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The Peaceful Resistance La Puya prevents the state's economic collapse

On December 23, 2025, the Peaceful Resistance La Puya, which PBI accompanied from 2013 to 2024, finally received the news they had been waiting for for seven years: the arbitration tribunal rejected the multimillion-dollar lawsuit filed by the mining company Kappes, Cassidy & Associates (KCA) against the Guatemalan State. The Resistance's participation in this process was crucial to the State's victory in the arbitration. Their collaboration with the State's legal team enabled them to provide evidence proving the exact opposite of the company's allegations—namely, that the Guatemalan State had used every tool at its disposal to facilitate the mine's operations, even resorting to repressive measures and violence against members of the Resistance. However, even with these extreme measures, the State and the company failed to subdue La Puya, whose courage, bravery, perseverance, commitment, and absolute rejection of mining in their territory brought the mine's operations to a halt.

In March 2026, the Resistance invited us to its 14th anniversary celebration. We were delighted to attend the celebration, where we spoke with Felisa Muralles (Ms. Licha), José Ángel Llamas, and Ana Sandoval about their struggle and their involvement in the various stages of the arbitration process.¹

PBI: How did you find out about the company's lawsuit against the Guatemalan government?

Ana: In 2018, two international organizations, Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and Edwards, contacted us to ask what we thought about the company's notice of intent to file a lawsuit against the State. At that time, we knew nothing about it, and that's how we began to learn more. From there, we began to exchange information with fellow activists in Santa Marta (in El Salvador) and learned about their experience with a company's arbitration case against the Salvadoran State. That's how we began to learn everything about arbitration cases and understand them a little better.

In 2020, the process of cancelling the license issued in 2016 was already underway. Four years had passed, but we were still waiting because the CC had not yet ruled on the injunction regarding the matter of consultation. And that was right when the CC issued its ruling upholding the lower court's ruling and confirming that the right to consultation had been violated. That was when the company formally filed its lawsuit with ICSID and made its claims.

The company claimed that the government had not treated it in the same way as other companies when ruling on its legal proceedings. They also claimed that the government had not provided the company with enough security to allow its operations to continue. And the other claim, if I'm not mistaken, concerned fair treatment. That one has more to do with how the State treats the company in terms of investment. And so they filed the claim under the Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA.

PBI: How did the Resistance get involved?

Ana: By that point, we already knew a little more about the process; during the initial stage, when options were presented, we had already requested to be a non-litigating party to the proceedings. This means acting as a third party in order to file an *amicus curiae* brief. But our request was denied. Then, when the company formally filed its lawsuit in 2020, we reapplied to be a party to the proceedings so we could submit the *amicus* brief. We argued that we had information that neither the government nor the company would provide to the tribunal, since we were the direct victims of the situation, having been subjected to abuses by both the government and the company, and neither party was going to provide that information to the tribunal. In the end, they rejected our request on the grounds that we lacked standing. After that, the government reached out to us, trying to establish a connection with the Resistance; they asked us to visit and talk about the arbitration issue. That all took place over the course of a week.

¹ Interviews conducted on March 8, 2026.

The lawsuit²

The U.S. company Kappes, Cassidy & Associates (KCA), operated by its subsidiary *Exploraciones Mineras de Guatemala, Sociedad Anónima* (EXMINGUA), began construction in early 2012 on a 60 km² site between the municipalities of San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc, about 25 km east of the capital. The *El Tambor* mining project's *Progreso VII Derivada* license sought to extract gold and silver over a period of five years.

KCA filed a lawsuit against the State of Guatemala after the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) and, later, the Constitutional Court (CC) suspended the mine's activities. This suspension came after the Courts found violations of collective rights, including the lack of prior, free, and informed consultation, as well as the existence of an ongoing social unrest in the territory. Furthermore, the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) contained irregularities, and it was proven that the mine did not have a construction permit.

Unable to continue its operations, KCA turned to an international

arbitration mechanism – a provision of the free trade agreement between the Dominican Republic, Central America, and the United States (CAFTA-DR), which the Guatemalan government signed in 2005 despite massive opposition from civil society organizations – to demand that the Guatemalan government bear the economic cost of the mine's closure. The company filed a dispute before the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), seeking \$499 million from the Guatemalan state to compensate the company for its investment and the loss of its alleged future profits.³

After a 7-year process, “the arbitration tribunal concluded that Guatemala did not violate its international obligations to protect investments, recognizing that the project's suspension was the result of domestic judicial decisions and a genuine social conflict, not one arbitrarily created by the State.” The ruling establishes that a state is not obligated to compensate a company for the suspension of a project that faces public rejection,

that the defense of the territory cannot result in a financial burden for the country, and that community resistance does not justify international financial sanctions.⁴

On December 28, 2025, the Peaceful Resistance La Puya held a press conference at the encampment, which they have maintained in front of the entrance to the mine for years. At the press conference, they welcomed the ICSID ruling but also made clear that they will remain vigilant “until the *Progreso VII Derivada* project has been permanently canceled” and in light of possible new mining licenses being granted in the region. “We feel satisfied and vindicated in our peaceful struggle, knowing that KCA lost its bid to make millions of dollars through this international arbitration process, which it initiated knowing full well that it would never win the consent of the communities that have always said no to its unfeasible project—a project that the mining company couldn't even defend it in an arbitration system designed to protect the investments of transnational corporations.”⁵

2 For more detailed information, we recommend: Solano, L., Moore, B., and Moore, J., “Mining Injustice Through International Arbitration: Countering the Arguments of Kappes, Cassidy & Associates Regarding Their Gold Project in Guatemala,” Institute for Policy Studies, Earthworks, 24 August 2020. This report evaluates and provides evidence that challenges the claims made by KCA in its ICSID claim and addresses its omissions, such as State authorities' use of force against the Resistance.

3 PBI Guatemala, International Arbitration against the Guatemalan State: The El Tambor Mine Case, Bulletin 43, June 2020.

4 Mazariegos, D., Resistencia Pacífica La Puya manifiesta satisfacción tras fallo arbitral favorable al Estado de Guatemala, Prensa Comunitaria, 28 December 2025.

5 Comunicado de la Resistencia Pacífica de la Puya, La Resistencia Pacífica de la Puya, a la comunidad guatemalteca e internacional, ante la decisión del tribunal internacional de arbitraje (CIADI), en el caso KCA v. Guatemala, informa, Facebook Resistencia Pacífica de la Puya, 28 December 2025.



To capture the spirit of the struggle, events, challenges, and achievements over the course of twelve years, there is no better source than the book, *Memories of a Peaceful Resistance: La Puya 2012-2023* which brings together the memories and notes of Felisa Muralles Díaz, known and loved as Doña Licha. Below are some of her memories:

PBI: Given past conflicts with the State, how did the Resistance react to this request?

Ana: Well, at first, we told [the State] that we were just going to listen to them, since they had already brought their proposal: they wanted to include us in their defense. This was during the Giammattei administration. So, at that meeting, we listened to them and explained that we had to think it over before making a decision. We explained everything the State had done to us – the repression, the court cases. And then the lawyer for the State said, “We already know; we’ve read a lot about you. In fact, we’ve already discussed you in the proceedings, and certainly in the government’s brief in response to the lawsuit, the government has already recognized the Resistance and

discussed the importance of La Puya’s work at length.”

