

Within the trend of criminalisation of social protest in Guatemala observed by PBI,<sup>12</sup> we can highlight those cases related to judicial proceedings against defenders, and lack of due process. According to existing records, in most cases, it is the male defenders who are criminalised and, within that a framework, linked to or high numbers of lawsuits<sup>13</sup>. This data must be analysed from a gender perspective, taking into account in any case the invisibility of defenders who are affected by criminalisation.

**Cecilia Mérida:** *What women do has not achieved recognition. In my case I had to get organised with respect to the situation of women in cases of detention of family and friends, it was up to us to support these people in jail practically, in addition to suffering the consequences of defamation, isolation.*<sup>14</sup>

When a human rights defender is criminalised one must take into account that the impact it has extends to the family, partners and colleagues. When these women suffer the criminalisation of their fellow leaders, they suffer doubly; however despite the stigma suffered, *women stand up to ensure family life and the right to the territory, becoming defenders of women's rights as well as natural resources, defenders of territory-body and defenders of territory-land.*<sup>15</sup>

**Cecilia Mérida:** *Behind a prisoner is another political prisoner.*

The physical, psychological and sexual violence to which are exposed for their work and for being women, is also present in the criminalisation of defenders. The sexualisation of violence creates fear in defenders. The female body is objectified and becomes a weapon that tries to stop the fight for the defence of women's rights and the right to defend these rights.

**Lorena Cabnal:** *Criminalisation directly affects women; it breaks a harmonious relationship, and also affects us in political, cultural, economic and spiritual terms.*

## Rights as tools for the defence of women's rights

The right of women to participate in public life, including through the promotion and protection of human rights is stated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations* and in various international treaties, particularly the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*<sup>16</sup>. The latter states that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life of the country.<sup>17</sup>

Guatemala's participation in international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS) requires the State Agency, under Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic, to comply with human rights treaties and covenants that it has signed and ratified.<sup>18</sup>

After the Peace Accords Guatemala adopted several initiatives to protect the rights of women,<sup>19</sup> but the most recent which came into force in May 2008 was the *law against femicide and other forms of violence against women*, which aim to reduce impunity for violence against women in Guatemala.

All these instruments would be effective according to human rights defenders, given the political will of all public institutions; however in the present context the *specific mechanisms of progress in women's rights in Guatemala cannot be viable because they have no budget attached to*

11 According to the testimonials of the participants of the meeting *Encuentro de mujeres defendiendo la memoria histórica, el cuerpo, la tierra y el territorio*, organised by PBI, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, 21- 24.08.2013.

12 PBI, Bulletin N° 30, "The criminalisation of social protest continues", Guatemala, 2013 [http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/fileadmin/user\\_files/projects/guatemala/files/spanish/PBI\\_Diciembre\\_2013\\_La\\_criminalizaci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_la\\_protesta\\_social\\_contin%C3%B3a.pdf](http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/fileadmin/user_files/projects/guatemala/files/spanish/PBI_Diciembre_2013_La_criminalizaci%C3%B3n_de_la_protesta_social_contin%C3%B3a.pdf), diciembre de 2013.

13 According to the report *El silencio es historia*, by UDEFEGUA, in terms of the gender of the human rights defenders attacked: 63% were men, 24% women-13% were attacks against organisations or institutions.

14 Interview with Cecilia Mérida, feminist and defender of life and land, Guatemala, 15.03.2014. She is Rubén Herrera's partner, human rights defender in Huehuetenango arrested on 15 of March 2013 and released 3 months later.

15 Interview with Lorena Cabnal, member of AMISMAXAJ, 01.05.2014

16 Naciones Unidas, Informe de la Sra. Margaret Sekaggya, Relatora Especial sobre la situación de los defensores de los derechos humanos, Capítulo III, 20.12.2010

17 United Nations, *Convención sobre la eliminación de todas las formas de discriminación contra la mujer*, Artículo 7 c)

18 Comisión Presidencial Coordinadora del Ejecutivo en Materia de Derechos Humanos (COPREDEH), *Política Nacional de Derechos Humanos 2006-2015*, Guatemala, 2005.

19 The Law for the Dignification and Integral Promotion of Women; the Law for the Prevention, Sanction and Erradication of Domestic Violence; the Law for Social Development; National Policies for the Promotion and Development of the Indigenous Women as well as the Plan for Equality in Opportunities. Additionally the Defence of the Indigenous Woman, the Forum for Women, the Presidential Secretary for Women and the National Coordination for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (CONAPREVI) were created.

them (...) These mechanisms are the result of the historical struggle of women but now we must fight for the State to take up its responsibility.<sup>20</sup>

The main tool for advocates, according to them, is the empowerment of women. This involves continuing to defend their rights, reporting and recognising the attacks, harassment, and criminalisation they suffer. It also involves initiating self-care and healing processes to control fear and build self-esteem in order to stay in the struggle for rights.

*The greatest participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields, is essential to the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace.*<sup>21</sup>

## Women defenders demand rights

Defenders demand political will and know-how to ensure that the rights provided for in existing law both national and international, can function appropriately. It is also considered important to make them known to all women.

Organisations recognise the *Guidelines of the European Union on human rights defenders* as a valuable tool that demonstrates the political will of the EU to address the issue and adopt various forms of intervention that may be effective, but it is necessary to disseminate and promote this information for these to work well.<sup>22</sup>

**Lorena Cabnal:** *International and national organisations that accompany human rights defenders have created conditions so that particular tools to defend human rights are known. As we know what exists we can analyse the situation and somehow strengthen this protection.*

Violence committed against women human rights defenders is often invisible and the impunity that prevails against aggression permits violence and perpetuates social acceptance of this.<sup>23</sup> The criminalisation of women must be made visible, and their struggles for human rights be recognised. Female human rights defenders, despite their situation, continue to maintain their struggle, demanding the fulfilment of women's rights by the state and the international community.

**Aura Lolita Chávez:** *To us, what inspires us is life. And we will always dream of living. We believe this generation is a commitment to other generations.*



Photo PBI 2014

Meeting with women human rights defenders in Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango, 15.03.2014.

