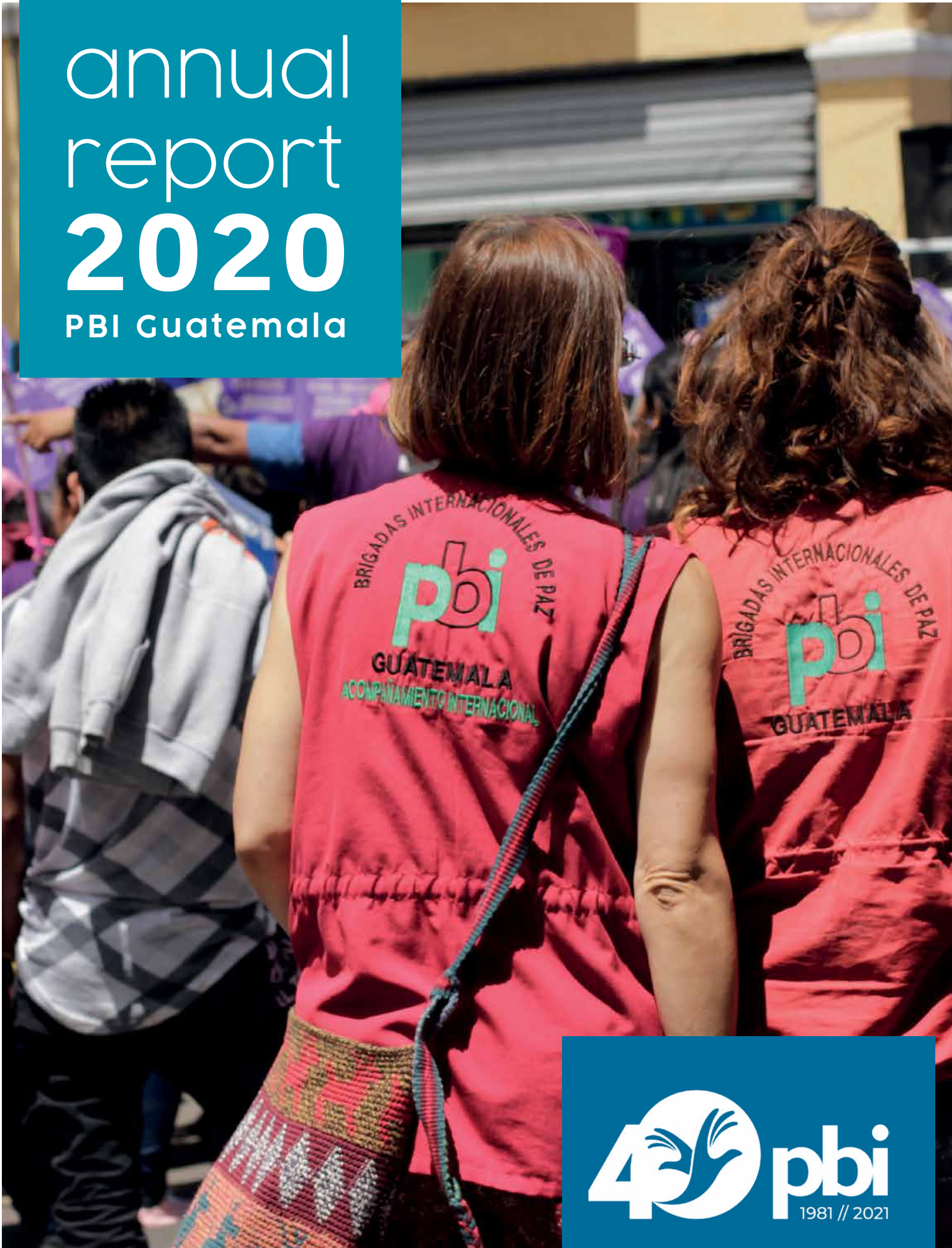


annual report **2020** PBI Guatemala



Contents

Annual Report 2020 - PBI Guatemala, May 2021

Writing and editing: PBI Guatemala.