Ms. Licha: That was quite an issue for us, because people didn’t agree with sitting down with the enemy. We felt it was wrong to offer them support after they’d sent forces to repress us; it was a conflict. In that place [at the encampment], we gathered, and our fellow activists said, “No, the State repressed us. We can’t sit down with the State. We’re not going to cooperate with them.” It was an ugly clash, but the people who were most against it were those who were a little more removed from the situation, who hadn’t endured the same suffering as we had. We had already gone through different phases, different training sessions, and different awareness-raising processes. So, we managed to reach an internal agreement: we decided that yes, we had to participate in order to set a precedent. We came to the conclusion that we are all part of the State, and that if the State lost, we would all lose.

We reached that agreement, and we gave [the government] all the information we had; three witnesses testified to give them all the details about how the State had repressed us and supported the company. All of this served to help the State defend itself against the company’s accusation that it had not provided them with the necessary support that investors needed, given that the State’s repression against us was specifically in support of the company. Furthermore, there was evidence that there were police substations here,

“On Sunday, June 5, [2016], a Mass was held to commemorate 51 months of resistance, as well as three months of resistance in front of the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

There was a police raid at the mining site, at the San José del Golfo warehouse, and at a plantation in Agua Caliente. They seized 74 sacks of gold concentrate valued at two hundred million dollars. They also found several archaeological artifacts. At the Agua Caliente plantation, they found a large number of macaws in captivity, which the MP will have to investigate because these are endangered animals. After having been in this struggle for 51 months, we’re finally seeing justice being served. The communities are crying out for justice. But the authorities have always turned a deaf ear. Now that we see the archaeological artifacts they’ve found—of the few that were discovered—we can see why [the mining company] was so determined not to give up, because they knew what they had here.

According to stories passed down by our ancestors, there was something there; those hills were enchanted. When the miners began working, something supernatural kept getting in their way. The machines or trucks would start up on their own, or as soon as they were repaired, they would break down again.”

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on both sides, guarding the entrances. All of this evidence reaffirmed that the State did indeed provide the company with the necessary support. We were confident from the start that this evidence would bear fruit. And it did.

José Angel: It was a complicated situation because our communities couldn’t quite come to terms with it when the PGN [State’s Attorney] asked us if we could help them by sharing our accounts of the different situations we had experienced. So, during an internal meeting, we talked about it a bit because it’s not easy to support an enemy—after all, the State had practically become our enemy. But seeing that the goal was to win that lawsuit, we decided to participate. And

“On September 2, [2016], a group of twenty of us went to Quesada, Jutiapa, to the resistance movement there. It’s been a month and a half since they began the resistance. They’re protesting because a renewable energy company was set up there, using firewood to generate power. That means they’re cutting down a lot of trees, which is why the residents have organized to stop them. We went to support them so we could coordinate and meet more often, until one day the whole country rises up and protests against these invaders. Let them go destroy their own countries, not ours.”

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we succeeded in getting a majority vote.

We appointed representatives to give their statements and present all the evidence showing that the government had, in fact, defended the company, because that was one of the accusations made by the company—that the Guatemalan State had not complied with the commitments or agreements it had entered into through the Free Trade Agreement to allow companies to carry out the project. So, that was a lie the company was presenting before the arbitration body. And they submitted all the evidence they could, along with our fellow activists' testimonies—which were ultimately admitted, first virtually and then on two occasions in person. I believe that's how the judges realized that the company had indeed lied—it had always lied—both when it first entered the communities and later in its attempt to win the case against the Guatemalan State. But thanks to the communities' participation, they were able to prove that all of that was false and that we were peacefully defending life. That was what had the greatest impact; I believe that's what led to the favorable outcome in this lawsuit.

PBI: Can you tell us what the State's repression and attacks against you consisted of?

José Angel: Well, first of all, they tried to forcibly evict us while we were engaged in peaceful resistance. During the first attempt, there was no violence, but during the second one, they used tear gas against the people. In 2014, we experienced the third round of repression, and it was extremely brutal for the people, because [the state forces] did not follow protocol for the use of tear gas. They completely violated the rules and did so against the people; that was one

"On December 11, [2016], we organized a caravan to raise awareness about arsenic contamination in the water. The acceptable level is 0.08 ml per liter. In 2013, even though the mine was not yet in operation, the level was already at 0.52 per liter, and it now stands at 0.99 per liter. The march began at Loma Rendida, went through all the villages, and ended at La Puya."
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of the situations that was especially painful for us. But despite all that, we reached a consensus to support the State's defense in the arbitration, since we concluded that if we lost that case, the entire country would suffer. That is why we agreed to participate. It was this peaceful approach that we used to resist and resolve the situation. This approach proved very effective and prevented bloodshed during the repression, because the PNC [National Civil Police] forces came down hard on us—several members of the Resistance were injured—but our responses and actions were always peaceful. Yes, on May 23, 2014, around 36 comrades were injured. The injuries ranged in severity, and some of our fellow activists were seriously wounded. One woman was struck by two grenades. Another had to undergo surgery to remove part of her skull after a projectile struck her forehead. Yes, it was a very difficult day. After that incident, the PNC spent over a year here protecting the company, to the point that they set up two camps here, at the entrance to the mining project. We had documented all of that.

We managed to request public information and learned that the Ministry of the Interior had already spent more than Q850,000 on such operations to protect the company, which is sad because the company did not benefit the country at all—it only gave Q500 to each municipality (San Pedro de Ayampuc and San José del Golfo) as royalties for the time it operated there.

PBI: Q500 a month?

José Angel: No, during the entire time they were operating. That's what I found out. Meanwhile, the Ministry of the Interior had already spent more than Q800,000 on repressive measures, in addition to the support it provided to the company. It's unfortunate, but companies never leave any profits for the Guatemalan State or for other countries. One such example is what happened with the company, Perenco. Guatemala lost millions of quetzales while the company walked away with the wealth. This is happening in all the communities where there are mining projects, since not only does it wear communities down, but it also wears down institutions by forcing them to support the companies. Not many people know about this, but it's the reality. These projects leave nothing good behind for Guatemala or for communities.

PBI: What tricks did the company use? What evidence refuted the company's claims that the government failed to fulfill its obligations?

Ana: All the damage the company has caused since it arrived. The way they imposed the project by hiding information. The military personnel who were in charge at the beginning, and how they, too, created division within the communities. The failure to

"On December 19, [2016], we were informed that, of our three comrades who had been criminalized and whose cases were still pending, the sentence had been upheld, meaning that they would either go to prison or we would have to pay a Q166,000 fine for all three. Now we've gotten more organized to hold fundraisers to help raise that money, and God willing, we'll succeed. We're going to show those miners that even though it'll be hard for us to raise the money, they won't get what they want—which is to send our three comrades to prison. And we have complete faith in God that they'll get their just deserts for being corrupt liars."
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comply with environmental and social impact assessments; there was an inspection conducted by the Ministry of the Environment in 2015 or 2016,

[March 3, 2017] The time has come to celebrate five years of struggle. It feels like it hasn't been that long. At the beginning, we used to say, 'How long is this going to go on for?' Now we see what we've accomplished. Honestly, time has flown by. We've put it to very good use in support of life and our neighbors, just as the second commandment of God's law states: 'You shall love your neighbor as thyself.'

The event will be unforgettable. We will have many visitors, the Holy Eucharist offered by seven priests, a walk from San José del Golfo, and the coronation of the incoming and outgoing girls who have been named as "Defenders of Life".

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and they found that the company was not complying with more than 150 standards. That inspection was also based on the environmental impact assessment. Furthermore, some believe that the environmental impact study is of very poor quality and fails to include necessary information.