20 PBI Interview with Lorena Cabnal

21 United Nations, *Convención sobre la eliminación de todas las formas de discriminación contra la mujer*, Artículo 7c)

22 CIFCA, Grupo Sur, ODHACO, *Abriendo todas las puertas de la UE a las mujeres. Implementación de las directrices de la UE sobre violencia contra la mujer en Guatemala y Colombia*, Bruselas, 2012.

23 UDEFEGUA, Cit. 2012.

# Roundtable Dialogue Meetings<sup>1</sup>: Problems faced by Guatemalan communities and civil society organisations

The Peace Accords were signed in 1996 marking an end to over 30 years of internal armed conflict in Guatemala. The conclusion of the peace process supposedly marked an era where participation in open dialogue meetings would replace the taking up of arms as the primary means of conflict resolution. Over the past ten years, successive governments have taken various approaches to tackling social conflict through dialogue processes, including the creation of various state-sponsored institutions. However, these bodies have attracted criticism due to their inability to find durable solutions to Guatemala's many complex and enduring social problems<sup>2</sup>.

PBI accompanies individuals and organisations with knowledge and experience of the various mechanisms implemented by the state to encourage and facilitate dialogue. In this article they share some of their experiences, including the obstacles and challenges facing dialogue processes, particularly those dealing with issues related to mega projects which involve the exploitation of land and other natural resources by non-state entities. According to those interviewed, the dialogue processes have not been successful in finding meaningful long-term solutions or in tackling the root causes of conflicts. Rather, they have been manipulated and used by state and non-state actors as a way of wearing down and weakening social movements. Civil society organisations claim that the government does not tend to act as an impartial mediator in these talks, but instead takes the side of companies wanting to exploit natural resources. In doing so it allows the meetings to be used as a propaganda platform for these companies, which see social actors as troublemakers and the cause of conflict. They also claim that the government uses these meetings to impose upon the population its own policies and opinions. Also, recurrent in the interviews was the suspicion that these dialogue meetings had been used to collect information and "evidence" on those involved in civil society movements to later use it against them. These suspicions coupled with the government's behaviour during talks have not helped create an atmosphere of trust or an environment that facilitates the free and open exchange of information.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, in the hope that the talks will one day serve their purpose, civil society organisations continue participating in these processes and still see them as an essential tool with which to prevent violence and encourage popular participation in the problems that affect marginalised populations.

## Delaying Tactics

Those interviewed shared the conclusions reached by the press, which carried out an investigation in 2013 into various dialogue processes: the state had been using these dialogue processes as a delaying tactic.<sup>3</sup> It is common for the organisations and individuals participating (in good faith) in the these talks to see no results for lengthy periods of time: "...years have passed and still no solution, and the government hasn't moved a finger; it's as if every time we meet we're meeting for the first time with people who know nothing about the situation and we have to start from scratch. This way the talks never go anywhere and we have to cover the same ground again and again. The government does nothing to help find solutions. It's clearly just a tool to wear people down."<sup>4</sup>

Representatives of the Verapaz Union of Campesino Organisations (Unión Verapacense de Organizaciones Campesinas, UVOC) are involved in cases dealt with by the Secretariat of Agricultural Affairs (SAA), at both the regional and national level, for over a decade now without resolution. Even in cases where agreements have been reached, the solutions are never as favourable as hoped for by communities. Furthermore, the organisation came to the conclusion that the outcomes rarely represent the communities' interests, and they just manage to negotiate a slightly better outcome than would have been the case but for the meetings. It is worth drawing special attention to the case of San Miguelito Cotoxjá, located in the Polochic Valley where UVOC was involved in dialogue meetings that lasted over 14 years. These talks took place between community members, UVOC and the sugar cane company Chabil Utzaj. The dispute arose over a plot of land the company wanted to use for sugar cane cash cropping, but the communities insisted this was in fact their land. Because the talks were so unproductive and went on for so long, the communities had been worn down to the extent that they accepted a proposal that was not very favourable. This is characteristic of such processes where the balance of power is heavily against communities and their representatives. According to Omar Jerónimo, member of the Central Campesino Chortí Nuevo Día since the Peace Accords, dialogue meetings have served only as a tool to weaken community movements.<sup>5</sup>

Various analysts have concluded that the use of dialogue meetings as a delaying tactic clearly represents a lack of political will to find meaningful solutions;<sup>6</sup> they also purport that instead of using dialogue meetings as a tool to reach agreements, they are an end unto themselves, in that they are used

1 From the Spanish *Mesas de Diálogo*, which literally translates as *Dialogue Tables*.

2 Prensa Libre, *Guatemala suma 25 años de diálogos fallidos*, Guatemala, 12.05.2013. [http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/politica/ANOS\\_0\\_917908231.html](http://www.prensalibre.com/noticias/politica/ANOS_0_917908231.html)

3 Ibidem.

4 PBI interview with Jorge Luis Morales, lawyer of the UVOC, Guatemala, 28.05.2014.

5 PBI interview with Omar Jerónimo, member of the CCCND, Guatemala, 15.05.2014.

6 Solís, F., *Modelo de acumulación, conflictividad y diálogo*, El Observador, Año 8 y 9, N° 42-43, Octubre - Marzo 2014.



Photo, PBI 2014

Members of UVOC in a dialogue meeting with the Secretariat of Agricultural Affairs, Alta Verapaz, 2014.

to neutralise social conflicts while giving the impression to the outside world that efforts are being made to resolve conflicts peacefully.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations' principles state that political will is essential for roundtable dialogue meetings to achieve their goals.<sup>8</sup>

### The facade of goodwill, without addressing the root causes

Members of social movements have identified participation in dialogue meetings as a way of political points scoring and creating photo opportunities rather than using them to create a genuine interchange of opinions, ideas and experiences in order to reach a reasoned solution that truly addresses the root causes of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Recent studies have also indicated that spin is placed on the outcome of dialogue meetings by the government and businesses to give the impression that agreements are being negotiated to reach a solution and that any opponents to the process are violent.<sup>10</sup>

In the current political climate, "the primary purpose of dialogue mechanisms used to manage conflicts is to project a (false) image of a government willing to resolve difference through peaceful methods. Behind this mask lies a very different attitude, an attitude that attempts to reach agreement

by imposing ideas, enacting laws, implementing projects and forcing alien concepts upon the people."<sup>11</sup>