Design and layout: Ximena Chapero www.ximenachapero.com

Photographs: PBI Guatemala

The Annual Report of the Guatemala Project is a publication written and edited by PBI Guatemala.

PBI Guatemala does not assume responsibility for statements issued by third parties in this publication.

Cover Photo: Accompanying International Women's Day march in Guatemala City, March 2020



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License. You can remix, tweak, and build upon it non-commercially, as long as you credit PBI (coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org) and license your new creations under the identical terms.

Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

ShareAlike: If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

NonCommercial: You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

Who are we and what do we do?	4
Editorial	6
Context	8
Who we accompany	12
Defenders in the face of adversity: achievements and resilience in times of pandemic	14
Alta and Baja Verapaz, where the defense of human rights becomes more difficult every day	18
Advocacy and communications	20
Strengthening local capacity	24
PBI Guatemala volunteers	28
PBI in numbers	30
Members of PBI Guatemala	31
Financial report	32

Who we are

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non-governmental organization with more than 36 years of experience in international accompaniment. PBI has been present in Guatemala since 1983 (with a break between 1993 and 2003) protecting space for people, organizations and collectives that promote human rights in a nonviolent manner and suffer repression for their work. PBI works only at the request of local organizations.



Our mandate

We seek to contribute to create the necessary conditions for defenders, organizations and communities to continue their work aimed at increasing respect, observance and protection of human rights and strengthening the rule of law in Guatemala.

Our principles

We work under the principles of:

- nonviolence
 - non-partisanship
 - non-intervention
- With a horizontal organizational structure and by consensus.

What we do

The international accompaniment we propose is global in nature and flexible, at the service of the demands and needs of social organizations who request it. The work focus of global accompaniment aims to weave an effective protective network, depending on the elements relevant to the context.



Acompañamiento físico



Acompañamiento político



Acompañamiento informativo



Fortalecimiento de capacidades

➤ Presence of international observers

PBI has a team of volunteers in Guatemala who accompany threatened or at-risk human rights defenders, provide presence at offices of threatened organizations, visit rural communities, and carry out international observation.

➤ Interlocution with authorities, advocacy and lobbying

PBI volunteers maintain continuously contact with Guatemalan civil authorities and with international entities like the United Nations and embassies, to make them actors in our accompaniment and protection work, as well as make them aware of concerns about areas where we work and ask for their support. Through the Advocacy Coordinator in Europe and PBI's Country

Groups we keep up-to-date multilateral institutions, the governments of 13 European countries, North American and Oceania on the situation of Guatemalan defenders.

➤ Publications

We produce and distribute information on the human rights situation in Guatemala, based on public information sources and our direct observation.

➤ Strengthening capacities

We continuously train the PBI international observer team and facilitate spaces for interchange and training on security and protections for Guatemalan defenders, with the support of existing local resources.

Editorial



2020 has been an unprecedented year for PBI Guatemala. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have led to challenges we have never faced before. Despite the initial uncertainty and confusion, the purpose of our work and our commitment to human rights defenders (HRDs) forced us to react quickly to the new challenges. Most of our field staff, both hired and volunteers, decided to remain in the country, and those who decided to leave continued working from abroad.

We maintained our permanent analysis of the human rights situation, incorporating all additional difficulties which arose as a result of the pandemic, particularly those related to the measures taken by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19. These measures have had a profound impact on the lives of the population in general, and of human rights defenders in particular, since the limitations placed on basic rights such as the right to assembly, protest, freedom of movement and due process have strongly hindered the work of human rights defenders.

We continued with all our activities, adapting them to this new reality, with the shift to virtual activities being the main alternative. As such, we began to transfer all our activities to this new medium and we soon realized it was possible to continue with our work despite the physical - not social - distance that separated us from the people we were accompanying.



We reinforced our telephone accompaniment and implemented secure virtual communications with the human rights defenders. We continued our advocacy work through virtual meetings with national and international authorities. We transferred all our capacity building work to a virtual format. We reinforced our communication axis by seeking new formats to give a voice to the people we accompany. We facilitated direct communication between the defenders and the international community, etc. In short, we continued with our work, which, in the words of those we accompany, was more necessary than ever, given the circumstances aggravated by the COVID-19 situation.