The police were there protecting them for more than two years, with a camp set up on the mine's property. So what could the company possibly say if it had security the entire time it was operating? In 2016, the company filed an injunction against President Jimmy Morales, the police chief, and the Minister of the Interior, arguing that they were not being provided with sufficient security to allow them to operate. The Court ruled that the company's argument was unfounded, because the project had been suspended by a court order; therefore, it made no sense for them to request security in order to operate.

There are many irregularities, starting with the way the license was granted. For example, in 2011, when we first learned about the project and began asking for more information, they told us no, saying there was nothing to see. And then, once we had set up the encampment set up here—after we'd been here for several days—we got a call

from the Ministry of Energy and Mines and the Ministry of the Environment telling us, "Look, because of your persistence and the pressure you put on us, we tracked down the file that had gone missing. And yes, there is a mining license." That's how they told us that, yes, there was a license.

From the beginning, this company has had the full support and backing of the government, under different administrations. It has had institutional backing; otherwise, it wouldn't have gotten to where it is today. So yes, one key point to note is that if the State hadn't given the company everything it asked for, it would have lost the lawsuit. Because in the end, what the State argued was, "We did fulfill our obligations and provided security. Here's all the evidence." And the State also said, "The company acted illegally." But of course, that's because they allowed the company to do so.

PBI: Over the years, there has been a lot of defamation against you. Where did that defamation come from?

Ms. Licha: The defamation came from the communities themselves, from more distant communities, who used to say, "These people just want to make money." They were negative people who supported mining. Those people still say, "So-and-so got this much, so-and-so got that much... he's riding a motorcycle because the mining company gave it to him." That defamation has spread, but we've been able to handle it because we have a clear conscience and because it's not true. If they have evidence, they should show it to us—then we'll take it seriously. As Lolita Chávez said, "I bathed in lard, so now

these comments just roll off my back." That's how they try to defame us, to tear us apart, to upset us, and to make us give up. But thank goodness, we're still as united as ever.

PBI: Did the lawsuit against the State lead to more defamation against the Resistance?

José Angel: Yes, the State itself—across three successive presidential administrations—accused us of being the reason it had been sued and was required to pay a large sum of money. But we have never felt guilty. In fact, the State has failed to defend its people, and that is why we, as community members, had to take on that responsibility—because the State did not. That's why it's taken such a toll on our communities. Those of us who consciously committed ourselves to defending our rights and opposing the mining project had to spend an average of two months a year here at the encampment, over the course of eight years. During the pandemic, people stopped mobilizing as much because it was no longer possible to travel to participate in the shifts. However, we felt a little more confidence because there were already lawsuits and legal processes underway. We believed the company couldn't continue operating, but we weren't entirely confident, because the company doesn't respect

"On Saturday, the 30th [June 2018], some women from a U.S. organization came to guide us and explain what arbitration is to us, which is when the mining company is supposedly facing off against the State. So this means that if the company does not reach an agreement with the State within six months, they will file an international complaint. And if they do reach an agreement, that's even worse, because it means the mining company would start operations. All we can do is trust in God and hope they don't reach an agreement—and God will decide what happens next or what befalls us, because the people in the communities defending water and life do not want mining."

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Guatemalan laws. In fact, when the company was ordered to stop work on the project, they continued operating for several days until we community members stopped them. The police returned, but when they saw the order to suspend operations, they had to acknowledge that we were right and that the company could not continue working. So we believe that the company does not respect the law or comply with agreements, which is why we cannot completely abandon our encampment. They could try to force their way in, aided by the rampant corruption that plagues government institutions.

PBI: What was the cost of your commitment—of your time and your life—to the Resistance?

José Angel: Most of us work in agriculture, which meant that we had to spend our time in the resistance, instead of taking care of our crops. We suffered financial losses, because we have to work every day just to make ends meet. I think our way of life

actually worked in our favor—we usually worked Monday through Saturday, but with this struggle, we had to adjust and work on Sundays as well. When they were repressing us, our communities had to be here and move back our harvest dates in order to make time for the Resistance. Because when [the company] didn't see many people there, that's when they'd intimidate us even more. So yes, it was a huge financial strain, and it was only thanks to the solidarity of each and every family that we managed to survive and keep the movement going.

PBI: And how many families participated? How many communities?

José Angel: We don't have the exact number of families, but about 13 communities were present, along with many families. Entire families would sometimes come here, and we also received support from some relatives abroad who donated money, because it wasn't just a matter of devoting time. We also had expenses for transportation, food, and legal fees related to the criminalization of 18 people, three of whom were sentenced.

Our communities organized different activities, including raffles, sales, and contributions from relatives abroad. We managed to raise enough money to

cover the bail for our fellow activists who were sentenced to nine years in prison, at a cost of 9 quetzales a day. That amounted to more than Q90,000, which we paid as bail so that our comrades would not go to prison. We are not community members who break the law; we have always been law-abiding.

Our comrade was so deeply affected by the situation that he became depressed, and although we responded to all these challenges by working together, he suffered a stroke. He was partially paralyzed for two years before eventually passing away. He is no longer with us.

We paid more than Q90,000 so our comrades could avoid jail time for the alleged crimes that were pinned on them. But the judge also issued a ruling ordering them to pay the plaintiff, who was from the company, Q20,000 for each of our colleagues. So that came to another Q60,000. We haven't paid that yet because the ruling isn't final. We hope it will be dismissed someday.

Our communities stood united, and we managed to raise that money. We are still waiting for the court order, but ideally, we won't be ordered to pay. It has been a very difficult situation. Some of our neighbors who worked with the company defamed our communities. The company used them just to identify people and stir up trouble, claiming that women, as well as men, were coming here to engage in prostitution. Their efforts were unsuccessful, but they did have a significant impact.

PBI: During the arbitration proceedings, did the State acknowledge any responsibility for the violence and repression directed against you?

Ana: Not as the State. What the State does acknowledge is that there has already been environmental damage; in fact, it conducted a study to quantify how much damage was done. As part of the lawsuit, the State filed a counterclaim against the company for \$2 million in environmental damages. The State also conducted an analysis of the social unrest caused by the company's arrival. The State also recognizes the legitimacy

"On December 11, media reports stated that the mining company had already filed an arbitration lawsuit for three hundred million dollars because they were not allowed to reopen the company. Upon hearing this news, we decided to hold an emergency meeting to discuss what actions to take in light of this situation. We agreed to hold a press conference on December 19 to explain our position on this situation to the country and the world."
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"On March 2, [2019], two women from a U.S. organization came to tell us what they're doing there on our behalf and in opposition to the \$300 million arbitration claim against the State. They brought us a letter, signed by 122 organizations from around the world, that are keeping an eye, since the Guatemalan government will surely try use this to favor business interests. The organizations promised us that we would form a commission to deliver the letter to the ministries, the ombudsman for human rights, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights so that everyone knows how much support the Peaceful Resistance La Puya has."
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of the Resistance, and the studies and reports they have conducted here cite the Resistance as such. They actually cite several of the documents that have been published. This is important to us now, as we reach the end of the case, because we believe this could be used in other cases. For example, there is the issue of the consultation. The ruling states that consultation must take place, and the company can only continue operating if it demonstrates that there are no adverse effects on the communities. The State has already proven such impacts in an international tribunal. Of course, these are two different proceedings—one has nothing to do with the other—but the State has made these arguments. I think that's very important and should be brought into this other proceeding. The other issue is repression. Ultimately, if the State had not repressed us the way it did, they would not have won the lawsuit. The State won the lawsuit because of everything they did to us. I think that's very important.