Luis Solano in *The Observer* stated that if a dialogue process appears to take place in good faith, but instead in reality takes place in the context of an imbalance of power, where one side seeks only to impose its ideas on development and ideology on the other, then "the dialogue loses its character as a peace building tool".<sup>12</sup>

### Imposition of a development model

According to *The Observer*, many participants in roundtable talks share the feeling that these sessions have been used by successive governments to promote their particular development model, based on the neoliberal doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Omar Jerónimo stated that: "The attempt to use dialogue meetings to impose a particular model of development (for example, unbridled mining by extractive industries) is not unique to Guatemala but happens all over the world, and it is a development model that is simply not shared by the communities."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, after the high level meetings between the Peaceful Resistance at La Puya with the Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina, representatives of the Resistance concluded, "...they were just trying to force us into accepting the mining project."<sup>15</sup> In this regard it is increasingly questioned that where there is an imbalance of power fuelled by the powerful economic interests of non-state actors, there leaves little margin for the opinions of the affected communities and the ideas of civil society organisations.



Photo, PBI 2014

Dialogue meeting between state authorities and the Peaceful Resistance of La Puya three days before the violent dispersion of protesters at the permanent sit-in outside the entrance to the mine. Guatemala, 20.05.2014.

7 El Observador, *La estratagema del diálogo: Respiración artificial para una democracia que nació enferma*, Guatemala, Año 8 y 9, N° 42-43, Octubre-Marzo 2014.

8 Naciones Unidas, *Directrices de las Naciones Unidas para la mediación eficaz*, Septiembre, 2012.

9 PBI interview with Jorge Luis Morales, Cit.

10 Bastos, S. y de León, Q., *Dinámicas de Despojo y Resistencia en Guatemala. Comunidades, Estado y Empresas*, Equipo de Comunicación y Análisis Colibri Zurdo, Guatemala, 2014.

11 El Observador, Op. Cit. 2014

12 Solano, L., *El diálogo como fetiche*, El Observador, Guatemala, Año 8 y 9, N° 42-43, Octubre-Marzo 2014.

13 El Observador, Op. Cit. 2014

14 PBI interview with Omar Jerónimo, Cit.

15 PBI interview with Tono Reyes, member of the Pacific Resistance La Puya, Guatemala, 01.05.2014.

Photo PBI 2014



Members of the Peaceful Resistance at the Puya talk to members of the PNC on the day of the violent dispersion of the sit-in, San José del Golfo, 23.05.2014

### Inequality of the conditions of participating in dialogue meetings

Organisations participating in these meetings believe that their effectiveness is limited by power dynamics, with the balance weighted in favour of companies and other private entities. In an interview with Jorge Luis Morales, UVOC's lawyer, he stated that the SAA "are very attentive to the company's goals and their proposals." Several people interviewed regretted that institutions or public authorities promote the views and approaches of private actors, the economically powerful, with no real interest in resolving the situation. Accordingly organisations interviewed expressed concern over the lack of desire to favour the approaches and visions of the affected communities or social actors involved in these dialogues, often in precarious economic situations.

In dialogue processes where the Peaceful Resistance La Puya have participated, Tono Reyes, a member of the resistance stated that: "the government has all the resources, all the technical support they could need, and we turn up with community members. The ideal situation would be one where we are on equal terms."<sup>16</sup> The lack of equal participation, and the economic burden of attending talks that go on for years, are factors that have made life difficult for the members of the Twelve Kaqchikel Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez:

"The conditions just aren't right to engage in a dialogue; some of us have warrants out for our arrest, or have been accused of crimes, and we simply don't have the money to hire good lawyers to come with us to the talks; on the other hand the cement company has a whole team of lawyers and professionals advising them (...). If they really wanted to talk to us, they should release our wrongly accused and criminalised resistance members from prison. All the accusations against

them are false. Were they to be released we would feel like the conditions were equal: then we could sit down and talk."

According to principles established by the United Nations the mediator should be independent, not have a material interest in the result, and ensure a balanced process where each participant is treated fairly.<sup>17</sup> However, in the interviews conducted by PBI, the National Dialogue System has been criticized in its role as mediator for failing to ensure a balanced process and equal participation of the parties during the meeting.

In their democratic dialogue guidelines, the Organisation of American States does not recommend using roundtable meetings as means of conflict resolution where there is a "significant imbalance of power between the would be participants as this would compromise the process, and increase the likelihood of attempted co-opting."<sup>18</sup> Along the same lines, according to Luis Solano, dialogue meetings are not an effective mediation tool when they take place in the context of political and economic inequality between the participants. The root causes of the conflict will rarely be explored in any depth if the government supports the interests of companies and other entities with similar interests.<sup>19</sup>

#### Information provided by members of civil society and social movements in dialogue meetings, later used against them:

Omar Jerónimo told PBI in an interview that, "these roundtable dialogue meetings in Guatemala (...) have started being used as a tool to weaken communities, to find out who the community leaders are, too see who has authority, and then to try to co-opt and corrupt these leaders. In the worst case scenarios, leaders are murdered, and I'm talking about real life examples that we have lived through."

Members of UVOC have also mentioned these same concerns: "(...) it gives the authorities the opportunity to see who the leaders are, and gather evidence to use against them in the future."<sup>20</sup> The same experience has been had by members of the Twelve Kaqchikel Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez: "(...) so many of our members have warrants out for their arrest, that to attend a dialogue meeting would only result in more of us in prison."<sup>21</sup>

#### Overcoming the obstacles: dialogue and social participation as the basis for conflict resolution

Despite all the criticisms levelled against the dialogue process in Guatemala, civil society organisations and individuals interviewed still value highly the importance of having dialogue meetings. They continue to demand that the dialogues constitute an essential tool for effective democratic participation in conflict resolution: "(...) a meaningful dialogue meeting, taken seriously, with clearly defined goals and the willing and active participation of all parties, can bring about positive changes; (...). We participate in these processes because we believe that open and constructive dialogue is one of the best tools we have at our disposal to construct a democratic society."<sup>22</sup>