From September onwards, the measures limiting the rights to freedom of movement and assembly were lifted and some face-to-face judicial hearings resumed. Following this reopening, we began to receive requests from the organisations we accompany. We thus resumed several physical accompaniments in the courts and observed some public activities, always employing our biosecurity protocols.

This process of adaptation has not been free of obstacles, but we believe we have managed to overcome them and have achieved our goal of supporting the permanence and opening of spaces of action for human rights defenders who face repression due to their work. We hope to fully recover our in-person accompaniment work throughout 2021 if the health crisis allows.

Context

In Guatemala, 2020 was marked by the change of government and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since taking office, Alejandro Giammattei's government has been characterized by an authoritarian drift which has exacerbated the limitations on freedoms and the closure of spaces for democratic participation. In his first year in office, he declared seven states of prevention or siege, several of them before the outbreak of the pandemic. These affected 22 municipalities, continuing the trend of territorial control through militarization which had been initiated by previous governments.



One of the most widely criticized decisions, prompting widespread expressions of concern from Guatemalan society and the international community, has been the closure of key institutions created in the aftermath of the signing of the Peace Accords (1996), whose objective was to address the structural causes of the internal armed conflict (IAC): the Presidential Commission for the Coordination of Executive Policy on Human Rights (COPREDEH), the Secretariat for Peace (SEPAZ), which includes the National Reparations Program (PNR), and the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs (SAA). In their place, the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (COPADEF) was created, which will assume the tasks of COPREDEH and SEPAZ, while the tasks of the SAA and the PNR will be distributed between the Ministry of Social Development and the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency (SEGEPLAN).

Organizations representing campesinos, indigenous peoples and victims' and survivors' of the internal armed conflict are particularly concerned about this development. They state that the closure of these institutions leaves a great void, as there is no one left to assume their mission: some 2,000 agrarian conflicts remain unresolved; thousands of victims and survivors of the IAC have not received the necessary recognition; judgments from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the Guatemalan State have not been fulfilled; the development and implementation of a public policy for the protection of human rights defenders, which was in the hands of COPREDEH since 2012, is still pending.

The adoption of measures to curb the spread of SARS-COVID19, the first case of which was detected in

Guatemala in March, had a particularly harsh impact on the campesino and indigenous population. Comprising the majority of the population in Guatemala, these groups experience the highest rates of inequality, poverty and denial of basic rights as a result of the structural problems facing the country. In addition, the programs promoted by the Government to address the economic impacts of these measures have generally excluding rural areas, which are mostly indigenous. The inefficiency in the execution of state programs to support families in greatest need within the context of the pandemic led to protests which began at the end of August, and sought to highlight the crisis the country is going through.

Similarly, the State of Calamity decreed at the beginning of the pandemic included the shutdown of public transport and the prohibition of free assembly and free movement during curfew hours. This prevented communities from exercising their right to resist extractives projects which have been imposed without consultation or which have been rejected, leading to an exacerbation of these conflicts. At the same time, the restrictions have increased the isolation of the communities, because neither the local organizations, nor the international organizations who accompany them, have been able to maintain a presence in these territories.

This context has provoked an aggravation of the agrarian conflict with an increase in threats of evictions of various communities, as well as attacks against leaders who defend the right to land and territory, especially in the departments of Alta and Baja Verapaz. An example of this was the eviction in April of more than 36 indigenous Mayan Poqomchi'

families from the community of Washington (Purulhá, Baja Verapaz). This is a paradigmatic case as it was the first eviction executed during the State of Calamity, despite the announcement that all eviction orders were suspended. It was carried out by non-state actors and therefore without the presence of public security forces or the authorities responsible for ensuring respect for human rights. It was perpetrated with violence: homes were burned, crops were destroyed, the evicted families were prevented from taking their belongings with them and they were not relocated. In October, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary protection measures to the families and requested that the State of Guatemala implement the necessary measures to protect their right to life and personal integrity.