PBI How did you find out about the ruling?

José Angel: We had an agreement with the PGN that they would inform us of the arbitration results. On December 23, 2025, the PGN broke the news to the lawyers advising us—the Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)—and they immediately informed us that we had won the arbitration, that the State would no longer have to pay that massive sum, and that the arbitration panel was requiring the company to pay a small amount, Q380,000. That's really a pittance, but at least it covers something, because the State's legal defense cost millions—they hired an international firm to represent them, an Argentinian lawyer. While we don't know the exact amount, we do know that State spent millions on its defense.

Ms. Licha: The day before Christmas Eve, Edgar [from the BDH] called to tell us that the PGN had called and said, "Thanks to you, we won the lawsuit."

We didn't even know what to do—cry, laugh, or thank God. We had very conflicting feelings because we were saying, "What a tremendous gift." Even though we weren't going to receive anything financially, we felt enormous satisfaction because we set a strong precedent, showing companies that they won't always win. It was a huge achievement, although there was some confusion—people were speculating about how much money the Resistance would receive and how much the country would get. So we kept explaining and explaining that neither the State nor the Resistance would receive anything. There simply wouldn't be any payment, because those agreements are unequal: if the company won, it had to be paid, but if the State won, it wouldn't be paid. So we had to explain that over and over, although people still didn't believe us. They'd say, "But they are going to give a share of the money to the State, aren't they?" And we'd tell them, "Yes, they're going to give the State a tiny amount, but that's just what the State spent on defending itself."

"We are not going to receive financial compensation, nor do we want any, because all that we have given, we have donated to life, to nature. We don't care that we aren't receiving any financial compensation.

We feel more content if we get nothing—that way, there will be no excuse to defame us." [highlight]

PBI How does this ruling make you feel?

José Angel: For us, it's the satisfaction of knowing that we did the right thing and that, despite the injustices perpetrated by the government, we protected the country from having to use our tax dollars to pay the amount the company was suing for. That was one of the reasons we began working with the PGN on the defense. We hope that the money that ultimately did not have to be paid to the company will be allocated to healthcare and education for the people of Guatemala. We are quite pleased and feel motivated because our struggle has been worth it.

Ms. Licha: We are pleased that we did win. As I say in my poem, a tiny group of ants defeated a huge elephant. We felt like a handful of ants facing a huge monster. We tickled them, and those tickles stung, and now they're furious because they lost their millions, and we feel an enormous sense of satisfaction at having won. As I said, we didn't gain anything financially, but we gained a great deal of satisfaction and set a precedent for the country.

What we would have liked is for President Arévalo to at least say, "Look, I want La Puya to come here," or "I'll go to La Puya to thank them for what they did." That's the least he could do, but he hasn't done it. Nonetheless, we already

"On February 23, [2020], a group of people from the U.S. came to visit us. They wanted to learn about the La Puya resistance and its stories. There were about 26 of them, and they were very impressed to learn that we've been here in resistance for almost eight years now and that we've achieved many wins thus far. In particular, that the project has been stopped. We are now just six days away from our eighth anniversary, and we're already organizing for that big day because we take great satisfaction in the fact that the mine is not operating. We don't know what the outcome of the international lawsuit will be, but in the meantime, we remain steadfast in our struggle.

Today marks 2,920 days since the resistance began. Eight years equal 96 months, and since we come every six days for a 24-hour shift, that amounts to 486 days of shifts—which works out to about a year and four months dedicated to the struggle. That's not counting the extra days we've been here, like when the resistance first started: we'd come here even when it wasn't our shift because we needed to maintain a visible presence. They also came to harass us for two straight weeks. We are also here on the days when Holy Mass is celebrated. So we've already been here for many days, and we are determined to stay as long as necessary."

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have that sense of satisfaction, and no one is going to take it away from us.

Ana: There was a lot of joy, and I think it really lifted everyone's spirits. There were a lot of expectations about whether or not the State would win, but upon hearing the news—and especially after reading the PGN's statement saying that all the claims were dismissed—yes, it brought us a lot of joy and really lifted everyone's spirits. And of course, this also sets a precedent for other territories and could have a domino effect. We're pleased in the sense that not only have the national courts told the company it's doing things the wrong way, but an international tribunal is also saying that none of its claims hold up. Yes, I think that part is important, but we also can't overlook the fact that the State was successful in this process because it gave the company everything it asked for.

PBI: And now the only thing left is the consultation.

José Angel: Yes, the CC granted us the injunction, and then ordered that the consultation be held. But the State has not handled this properly, since, to begin with, the authorities refused to recognize us as indigenous peoples. They went to one community [Nacahuil] that is part of the Resistance and said they would only hold the consultation with them. However, the community members contacted us immediately and told us that they would not participate unless all the communities were involved. If the process begins, it will be difficult to

get them to accept us as community delegates representing the indigenous peoples.

We reached some agreements on how to carry out the consultation, but then there was a change in the administration. This administration took a long time to appoint new staff. Once the staff was appointed, three meetings were held with the person in charge of conducting the consultation on behalf of the MEM [Ministry of Energy and Mines]. Also, the minister is being criminalized because he was the president of the 48 Cantones of Totonicapán [Luís Pacheco], who began the struggle to allow the Arévalo administration to take office. They went and put him in jail because of the persecution he faced from the Public Prosecutor's Office, and so the process was postponed again.

To date, they haven't appointed anyone in charge, but we recently received a notice from the MEM stating that they needed us to restart the process. We have now agreed to hold the first meeting on March 15, where they will introduce the new staff members who will oversee the process and ensure that it moves forward. After all, this is an order issued by the CC, and it must be complied with. However, this is no longer a matter of prior and informed consultation; rather, it is about remedying the damage the company has already caused, because there is nothing "prior" about it. So really, they are hoping for a process that will address the damage that has already been done.

PBI: Have you sought advice from other communities that have gone through this process? How do they organize?

José Ángel: Yes, we are in communication with them, but all of us are at almost the same level. Consultations have not taken place in the vast majority of communities. Instead, processes have been carried out, but results have not been made official. There are no regulations governing how consultations should be conducted. So, while we do share information, the aim is to move the situation forward jointly at the national level.

PBI: And what do you hope to achieve from this process? How long do you think it will take?

Ms. Licha: No clue, because we're the ones who will set the date. They agreed that we would set the date. Indigenous peoples choose dates based on what the Maya calendar and the time keepers say. So, we have asked them when we could meet, what dates would be best. They agreed. So now they'll just have to wait, because we're the ones setting the date.

Ms. Licha, Mr. José Angel, and Ms. Ana, we truly appreciate your time, dedication, and admirable efforts, and we wish you strength, perseverance, and success as you move forward on your journey.

"We are just a few days away from the end of 2021...For me, being there at the Resistance feels like an obligation, a duty, or a responsibility. This is our shared home, and we must care for it and defend it from hungry, money-grubbing predators who do not consider the immense, irreparable damage they are causing to an entire planet. This has been a time of great learning—like a school where I've come to realize that everything is provided to us by our Mother Earth."
[p.164]



Resistir para vivir mejor

(Resist for a better living) by Felisa Muralles
(presented on the 14th anniversary of La Puya, March 8, 2026)

Hoy cumplimos 14 años
resistiendo en unidad,
muchos han sido los daños
en nuestra comunidad.

Hoy es un día de fiesta,
celebrando por la vida
disfruten los presentes
y la dicha es compartida.