16 Ibidem.

17 Naciones Unidas, Op. Cit.

18 OEA, *Guía práctica de Diálogo Democrático*, Guatemala, 2013.

19 Solano, L.; Op. Cit. 2014

20 PBI interview with Jorge Luis Morales, Cit.

21 Statement by the Twelve Kaqchikel Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, 22.07.2013.

22 PBI Interview with Omar Jerónimo, Cit.



## Overcoming the obstacles: dialogue and social participation as the basis for conflict resolution

**28.05.2012-** Miguel Ángel Balcárcel, Miguel Angel Balcárcel, coordinator of the National Dialogue System, and Adrián Zapata, presidential commissioner for Rural Development, were selected by the President in May 2012 to negotiate and look for solutions to problems affecting various sectors of society; they were put in charge of tending to requests from organisations making demands to the government, and promoting dialogue between the parties. In an interview with Prensa Libre, Balcárcel referred to the need to overcome the history of confrontation and look towards cooperation. He affirmed that the strategy to encourage dialogue and end conflict nationwide would focus on giving due attention to all problems, and resolving them without violence, and in a manner respectful of human rights standards, “putting an end to all conflicts, including historic problems.”<sup>23</sup>

**10.10.2012-** In the newspaper La Hora, a few months after a mass campesino march (in February 2012) Balcárcel acknowledged, that there were some historic problems that could not be resolved as quickly as anticipated. He also stated that there were many obstacles to improving the dialogue system:

- he acknowledged the need to give an answer to those involved about existing problems: “there must be widespread acknowledgement of which methods of social protest are acceptable and which are not.”;
- there is a need to find common ground and to do so will require compromises: “if we want to reach agreements, everyone has to give a little ground.”
- it must be understood that dialogue is not a solution in itself but more a means to an end: “if one party tries to impose their will over another, that is not a reaching a mutually accepted agreement.”
- Up to date information available to both parties in dialogue: “When demands are made they need to be very tightly drafted”, he said in relation to the demands of civil society organisations.
- The capacity of state institutions to respond to demands: “The problem is that the government and other state machinery need to focus on responding quickly and efficiently to unexpected problems or matters that need urgent attention. This isn’t something that is always achieved because so many processes are designed to be gradual “so that things can go slowly; it’s a long process despite all the goodwill behind it.”<sup>24</sup>

**05.08.2013-** In an interview published in 2013, the commissioner of the SND stated: “Dialogue allows for all kinds of opinions, ideologies, and people to express themselves and find common ground, so that they can build agreements together, solve problems and empower themselves. As long as an agreement can be reached, the result is always positive, because now that group of people can reach their goals and go on to build an environment of cultural change.

Conflicts are linked to state machinery because the people demand solutions from the state, and for those solutions to become a reality credibility and trust needs to be built up, we need the capacity to respond, we need to be efficient and to meet the expectations of the public.<sup>25</sup>

**18.06.2014-** After the first dialogue session initiated between the Twelve Kaqchikeles Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez and governmental authorities, which took place in the President’s House, the coordinator of the SND, Miguel Ángel Balcárcel stated in a press conference that the operation of the cement factory “isn’t an issue that involves the executive because the other party here is a private company, but the Government can mediate between the two to ensure an agreement can be reached.” He also stated that “these meetings aren’t just for show. We want to look at each issue in turn and get to the bottom of the conflict and reach mutually acceptable solutions for all involved as guaranteed by the Constitution.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Balcárcel, the main object and purpose of the SND is to complement the activities and mandate of state institutions when conflict arises. He stated in 2013, “It’s not the state’s complaints department, it’s designed to ensure good democratic governance; it has a very specific function. When there is a protest or road blockade we won’t be there. Our intervention will be much more systematic and long term”.

In terms of the mandate of the SND and its areas of focus: “We have identified six main points of conflict in the country: natural resources, land rights, electricity generation, boundary problems, social policies and democratic security. We don’t manage all these conflicts, but we do design a methodology through working with different actors; at the moment we intervene when asked by the parties involved in the conflict or at the President’s request. We work directly with the appropriate state institutions.”<sup>27</sup>

23 Prensa Libre, *Dos estrategias abren diálogos*, Guatemala, 28.05.2012

[http://www.prensalibre.com.gt/noticias/estrategas-abren-dialogos\\_0\\_708529170.html](http://www.prensalibre.com.gt/noticias/estrategas-abren-dialogos_0_708529170.html)

24 La Hora, *Balcárcel: el diálogo sólo es útil si todos cedemos algo*, Guatemala, 10.10.2012

<http://www.lahora.com.gt/index.php/nacional/guatemala/actualidad/166798-balcarcel-el-dialogo-solo-es-util-si-todos->

25 De Guate, *El diálogo da poder al ciudadano*, Guatemala, 05.08.2013

<http://www.deguate.com/artman/publish/principal/el-dialogo-da-poder-al-ciudadano.shtml#U8hAB6aoJHY>

26 Tele Prensa, *Opositores a construcción de cementera buscan proceso de diálogo*, Guatemala, 18.06.2014

<http://www.teleprensa.com/guatemala/opositores-a-construccion-de-cementera-busca-proceso-de-dialogo.html>

27 De Guate, Cit.

# The Ch'orti' Maya:

## community experiences in defence of indigenous people's rights

The Ch'orti' are a Mayan people resident in Mesoamerica, who have lived for centuries in what is now Eastern Guatemala and Northern Honduras. While the Ch'orti' at one time occupied an extensive area in the region, historical events marked by wars, plundering, evictions and the concentration of land have restricted the area they now occupy.<sup>1</sup>

The pressures on the lands and territory the Ch'orti' inhabit have continued in recent decades. As a result, Ch'orti' communities are actively demanding respect and guarantees for their collective rights as indigenous people, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights, within a context characterized by economic interests, particularly those involving exploitation of natural resources. The New Day Campesino Central Coordinator (Central Campesina Ch'orti' Nuevo Día, CCCND) has been involved in these community processes since 2003 in several municipalities in the Department of Chiquimula.