According to the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEUGA), 2020 was the worst year for human rights defenders since the institution began registering attacks in 2000. As of December 15, 1,004 aggressions against this population were registered, a third of which were directed against women human rights defenders. There were 15 murders (11 men and four women) and 22 attacks, with those who defend land and territory among those most heavily targeted. 313 of the aggressions registered by UDEFEUGA related to cases of criminalization. Similarly, the risks to women journalists and community communicators have increased in number and seriousness. Since the declaration of the State of Calamity, reporting has become more difficult and dangerous. In a public statement the

Association of Journalists of Guatemala condemned, the harassment and attacks against journalists. An emblematic example of the attacks faced by women journalists has been the arrest of the Mayan K'iche' communicator Anastasia Mejía Tiquiriz, director of the community media Xol Abaj, who has been indicted for the crimes of sedition, aggravated assault with specific aggravating circumstances, aggravated arson and aggravated robbery. This case prompted reactions from the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), the Association of Journalists of Guatemala, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) and even the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Human Rights System and the IACHR, who have denounced the criminalization of the journalist and have called on the State of Guatemala to respect

and guarantee her right to personal liberty and due process.

In early November 2020, Hurricane Eta and Storm Iota hit the northern region of Guatemala hard, leaving 2.4 million people affected, 270,000 of whom lost their homes. Most of these communities, who were already living in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty, are campesinos who live from their crops, which have been destroyed. Furthermore, communities fear the loss of native seeds and that arable land has been rendered unusable in the short and medium term. Faced with this situation, and the scarce and delayed State response, the peasant organizations have warned of the likely onset of an extremely serious humanitarian crisis.

Who We accompany

PBI Guatemala accompanies organizations and social movements who are fighting against impunity, for access to land and in defense of the territory through peaceful means.

In 2020 we provided support to 13 organizations and social movements (217 people: 144 men and 73 women).

We received 12 new requests for accompaniment, five of these related to overall accompaniment, and the rest related to one-off accompaniments for specific activities, where there were risks to the participants. After the respective analyses, we began two new general accompaniments: to the spokesperson of the Association of Residents Against Corruption in Patzicía (AVCCP), Carlos Sajmoló, and to the Retalhuleu Community Council (CCR).

We continued to monitor the situation of human rights defenders in Petén through periodic calls, we did not carry out monitoring visits to the department due to the health situation and the restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

-  Telephone monitoring with various organisations
-  Retalhuleu Community Council (CCR)
-  Cunén Communities' Council (CCC)
-  Peaceful Resistance La Puya
-  Peaceful Resistance La Laguna
-  The Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)
-  Peaceful Resistance Cahabón
-  Chicoyogüito Neighborhood Association of Alta Verapaz (AVECHAV)
-  Union of Campesino Organisations for the Verapaces (UVOC)
-  'New Day' Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator (CCCND)
-  TZ'KAT Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism from Iximulew
-  Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) Región Las Verapaces
-  Chinautla Multisector
-  Association of Neighbors Against Corruption in Patzicía (AVCCP)



MAYAS, XINKA AND GARÍFUN LANGUAGE

★ We maintained continuous monitoring of other human rights defense processes through observations, telephone follow-up and dissemination of information, paying particular attention to women human rights defenders in high-risk situations.

Who we accompany

Defenders in the face of adversity: achievements and resilience in times of pandemic

2020 has been a complex year for the defense of human rights, particularly within a context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions imposed in response to the virus have left limited spaces in which human rights defenders can act. At times, these restrictions have been used as an excuse to further restrict their rights, which has contributed to a considerable increase in attacks and aggressions against them.

Despite all these difficulties, human rights defenders have adapted to the new context, not only by continuing with their work, but also increasing the number of activities. Defenders have responded to the increased needs as a result of the humanitarian crisis triggered by COVID-19 and aggravated by the passage of Hurricane Eta and Storm Iota through the region at the end of the year. Some of these efforts have resulted in concrete achievements which we would like to highlight, as they demonstrate the tremendous value of the high-risk activity of defending human rights in Guatemala.