Nos visitan muchas personas
para festejar este día,
te damos las gracias a Dios
también a la Virgen María.

Aunque ya no estamos todos,
pero seguimos resistiendo,
y el apoyo en diversos modos
hemos ido recibiendo.

Los compañeros que se han ido
a la otra dimensión
de allá nos están apoyando
y pedimos su intercesión.

La fecha se está acercando
para realizar la consulta.
Le pondremos todo el esfuerzo
y veremos qué resulta.

La tenemos que ganar
pues es por el agua y la vida.
La gente ya lo entendió
y ahora ya está convencida.

Las hormigas han vencido
al enorme elefante,
la demanda hemos ganado
y seguimos para adelante.

Y continuamos trabajando,
confiando en nuestro Señor,
él nos ha acompañado
dándonos fuerza y valor.



Recreational activities on the 14th anniversary of La Puya, March 8, 2026.

Seeds in dispute:

the battle for food sovereignty in Guatemala

After receiving their request for accompaniment in late 2025, we began accompanying the National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty (REDSAG) and their struggle against monoculture plantations on the southern coast in April 2026. Below, we share their work with you.



On May 31, 2022, hundreds of indigenous and ancestral authorities as well as indigenous and peasant organizations delivered the Bill of Biodiversity and Ancestral Knowledge, called the Law of the Peoples, to several deputies of the Republic's Congress, who promised to bring the initiative (with registration number 6086) through legislative means. To this date it has not become law.

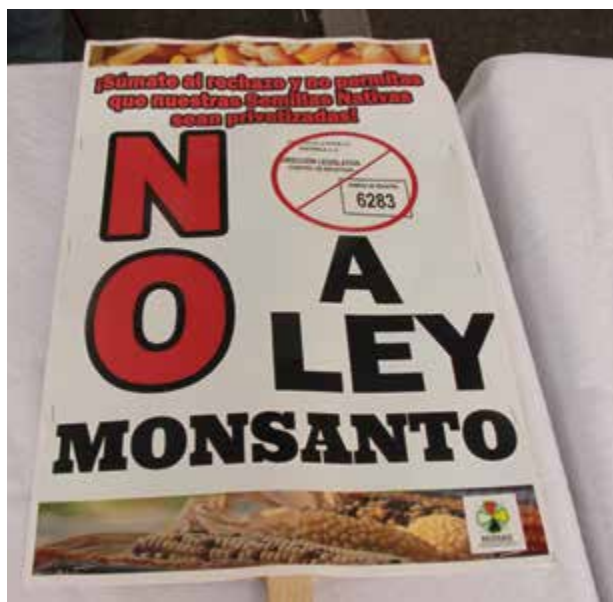
Peasant agriculture plays a fundamental role in the global food supply: 70% of the food supply comes from small-scale production.¹ As in other countries, Guatemala relies heavily on family

farming for food security. However, even though peasant communities—the vast majority of whom are Indigenous—produce most of the food consumed in the country, these communities' rights to

self-determination and food sovereignty are deeply underrecognized. REDSAG has identified and addressed this issue for more than two decades, working to secure recognition of food sovereignty, a

¹ Samberg, L. H.; Gerber, J.S.; Ramankutty, N.; Herrero, M. and West, P.C., Subnational Distribution of Average Farm Size and Smallholder Contributions to Global Food Production. Environmental Research Letters, 2016.

fundamental right for Indigenous peoples, and to defend the rights of Guatemala's peasant and indigenous communities.



Flyers during the protest against the so-called "Monsanto Law", in front of Congress, 13.09.2023.

REDSAG was founded in 2004 with the aim of coordinating peasant social organizations, groups, and movements that share a common vision for establishing food sovereignty, defending biodiversity, and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and peasants. It operates nationwide and is organized into six regions: Petén, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western. Since its founding, REDSAG has promoted proposals, strategies, and actions aimed at defending food sovereignty and the fundamental elements that underpin it, such as land, territory, water, seeds, and other natural resources essential to life and peasant agriculture.

Although the Network initially addressed food security issues, it soon

decided to focus exclusively on food sovereignty due to the governments' poor practices in ensuring food for their peoples. "The food system is always subject to many corporate interests. Everyone consumes food. The capitalist system that dominates us takes advantage of this," explains David Paredes, coordinator of REDSAG.² "Food security is about addressing the problem of hunger from a capitalist perspective. The goal is to deliver food...to ensure that the population has access and to provide this food security. But the issue we see is that, when the discussion is about food security, no distinction is made about where the food comes

from." David explains that genetically modified seeds are distributed to communities and families as part of food security projects, with assurances that they have been "improved" and that people will be able to produce and sell more using them. However, these genetically modified seeds contain chemicals that reduce the nutritional value and also pose a health risk to those who consume food grown from them.

The use of genetic modification technologies on seeds is relatively recent and is still in the experimental phase. Thus, long-term impacts continue to be the subject of debate and research. Because these are experiments, they are not as precise as claimed and can be dangerous due to potential genetic errors and mutations,

posing a risk to the environment and human health. Furthermore, there is another risk: that genetically modified seeds could cross-pollinate with native seeds, causing severe contamination. This situation could lead to as-yet-unknown impacts, threatening the safety of agricultural workers who handle these seeds and those who consume them.³

Therefore, while the food distributed in the name of food security may alleviate hunger in the short term, the food does not provide enough nutrients and may even cause long-term harm to the body due to the chemicals it contains. In contrast, the concept of food sovereignty offers a different perspective. David explains that "it is very different to talk about indigenous peoples' food systems. It means talking about a holistic relationship with all the elements of Mother Earth, including the microorganisms we cannot see but that play an important role—and which chemicals kill. Talking about food sovereignty means using all of this to benefit our food. It is a holistic approach that respects the soil, the air, and the water. That way, our food is not contaminated with any chemicals."

The use of native seeds is not only essential for ensuring a nutritious diet but also holds profound cultural and historical significance for indigenous peoples. It is also crucial for environmental preservation. Guatemala is one of the world's 21 megadiverse countries, recognized for the richness of its ecosystems.⁴ Likewise, Guatemala is home to essential crops, like beans and corn, which form the basis of the Guatemalan people's diet and are key elements of the country's cultural

² Interview with David Paredes conducted on 13 June 2026.

³ Bravo, E., *Cortando y pegando genes para manipular la vida. La edición génica. Sus peligros y normativa en América Latina*. Acción Ecológica, Naturaleza con Derechos y Alianza Biodiversidad. April 2025.