### The quest for state recognition as an indigenous community based on measurement and delineation of community lands

Since the end of the year 2000, plans for the exploitation of natural resources and large infrastructure projects in the municipality of Jocotán (see table of economic projects) have been questioned by social and community stakeholders in the region. They have reported an increase in conflicts due to a lack of information and prior consultation with communities in the area. Within this context, there have been reports of threats, intimidation and attacks against those who have resisted the projects, and, in particular, land purchase pressures involving stakeholders who are promoting the projects at the local level. For several years six communities in Jocotán that have been affected by this situation, Las Flores, Matazano, Guareruche, Escobillar, Pelillo Negro and Suchiquer have sought official state recognition of their territories as part of the work they have undertaken to defend their land and natural resources.

In 2011, one of the first steps taken by these communities involved a request submitted to the Land Registry (Registro de Información Catastral, RIC) for their communal lands to be measured and delineated in order to facilitate legal recognition, which would provide a means for defence of their territory, guaranteeing prior consultation when dealing with plans and projects that affect these lands. In spite of a series of meetings between the RIC and the com-

munities, the CCCND has noted several issues that have contributed to a stalemate in this process, among them: RIC disagreement with the approaches proposed by the communities for measuring communal lands; pressure by private stakeholders with respect to community matters, visible for example when companies with particular economic objectives in the area demonstrate interest in individual measurements of community lands; and the impact of these pressures on the social fabric and community organization as expressed by the appearance of specific individuals within the communities who advocate individual measurement of the lands.

Following a RIC request, the six communities created indigenous councils in 2011. These structures, according to Carlos Aragón, a member of the New Day Indigenous Campesino Association (which is part of the CCCND), were not well received within the communities since they went based on an external request and lacked clarity with respect to their purpose, particularly in the first two years after their creation.

According to Aragón, over the years the relationship between the RIC and the communities has deteriorated. Meetings no longer take place and the inability to come to an agreement with the institution regarding ways to move forward finally made the collective measurement of the lands an unattainable goal. Both the CCCND members and residents of the communities came to the conclusion that the strategy to achieve recognition by the State of the communities' indigenous status was not achieving the desired results.<sup>2</sup>

### Change of direction: strengthening of community and inter-community processes

Beginning in 2013, the communities' strategy changed direction, putting more emphasis on their internal processes. As part of this strategy, they sought to strengthen the communities and their councils based on an assertion of their indigenous identity: *We decided to empower ourselves, as indigenous peoples, to feel we have our own history, our own way of living together and administering our lands, and our own way of navigating our culture.*<sup>3</sup> says Luis Ramírez, a Maya Ch'orti' member of the Las Flores indigenous council.

1 Mosquera Aguilar, A., *Historia social de los antiguos mayas*, Guatemala, digital edition, 2013. [http://www.angelfire.com/mo/squera/online/Histosoc\\_maya.pdf](http://www.angelfire.com/mo/squera/online/Histosoc_maya.pdf)

2 PBI Interview with Carlos Aragón, Guatemala, May 2014.

3 PBI Interview with Luis Ramírez, Guatemala, June 2014.

To carry out this process, in 2013 the first step involved strengthening the Ch'orti' Inter-communal Indigenous Council, which was comprised of the six communities that had submitted the request to the RIC for measurement of their communal lands. As a result of the deterioration in the relationship, the Council publicly declared the closure of the request to the RIC and asked the RIC to refrain from returning to their lands. *The failure of the RIC to understand what an indigenous community is, what its communal lands are (. . .) and the legitimacy and authority of our indigenous and ancestral leaders will not permit this process to advance (. . .) We declare that the RIC is not welcome in*



Photo: PBI 2014

Community meeting in Cajón del Río, Camotán, April 2014.

*our communities and we ask for a suspension of all activities that lead to confrontation and divisions between our people (. . .).<sup>4</sup>*

The Ch'orti' Inter-communal Indigenous Council began convening monthly meetings focusing on political analysis and decision-making oriented toward defending the communities' lands. In addition, they implemented a process for recuperation of their *collective memory* as Ch'orti' communities, with the goal of recuperating their collective values, customs and structures.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the indigenous councils began to take a more proactive role in the communities, attempting to recover the structure of their ancestral councils. In Las Flores, for example, after forming their indigenous council the community carried out an investigation, working with their elders to determine the nature of their ancestral council, which represented the community for centuries but which was lost in recent history. As a result of the investigation, they found that the ancestral council consisted of two levels of authority, the Ajiroib' (*the primary caretakers of Mother Earth*), which was comprised of five people, and

the Ahtakarsiajob' (*complementaries*), made up of 18 individuals. After seeking out this information, the residents of Las Flores held a community meeting and decided to resurrect this structure for electing their indigenous authorities, choosing 23 individuals to form the council. In addition, they began working on determining the role of the indigenous council, as well as a set of internal norms reflecting the values and principles of the community. *Every representative of the council has a function, including mediating conflicts, health and education, there is also a women's group, a youth group . . . every member of the council has a specific role, says Luis Ramírez.*

Little by little these actions are contributing to the strengthening of the indigenous and inter-communal councils. According to members of the association, one of the goals going forward is to improve their recognition and representation within the communities in order to ensure that the struggle to defend their ancestral lands is a collective process. *This is not something that is going to happen overnight, it's a long term project, says Carlos Aragón.<sup>6</sup>*

### Women's participation in community evaluation and decision-making

Leslie Ramírez, a member of the association, noted that one of the challenges identified for the organization and in the communities is participation by women in the indigenous councils. *In the region the community leadership structures are fundamentally geared towards participation of men . . . there is much work to do to improve participation of women in this area, both quantitatively and qualitatively.<sup>7</sup>* The CCCND is employing two strategies to address this issue: the first is with women's groups in the communities, encouraging more active participation in the work of the indigenous councils; the second focuses on raising awareness within the councils themselves. *There is work to be done fundamentally by accompanying the construction process in the communities. We need to raise awareness in the councils with respect to questioning the way in which women have been treated to date. And there's a need to look into whether this is the way we should continue in the future.<sup>8</sup>*

### Alliance of Eastern communities for defence of land and territory

In other areas of the Ch'orti' region beyond the previously mentioned communities in Jocotán, for example in the municipalities of Camotán and Olopa, in the department of Chiquimula, and La Unión, in the department of Zacapa, the path to recovering *historic memory* as indigenous communities is being followed with assistance provided by the New Day Indigenous Campesino Association.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in recent months, coinciding with information they have

4 Consejo Indígena Intercomunal Ch'orti' statement to the Registro de Información Catastral, July 2013.

5 Consejo Indígena Intercomunal Ch'orti' statement to the Registro de Información Catastral, July 2013.

6 Ibidem.

7 PBI interview with Leslie Ramírez, Guatemala, June 2014.

8 Ibidem.

9 Carlos Aragón interview, Cit.

Photo 2014



Placards and banners in protest of the criminalization of human rights defenders and extractive activities in the ch'orti' region, Chiquimula, April 2014.

received regarding plans for a hydroelectric project in Cañón del Río, in the municipality of Camotán, the residents are meeting and calling for respect for their ancestral lands and territories. Together with the Jocotán communities, the Camotán residents are participating in regional meetings

in which they are outlining their concerns and sharing their community experiences in defending their collective rights as indigenous peoples, as well as sharing their knowledge and what they have learned about their historic cultural and organizational practices.

### Economic projects in the region – Hydroelectric projects<sup>10</sup>

*In the department of Chiquimula there are various projects being planned or already underway.*

Since 2007, personnel from the Empresa Proprietaria de la Red (EPR) Generación Limpia y Manejo de Recursos Naturales Tres Niñas company have been arriving in communities in the municipalities of Jocotán and Camotán, attempting to purchase communal lands and encourage acceptance of a project that would involve the installation of three hydroelectric plants on the Río Grande river.<sup>11</sup> The three hydroelectric plants, according to people in the area, fit as pieces in one of the most ambitious goals of the Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP), which encompasses an electric interconnection from Mexico through to Panama.<sup>12</sup> In May 2009 the company presented environmental impact assessments of the three projects. Four months later, in September, the Environment and Natural Resources Ministry (Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, MARN) rejected the assessments, taking into account an alternative report, presented by the Madre Selva Collective, that outlined possible negative environmental impacts of the hydroelectric plants. In April 2010, however, it came to light that the company had presented another environmental assessment of the El Orégano project that was not made public and that the local population was unable to respond to with an alternative study as had been possible previously with assistance from Madre Selva.<sup>13</sup> The MARN approved the environmental assessment without taking into account the opinion of the population affected by the project. In addition, the construction and installation of hydroelectric towers continued in the area.

*In the region, next to the Tres Niñas company, appears a new firm called Jonbo S.A, both belonging to the America Trans Group. According to the group's web page,<sup>14</sup> the Jonbo project provides electrical engineering and energy transport services, such as construction of the infrastructure required for the installation of electrical projects.<sup>15</sup>*

Peace Brigades has accompanied the CCCND since 2009. Several of the organization's members have been the target of threats, intimidation tactics and attacks related to their work in the communities, including death threats and criminal allegations.

<sup>10</sup> PBI, *Major development projects in Chiquimula*, Bulletin 20, Guatemala, [http://www.peacebrigades.org/fileadmin/user\\_files/projects/guatemala/files/english/PBI\\_Boletin\\_20\\_eng.pdf](http://www.peacebrigades.org/fileadmin/user_files/projects/guatemala/files/english/PBI_Boletin_20_eng.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala (CERIGUA), Frente Guatemalteco de Afectados y Amenazados por represas y en Defensa del Agua (FGARDA)/ Coordinadora de Asociaciones y Comunidades para el Desarrollo Integral de la Región Ch'orti' (COMUNDICH), Comunicado a la opinión pública, nacional y internacional, Guatemala, 22.10.2007.

<sup>12</sup> Programa Nacional de Competitividad (PRONACOM), [http://www.pronacom.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=36](http://www.pronacom.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34&Itemid=36)

<sup>13</sup> PBI interview with Omar Jerónimo, CCCND member, Guatemala, 27.04.2010.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.americatransgroup.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=2](http://www.americatransgroup.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=2)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.americatransgroup.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=54%3Agrupojonbo&catid=34&Itemid=2](http://www.americatransgroup.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54%3Agrupojonbo&catid=34&Itemid=2)

## News of our work:

The PBI Guatemala Project carries out its work in the country based on three thematic approaches: The struggle against impunity, problems related to access to land and the negative effects of globalization on human rights. As part of this third aspect we observed a verification mission of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the situation of the communities in the area of Río Dolores (Alta Verapaz). The communities denounce a series of attacks against the community resistance in the context of the hydroelectric project Santa Rita S.A. Additionally, in the course of June we undertook a visit to Petén to follow up on the situation of the displaced communities in the area of the National Park of the Sierra Lacandón and Laguna del Tigre.

Based on our work of international accompaniment in the country, we have observed a serious closure of spaces for action for the defence of human rights.

### Closure of spaces

Following a tendency already observed during the last months of 2013, between January and April 2014 we have observed with concern the closure of spaces that impacts on the organisations we are accompanying. On 23 May the protest camp of the Communities in Resistance of La Puya was violently evicted. The peaceful resistance had maintained their camp since March 2012, in front of the installations of a mining project in the municipalities of San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc. The eviction took place three days after a high level dialogue meeting between the community and the public institutions had failed<sup>1</sup>. PBI observed a use of disproportionate force by the public security forces in the course of the eviction. Since its origin, the Communities in Resistance of La Puya have suffered threats and attacks against them as well as an assassination attempt against one of its members, Yolanda Oqueli. None of these attacks, which have been denounced in front of the responsible authorities, have been clarified.

At the same time the criminalisation of social protest impacts on the organisation and its members: eight individuals face trials on the basis of charges filed by actors linked to the company accusing them of use of force, illegal detention and threats; three of them were sentenced, in April this year, to nine years of prison. The sentence provoked

a reaction from various human rights organisations at a national and international level, questioning the absence of guarantees for due process as well as the principle of judicial independence<sup>2</sup>.

Other social movements in Guatemala, among them organisations and processes accompanied by PBI, such as the Twelve Kaqchiquel Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez, the Central Campesino Chortí Nuevo Día (CCCND), the K'iche' People's Council (CPK) and the Verapaz Union of Campesino Organisations (UVOC) are facing similar processes due to their work as human rights defenders.