⁴ Asociación El Observador, *Boletín Enfoque Análisis de situación No. 100. Semillas Autóctonas vs. Transgénicos*. Guatemala, 24 November 2025.

and biological heritage.⁵ With this in mind, one of the main initiatives that REDSAG promotes is the defense and protection of ancestral knowledge and biodiversity, fundamental elements of food sovereignty. As David Paredes explains, “what food sovereignty does is pass on ancestral knowledge – a history of agriculture that indigenous peoples have practiced and that today forms the basis of our food supply.”⁶

Despite the importance of preserving native seeds and traditional production methods, peasant farmers face growing challenges stemming from the implementation of agricultural policies that promote the use of agrochemicals and genetically modified (GM) seeds. According to REDSAG, one of the most significant examples of the wrong direction agricultural policies have taken is the Plant Variety Protection Law, popularly known as the “Monsanto Law” due to its connection to the agrochemical company of the same name. The law sought to promote the protection of intellectual property rights over new plant varieties developed by so-called “breeders,” which were required to comply with a registration process.⁷ The law was passed in 2014; however, following fierce protests led by peasant organizations and food sovereignty defenders, the “Monsanto Law” was repealed three months after its enactment. The underlying reason for the strong opposition from peasant farmers’, indigenous peoples’ and civil society organizations is, above all, the law’s obvious goal of promoting seed privatization and the risk that such



Seeds exposed during the demonstration against the so-called Monsanto Law and in favor of the approval of the Biodiversity Law in front of Congress, 13.09.2023.

privatization poses to small-scale agricultural production.⁸

David Paredes points out that this law poses a threat to food sovereignty and the rights of peasant farmers. “The plant variety protection law safeguards large companies’ privileges. It talks about intellectual property; it talks about appropriating the rights of peoples. For example, an inventor can register an innovation, a trademark, or a seed variety, but they are disregarding and invisibilizing [ancestral knowledge]. It is a theft of ancestral knowledge.”⁹ REDSAG believes that the seeds that peasant farmers use today did not emerge all of a sudden or in isolation. They are the result of thousands of years of evolution through natural processes

and human activities.¹⁰ This ancestral knowledge made it possible to develop the agricultural diversity that exists today and constitutes a collective heritage that has historically been developed by indigenous peoples. However, laws such as the “Monsanto Law” allow a company or individual to genetically modify a seed and subsequently register it under intellectual property rights in their own name.¹¹ For indigenous peoples, this represents a form of appropriation and erasure of traditional knowledge, as it transforms a public good into private property. As a result, the law is seen as a step toward seed privatization and a threat to food sovereignty and farmers’ autonomy.

5 Ibid.

6 PBI Guatemala, ACÉRCATE September 2023.

7 Asociación el Observador, Op. Cit.

8 Ibid.

9 PBI Guatemala, Op. Cit.

10 REDSAG, Protejamos nuestra Biodiversidad. Documento mediado de la Propuesta de Iniciativa de Ley de Biodiversidad y Conocimientos Ancestrales, 2021.

11 PBI Guatemala, Op. Cit.

Although the “Monsanto Law” was repealed shortly after its introduction in 2014, Bill 6283 was introduced in 2023 to create the Protection of Plant Varieties Act, known as the “Monsanto Law 2.0.” The new initiative includes restrictions on seed exchanges between farmers and prohibits breeding new varieties. According to the El Observador Association, the initiative allows for the potential appropriation of genetic resources preserved by Indigenous peoples, whose work in protecting and exchanging seeds has been essential to preserving agrobiodiversity.¹² This bill, which clearly favors corporate interests, is currently being debated in Congress. If passed, the law will have a very negative impact on rural communities, as it would undermine farmers’ autonomy over their own seeds, placing them in a situation of economic precarity and banning several traditional farming methods that these communities have been practicing for a long time.

In addition, REDSAG recently protested Governmental Agreement 53-2026, issued by President Bernardo Arévalo and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food (MAGA) on April 17, 2026, which would facilitate the expanded use of genetically modified seeds. They filed an injunction against this agreement before the Constitutional Court (CC), arguing that, in their view, the agreement could have “serious consequences for native and heirloom seeds in the territories and for communities’ food sovereignty,” as it reduces oversight, simplifies registries, and facilitates the importation of agricultural materials, thereby opening the door to foreign seeds, including genetically modified ones.¹³



REDSAG protests Governmental Agreement 53-2026 in front of Congress, 11.06.2026.

In order to protect native seeds from policies that promote seed privatization, such as the Protection of Plant Varieties Act, REDSAG has developed and submitted a proposal titled “Biodiversity and Ancestral Knowledge Bill.” This initiative, also known as the “Law of the Peoples,” seeks to protect ancestral knowledge, practices, and wisdom, and to put an end to the development of an economic system that seeks to exploit natural resources. The bill stresses that one of the principles of the peoples is to respect the Maya worldview, a body of knowledge and wisdom that connects us to biological diversity.¹⁴

“Indigenous peoples’ and peasant farmers’ cosmovision is based on harmony, respect, and the preservation of all forms of life. We understand that we are connected to all forms of life on Mother Earth and in the Cosmos. That is why we are firmly committed to the defense, preservation, and care of the biodiversity found in our territories. For millennia, we have preserved them in harmony. With our proposal, we seek to halt the advance of an economic system that seeks only to profit from natural resources, without regard for the future of new generations or the harm we are causing to our Mother.”¹⁵

The “Law of the Peoples” establishes the right of indigenous peoples and peasant farmers to free, prior, and informed consent regarding the use of traditional knowledge, and seeks to strengthen the traditional mechanisms used to preserve these practices. In addition, the bill proposes penalties and bans on the importation and commercialization of living modified organisms or genetically modified organisms that threaten ancestral knowledge and biodiversity.¹⁶ The bill was submitted to Congress and is currently awaiting a decision. Bills like this are essential in Guatemala’s current context and in light of corporate interests, not only to protect the environment and promote the natural development of native seeds, but also to safeguard the autonomy of peasant and indigenous communities and traditional agroecological methods.

¹² Asociación El Observador, Op. Cit.

¹³ Espinoza, I., *La REDSAG presenta acción legal contra Arévalo por acuerdo que facilita semillas transgénicas*, Prensa Comunitaria, 20 May 2026.

¹⁴ Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria (REDSAG), *Protejamos nuestra Biodiversidad*. Documento mediado de la Propuesta de Iniciativa de Ley de Biodiversidad y Conocimientos Ancestrales, 2021

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Pajales Sis Case, Retalhuleu: The Struggle Against the Sugar Mills

PBI Guatemala began accompanying the Pajales Sis community in its struggle in September 2025. This community is part of REDSAG and actively participates in defending communities' rights to water and a dignified life, and in opposing the monoculture plantations whose operations threaten them. From an agroecological perspective, REDSAG does not consider monoculture farming to be compatible with food sovereignty, due to the damage it causes to biodiversity and the fact that, in many cases, pesticide spraying and the use of agrochemicals affect communities' fields and crops. The Network supports different struggles against monoculture plantations in different parts of the country, such as the case of Pajales Sis.

The Pajales Sis community, in San Andrés Villa Seca, Retalhuleu, is located between the El Pilar and Tululá sugar mills. José Miguel Sánchez, a COCODE member and resident of Pajales Sis, explains that this community “is a prime example of all the problems that exist from Escuintla to San Marcos. It's all the same issue: water, pollution, sugarcane... As a community, we're right in the middle of these huge sugar mills.”¹⁷ According to the community, when the sugar companies came to their lands, they promised them numerous benefits; they told them they would “give them a water tank, a field, and that they would build a bridge. But all of that was a lie.” José

Miguel states that, in addition to the broken promises, the community has suffered—and continues to suffer—the negative effects of the sugar mills' operations, especially on its rivers. “In 2013, they changed the course of the Sis River to create an open canal that carries away all the industrial waste from the El Pilar sugar mill. From there, it flows right through the middle of the community.”¹⁸

As José Miguel explains, one of the main issues facing the community is that the El Pilar sugar mill has changed the course of the river and polluted it. The company changed the course of the Sis River, creating a canal that runs through the community and is used to transport the mill's industrial waste and agrochemicals. Residents claim that this open canal creates a strong, unpleasant smell in the area and encourages the proliferation of mosquitoes that transmit serious diseases, jeopardizing the community's health. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of maintenance of the gabions built by the company. Gabions are walls erected on both sides of the river to contain the flow of water. Because of the lack of maintenance, most of these walls have already collapsed, leaving the community at high risk of flooding during the rainy season. At the same time, during the summer, the company exacerbates droughts by using river water to irrigate its sugarcane crops, significantly reducing the amount of water available to families.