During the first half of 2014, this type of legal accusation has increased and, as in the case of La Puya, has led to elevated prison sentences. PBI is concerned that this is a new phase of the use of legal mechanisms that engender a paralysis and penalisation of the right to defend human rights in Guatemala. The de-legitimation of mechanisms of dialogue as an instrument to resolve conflicts in a non-violent fashion when violent evictions are being carried out although a dialogue process is ongoing, is also of great concern.

Given this situation, since the beginning of June, we have promoted an activation of the support network of PBI Guatemala at a national as well as international level in order to call for the attention of the international community to this closure of spaces and to request concrete measures directed at the protection of organisations, individuals and communities we are accompanying.

### The communities of Río Dolores: attacks against them and human rights violations

In May we observed the verification mission of OHCHR and social organisations to the Maya Queqchí communities located in the Río Dolores Valley, in the department of Alta Verapaz. The aim of this initiative was to verify and clarify the human rights violations which had been denounced by the communities since the arrival of the hydroelectric company Santa Rita S.A. in the region in 2008. Amongst the abuses suffered and denounced by the communities, we can highlight the following

1 PBI, *Violent eviction of the Pacific Resistance La Puya*, Guatemala, 03.06.2014 [http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/field-projects/pbi-guatemala/latest-news/news/?no\\_cache=1&L=0&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=4272&cHash=e2a749c4c1508c6e7a7ff9e3d37166c2](http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/field-projects/pbi-guatemala/latest-news/news/?no_cache=1&L=0&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4272&cHash=e2a749c4c1508c6e7a7ff9e3d37166c2)

2 Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos (FIDH) y Organización Mundial contra la Tortura (OMCT), *Faltas al debido proceso en la sentencia contra los Sres. Alonzo de Jesús Torres Catalán, Valerio Carrillo Sandoval y Jorge Adalberto López Reyes*, Observatorio para la Protección de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos, 09.05.2014 <http://www.fidh.org/es/americas/guatemala/15297-guatemala-faltas-al-debido-proceso-en-la-sentencia-contra-los-sres-alonzo> Unidad de Protección para Defensores y Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (UDEFEQUA), *Criminalización y machismo en La Puya*, Guatemala, 28.05.2014.



Photo PBI 2014

Verification mission in communities in Río Dolores (Alta Verapaz) 13.05.2014

- Two children of the community of Monte Olivo were killed in an attack with firearms in August 2013.
- Months after this killing various individuals were attacked with firearms and machetes in the course of an extrajudicial eviction of the community. At the beginning of April 2014 in the community of Nueve de Febrero, nine people were attacked and injured with firearms by Sandino Ponce (son of the landowner where the hydroelectric plant is located) and his private security guards. One of the community members, Victor Juc Maas, died as a consequence of the attack.
- Arrest warrants have been issued against various members of the communities and three of them have been taken into preventive custody.
- The communities live with a constant fear of being evicted.
- Human Rights violations continue without investigation.

During the verification mission, members of the communities presented their situation to the representatives of OHCHR and the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH), who listened to the testimonies of the victims.

We were also present as the verification mission visited Jose Maria Guitzs, Sebastián Caal Ixim y Timoteo Chen Tun, the individuals who had been detained. The three denounced the failure to grant them access to information on the charges they face as well as the excessive extension of the judicial proceedings.

## Petén

In June 2014 we visited the department of Petén. Located in the north of the country, Petén is a region which despite representing almost a quarter of Guatemala's territory, has been historically marginalised. Up until the 50s 90% of the territory was covered by forest, with a small presence of Mayan Q'eqchi' population which had migrated from Alta Verapaz towards the end of the 19th century. Today Petén is a territory with a population of more than 600.000<sup>3</sup>. In 1989, the law on Protected Areas was approved. It represented the framework for the Mayan Biosphere Reserve (RBM), the biggest natural park of the country whose administration was delegated to the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP). Since the RBM was declared a protected area, communities located within this zone have been forcibly displaced. This practice, carried out by the state, intensified particularly

3 Data of the National Institute for Statistics (INE) of Guatemala, 2014.

in 2009 and in the second semester of 2010. Communities in the area denounced these policies of forced displacement of the population through various statements which were also submitted to public institutions.

In the course of this visit we met with civil society organisations and members of displaced communities of the Sierra de Lacandón National Park and the Laguna del Tigre National Park in order to follow up on this situation. One of these communities, Centro 1 explained how its population has been dispersed among various localities, in particular El Retalteco and La Libertad. In the camp located in La Libertad, where various refugees from Centre 1 are still sheltering five years after the eviction, we observed a failure to provide basic services in the provisional housing arrangement which had been constructed with materials recycled from wood and plastic. The families highlighted the need for food and work as well as the fact that, to date, their demands for alternative land to cultivate have not been attended. This deeply impacts on the way of life of the community. Although the practice of evictions in the protected areas was ended in 2011, the failure to resettle the communities which had been forced to leave, has left them without land to cultivate, lacking the means to survive.

Social organisations also raised concerns surrounding: the planning of large scale tourist and hydroelectric projects in the area, without acknowledging the communities or respecting their right to be consulted; the grave violations of women's rights; the growing influence of african palm companies and concerns over the La Candelaria Triangle, an area where more evictions are feared.

In order to inform on our work and our visits to local and departmental authorities in the region as well as to express our concerns with regards to the human rights sit-

uation affecting social organisations and communities, we held meetings with various public institutions such as: the Secretary for Agrarian Issues (SAA) in La Libertad and San Benito, the Land Fund (FONTIERRAS), the CONAP, the Presidential Commission for Human Rights (COPREDEH), the PDH of Santa Elena and El Naranjo, the municipal mayor and the National Civil Police (PNC) of Flores.