The El Pilar Sugar Mill, located at km 170 of route CA2, San Andres Villa Seca, Retalhuleu, has been accused of causing the diversion and pollution of the Sis River.

¹⁷ Interview with José Miguel Sánchez, Political Council of REDSAG, 12 March 2026.

¹⁸ Ibid.



Accompanying José Miguel Sánchez in Pajales Sis, 8.05.2026.

Apart from the impacts on the river, sugar production has other negative effects on community life. One negative impact comes from burning sugarcane left over from the last harvest, a technique used to prepare the land for the new harvest. This practice covers homes, businesses, and community spaces with ash, affecting animals, harming the environment, damaging the roofs of homes, and causing respiratory problems among community members. Furthermore, there are also serious health risks associated with periods in which pesticides are sprayed on the sugarcane monoculture crop. José Miguel and his family are particularly hard hit by this, as the sugarcane fields are located less than five meters from the door of their home, exposing them directly to the effects of burning and spraying.

The community has organized many protests against the sugar mills' harmful practices in the region and to demand respect for the environment and the human rights of community members. "Our struggle in Pajales Sis began in 2017," explains José Miguel, "We started speaking out against how the sugar mills are changing the course of the river and polluting the entire southern coast."¹⁹ In addition to all the negative impacts described above, José Miguel finds himself in a precarious security situation due to the reprisals he has faced for his leadership in the struggle against the sugar mills. He has been receiving threats for years and has been the target of efforts to criminalize him. In fact, he has been facing criminal charges since 2017, when his struggle began, which were brought by one of the region's sugar companies, El Pilar. The company uses criminalization as a strategy to obstruct their work defending communities' rights and to instill fear, just as has happened with other criminalized human rights defenders.

Though José Miguel faces security threats and criminalization, he has not given up his struggle and continues to speak out about the sugar companies' abusive practices. Because of the complaints he and other community

members have filed, Pajales Sis is currently involved in two ongoing legal proceedings: one civil and one criminal. The ongoing civil case concerns the gabions that El Pilar built. As for the criminal case, the community is demanding that the sugar mill take responsibility for polluting the river. Although several of the complaints they filed were dismissed, one of them—filed in 2019—has moved forward.

As part of that case, in 2025 the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) conducted an investigation to gather evidence on the sugar mill's premises and look into the allegations against the company. However, this investigation, which was supposed to be conducted unannounced to ensure impartiality, was coordinated in advance with the sugar company. Community members state that they identified the locations where water samples should be taken, as those were the areas where pollution was observed. However, samples were taken at other locations where the water showed no signs of contamination. As a result, the investigation came back negative and concluded that no toxic substances were found in the river.

In March 2026, a hearing was held at the Retalhuleu Judiciary to follow up on the case and present the results of the investigation. Although José Miguel, as the plaintiff in the case, was summoned, he was not allowed to enter the courtroom. Only a company representative and a representative from the MP were present at the hearing, while José Miguel and his attorneys were forced to wait outside. During the hearing, the case was closed based on the investigation results. José Miguel and his attorneys rejected the decision due to the alleged irregularities during the investigation and the serious impact the company has had on the community.

Because of his concerning security situation, PBI has been accompanying José Miguel Sánchez, a member of REDSAGS political council, since April 2026.

¹⁹ Ibid.

News of our work

Women potters fighting for the rights of the Poqomam people in Chinautla

Part of the struggle of the Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla involves pursuing legal processes to hold state agencies accountable for ensuring that their rights as an Indigenous People and as citizens are respected. In 2021, the Constitutional Court (CC) recognized their right to water; however, no institution took action to ensure that this right was realized. In 2024, the Ancestral Authorities, who are part of the Resistance, filed a lawsuit against the municipality of Chinautla to demand the closure of illegal landfills that pollute the rivers flowing through the area, and the implementation of an ecological restoration plan. In 2025, this lawsuit was resolved in favor of the Resistance when a civil trial court ordered the municipality to assume its responsibility for environmental management, by addressing the damage caused to the Chinautla, Tzajá, and Las Vacas rivers, closing the illegal dumps, and designing a technical and scientific response plan for the short, medium, and long term.¹

These two rulings led to the establishment of dialogue processes between the parties, aimed at finding solutions to the many problems affecting the Maya Poqomam people in Chinautla. This has taken the shape of monthly roundtable discussions. Representatives of the Resistance attend the discussions and PBI accompanies them there. Only a small number of representatives from the Resistance are allowed inside. Our accompaniment has consisted of going with them to the meeting place and staying outside with those who are waiting for the results of the dialogue, in other words, the women potters, who sustain much of this peaceful struggle. Each time a roundtable discussion is held, the women wait at the door for hours to show solidarity with those inside. During these long waits, we take the opportunity to talk with some of the women – specifically Estefanía, Justina, and Rosario² – who tell us about their struggle, the challenges they face, and the effort it takes to keep it going.

For years, the women potters have accompanied the Resistance's leadership board and organized protests to speak out about extractive companies' impacts in Chinautla. They have held encampments in front of the sand quarries and along the road where trucks travel each day, transporting materials extracted from the area and creating a constant cloud of dust that seriously harms the population's health. This is an entirely volunteer effort; in other words, they are giving their time, energy, and resources to defend their community.

For these women, going to the roundtable meetings means starting their day before dawn. They get up around four in the morning to get a head start on their housework and take care of their household's needs. If they're lucky, they stock up on water while it's available, since it's only provided every two weeks. Then they set out for Guatemala City. Sometimes one of the women's husbands, Don Teodoro, drives them in his pickup truck; other times they have to take the bus. They arrive around nine in the morning and wait outside the meeting rooms until four in the afternoon, rain or shine. The return trip usually ends sometime after six in the evening.

Despite the effort, time, and exhaustion this involves, they continue to attend these meetings because they see them as an opportunity for change, a chance to demand solutions to the dire situation they face in their community, where river pollution and environmental damage caused by the sand quarries make life very difficult. "The sand quarries are monsters that have destroyed our town. Many of our grandchildren don't know the intact hills or the clean water that the older people remember," says Justina. Environmental damage has profoundly transformed the landscape and the community's way of life. The women remember a different landscape, with hills that have now partially disappeared, with vegetables, edible plants, and medicinal herbs growing along waterways and with clean rivers where they used to bathe without a care. They know they will not be able to recover

¹ For more information, see: PBI Guatemala, Peaceful Resistance of the Poqomam People of Chinautla, Annual Report 2025.

² Interviews conducted during accompaniment visits in June 2026.



Female potter on her way to the market, 4.12.2025, Courtesy @normanulloa

everything they've lost, but they hope that the roundtable discussions will serve as a tool to prevent the damage from continuing to spread.

They tell us that the dialogue process has also been marked by disappointment, as they often feel they are not being heard. It pains them that the authorities keep them

out of decision-making spaces and that the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) does not provide them with clear answers or the respect they deserve. This sense of exclusion is compounded by the criticism they face within their own community. Some people question the Resistance's work, gossip about them, or downplay their efforts. They acknowledge that all

of this sometimes makes them want to walk away. However, they believe that if they abandoned the process, it would mean leaving unfinished a struggle they have sustained for more than a decade.