### **Social organisations we are currently accompanying:**

**Human Rights Law Office (BDH)**

**Coordination of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA)**

**Verapaz Union of Campesino Organisations (UVOC)**

**Association of Indigenous Women of Santa Maria de Jalapán in Jalapa (AMISMAXAJ)**

**Cunén Communities Council (CCC)**

**K'iche' People's Council (CPK)**

**Communities in Resistance of La Puya;**

**Twelve Kakchiquel Communities of San Juan Sacatepéquez**

**Central Campesino Chortí Nuevo Día (CCCND)**

**Since May 2014 we are following up on the situation of the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (UDEFEQUA)**

Meeting with internally displaced persons from the community Centro 1, La Libertad (Petén).  
09.06.2014

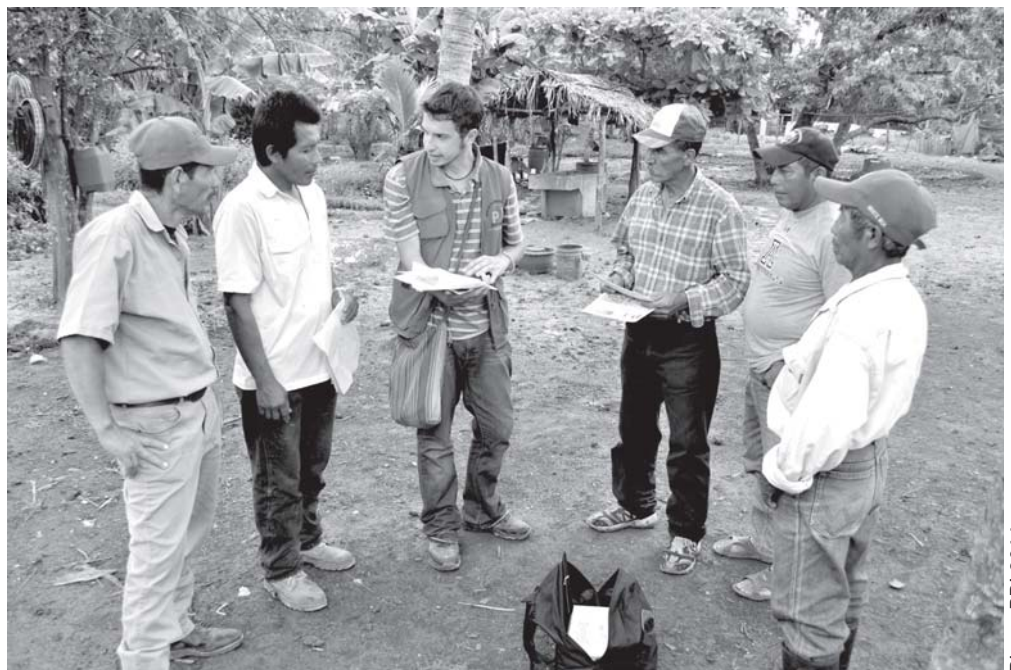


Photo PBI 2014

## Peace Brigades International

PBI is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) which protects human rights and promotes nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

At the request of threatened social organizations, it provides international accompaniment and observation. The presence of international volunteers backed by a support network helps to deter violence.

In this way, PBI creates space for local activists to work for social justice and human rights.

## PBI in Guatemala

PBI maintained a team of volunteers in Guatemala from 1983 to 1999. During those years, it carried out accompaniment work with human rights organizations, unions, indigenous and campesino organizations, refugees and churches. In 1999, after an evaluation process, it was decided to close the project since the country had greatly advanced in the opening of space for the work of human rights organizations. Nevertheless, PBI continued attentive to the happenings in Guatemala through a follow-up committee.

From the middle of 2000, PBI began receiving a number of requests for international accompaniment. Due to these requests, PBI carried out an investigation in the field that made evident a turn in the direction and a losing of space for human rights defenders. In April of 2002, PBI decided to reopen the Guatemala Project in order to carry out international accompaniment and observation in coordination with other international accompaniment NGOs. In April 2003, the new PBI office was opened in Guatemala.

## Team in Guatemala

Stephen Bradford (United States), Valentina Caprotti (Italy), Rubén Carricondo Sánchez (Spain), Erika Martínez García (Spain), Danilo Guerrero Díaz (Chile), Sanne de Swart (Netherlands), Felix Weiss (Germany), Kim-Mai Vu (Switzerland), Katharina Ochsendorf (Germany), Adam Paul Lunn (United Kingdom), Daniela Jesus Dias (Portugal), Annemieke van Opheusden (Netherlands) and Andrea Czoller (Austria).

## PBI Guatemala Team

Office Team Guatemala: 3a. Avenida "A", 3-51 zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala  
Phone/Fax: (00502) 2220-1032 Phone: (00502) 2232-2930 e-mail: equipo@pbi-guatemala.org  
Project Coordination Office: Avenida Entrevías 76,4°B, 28053, Madrid, (Spain)  
Phone: (0034) 418 543 150; E-mail: coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org  
Web: www.pbi-guatemala.org



This work has been published under Creative Commons's licence. There is allowed the total or partial reproduction of this publication providing that it is without ends of profit, the source is mentioned and Guatemala notifies to PBI the use of the same one (warning to ) coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org.

Attribution: It must recognize the credits of the work of the way specified by the author (but not in such a way that it should suggest that it has his support or that they support the use that it does of his work).

-To share under the same license: if it alters or transforms this work, or it generates a derivative work, only it can distribute the work generated under an identical license to this one.

- not to use the work for commercial ends.

## Mission

To improve the human rights situation in Guatemala and contribute to the democratizing process of the country through an international presence that works to maintain open political space for human rights defenders, lawyers, union members, campesino and indigenous organizations, and civil society groups that are suffering repression due to their work supporting human rights.

## Objectives

1. To provide an international presence that contributes to the opening and protection of the political space of Guatemalan organizations that are working for an end to impunity, national reconciliation and compensation to the victims of human rights violations and the fulfillment of the commitments achieved through the Peace Accords.
2. To sensitize the international community of the human rights situation in Guatemala through the regular communication of information as well as frequent contact with international authorities and the diplomatic community both within and outside the country.
3. To sensitize the Guatemalan Government about the vigilance and concern of the international community to the human rights situation in the country through the regular communication of information and frequent contact with the pertinent national authorities.
4. To share with Guatemalan organizations the experience and pedagogical tools that help reach the general objective of PBI's project.



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of PBI Guatemala and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.