The women participate in trash cleanup days as part of the commitments and actions agreed upon during the roundtable discussions. They consistently collect trash that has been carried downstream by the river, even though they know that much of it comes from the Zone 3 garbage dump and that, sooner or later, it will reappear downstream. The women participate in trash cleanup days as part of the commitments and actions agreed upon during the roundtable discussions. They consistently collect trash that has been carried downstream by the river, even though they know that much of it comes from the Zone 3 garbage dump and that, sooner or later, it will reappear downstream. Many people tell them they are "playing" at collecting trash. Others blame them for the pollution. However, for them, these cleanup efforts are a form of protest and a way to restore dignity to their territory. Collecting the trash does not mean they accept the problem as their own, as if they were responsible for it; instead, it shows that responsibility for the river's pollution extends far beyond the individual actions of communities living along the riverbanks.

But there is also room for hope. As a result of the Resistance's struggle, some changes have already begun to take place. Cleanup efforts in certain areas have improved, and the municipality is conducting trash collection days more frequently. However, the women believe that these efforts are still insufficient and that the institutional response does not reflect the gravity of the situation. One clear example is the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, which the authorities have not addressed: "The government isn't doing anything, so we're building the bridge ourselves."

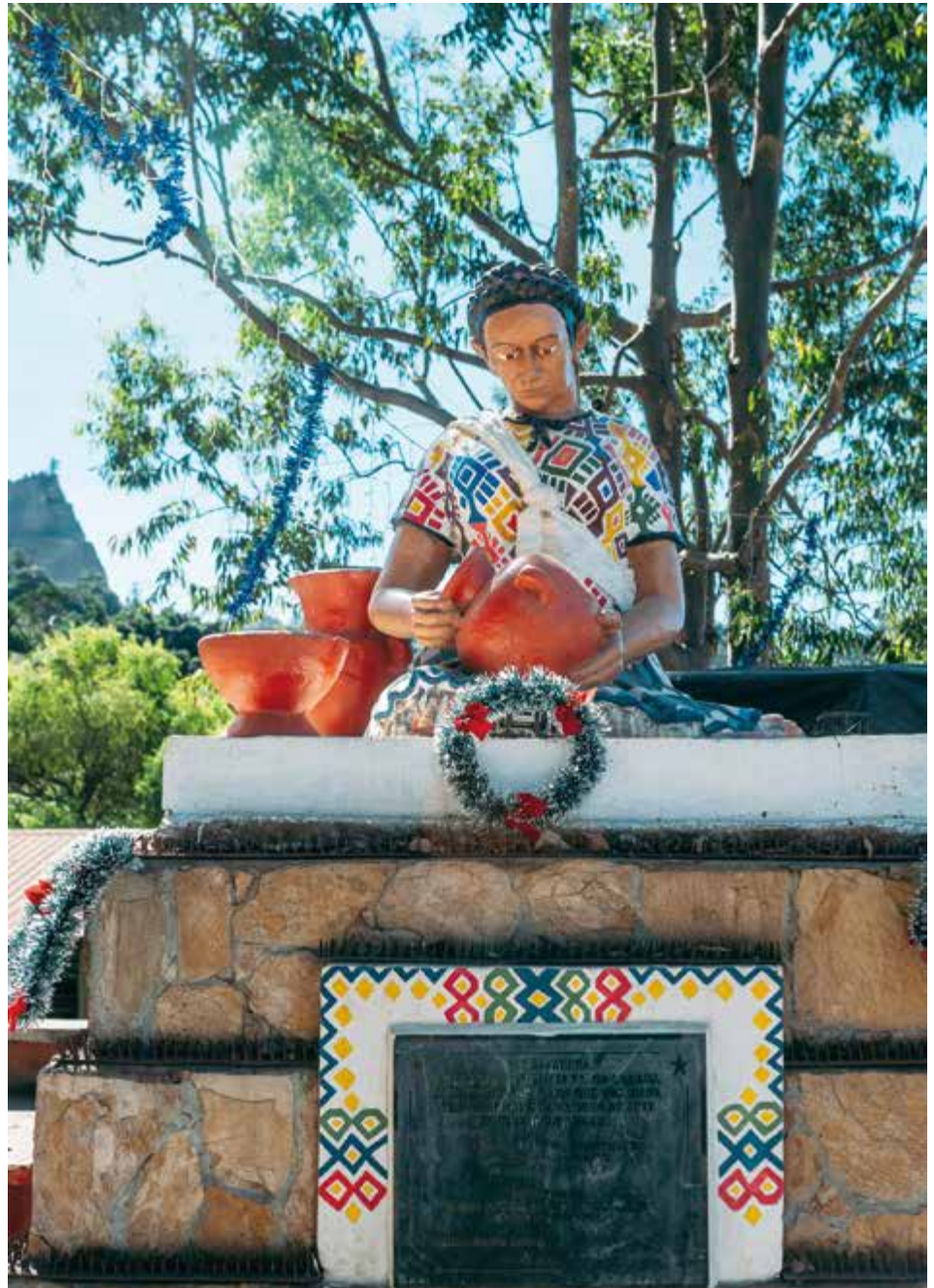
Furthermore, during the reconstruction of this bridge, which crosses the Las Vacas River, people questioned how slowly the work was progressing without realizing how difficult the project was and how little support they received from the municipality. They were even subjected to insults while delivering food to those doing the work. However, few people realize that it is the members of the Resistance themselves who are doing the work: they transport materials, organize tasks, and directly contribute to projects aimed at improving conditions in the community.

They do not like feeling abandoned by the government. They wish decision-makers could personally experience the consequences of the pollution they face every day, see their children get sick, and watch their land deteriorate year after year. “The people in power have their mansions—what about us?” Rosario asks. However, despite everything, they hold onto hope.

A key moment for the Resistance was the May 2026 decision by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) to revoke the environmental license for the San Luis gravel quarry. Although they know that this decision will not bring back their lost hilltops or immediately restore damaged ecosystems, they see it as an achievement resulting from years of complaints and activism, saying “the struggle has not been in vain.” They also note that many of the sand quarries are running out of resources to extract, since “there is no more white clay.” For the women, this highlights the scale of the extraction, which has transformed the region over the course of decades and left them without the raw material that sustains their livelihoods: clay, the foundation of pottery-making.

Despite all the difficulties and dire situations they face on a daily basis, they believe that the very existence of these roundtable discussions represents a

victory, as these spaces did not exist before and now allow them to call for answers and keep the discussion about the future of their territory alive. The women potters want lasting solutions to the trash problem, effective recycling systems, and concrete actions to save the river. They know that collective struggle is essential to achieve these goals. The community they have built, and their mutual support are what enable them to move forward with the hope of securing a pollution-free future for their children in Chinautla, territory of the Poqomam people.



Monument to the female potter in the central square of Santa Cruz Chinautla, 4.12.2025, Courtesy @ normanulloa



PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL GUATEMALA

PBI is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) which provides international accompaniment and observation at the request of threatened social organizations. The presence of international volunteers backed by a support network helps to deter violence.

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 and observation in coordination with other international accompaniment NGOs. In April 2003, the new **PBI** office was opened in Guatemala.

Purpose and principles

Contribute to improve the human rights situation in Guatemala and accompany social and political processes that promote the enhancement of democracy and participation in the country and the region. To attain this, **PBI** employs an international presence that supports the maintenance and opening of political and social spaces for human rights defenders, organizations and other social expressions facing repression due to their work supporting human rights.

PBI follows the principles of non-violence, non-partisanship and non-interference.

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