After four years of legal struggle, the indigenous Maya Ch'orti' communities of Las Flores, Ingenio, Guaraquiche, Matazano, Suchiquer, Guareruche and Pelillo Negro, located in the municipality of Jocotán, celebrated the historic ruling issued by the Constitutional Court (CC) of Guatemala, through which their collective rights to the ownership of 635 *caballerías* of land has been recognized. Many people from these communities are members of the 'New Day' Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator (CCCND), who PBI has accompanied since 2009.

In 2011, the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) authorized the construction of the El Orégano hydroelectric megaproject, located in Jocotán and owned by the company "Las Tres Niñas", S.A. The affected communities expressed their opposition as



In July 2017, indigenous authorities of Jocotán receive the legal resolution issued by the Supreme Court that recognizes their territory. Then, the Property Registry filed an appeal.

soon as they learned of these plans. However, the municipality of Jocotán granted a license and land to the company.

Research on the history of land ownership in this region revealed that the municipality granted land belonging to the Ch'orti' communities. In 2016, Indigenous Authorities from the 7 affected communities initiated a legal complaint against the General Property Registry, the municipal government and the company, which concluded with the aforementioned ruling. This not only recognizes the collective right to the land, but also the existence of the Ch'orti' people, a fact which had been denied by the municipal authorities until this moment. Consequently, the municipality is obliged to cancel the license and the hydro company must cancel its project.

Despite the great achievement this judicial decision represents, the members of the communities fear possible reprisals, an increase in attacks against them, possible criminalization processes and other expressions of violence towards them. The region is characterized by increasing social conflict, as well as a systematic increase in attacks against individual members of CCCND as well as member communities.

Another case worth highlighting is that of Carlos Sajmoló Pichiyá, spokesperson for the Association of Residents Against Corruption in Patzicía (AVCCP), who has undergone a process of criminalization, which was provoked by his work as a human rights defender. As part of its work against corruption, AVCCP has been carrying out actions to monitor and audit the work of the municipal authorities of Patzicía (Chimaltenango) since 2016. The organization, made up of more than 150 residents of the municipality, demands transparency in the management of funds and in decision-making by local authorities. The work carried out by AVCCP has been met with aggression and political persecution towards its leaders, especially Carlos Sajmoló.

In 2018, the municipality of Patzicía granted the company Red Eléctrica de Centroamérica S.A. (RECSA) a construction license to install an electrical substation in the municipality, without having carried out the obligatory prior consultation with the population. AVCCP led a neighborhood movement asking the municipality to carry out a consultation. The result of these actions was the revocation of the license granted to the company. RECSA reacted by denouncing Carlos Sajmoló for coercion, instigation to commit crimes, arrests and illegal detentions which, according to the company, occurred during the peaceful demonstrations organized by AVCCP in 2018. The first public hearing for this process took place in January 2020 and the judge declared a lack of merit. RECSA and the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) appealed the resolution. The Court of Appeals in Antigua Guatemala carried out the review and confirmed the ruling from the first instance, reaffirming that the accusations against Carlos were not based on valid evidence.

The TZ'KAT Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism from Iximulew, was nominated in 2020 for the Human Rights Tulip Prize awarded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the Netherlands. They were among the three finalists, which raises awareness about the importance and value of their work, recognizing the emotional, physical, spiritual and political support they give to Mayan women survivors of sexual violence suffered during the internal armed conflict, as well as to women human rights defenders who suffer all sorts of attacks as a result of the work they do. The Dutch MFA emphasized that during the pandemic, TZK'AT has continued to assist women human rights defenders and their families, paying special attention to women affected by the virus. They also stated that

“ over the years, the Network has helped lay the foundation for community and territorial feminism as an epistemology that gives women and communities around the world the opportunity to analyze their oppressive realities and provides them with the tools to heal themselves and others. ”



Who we accompany

Alta and Baja Verapaz, where the defense of human rights becomes more difficult every day

The Community Council of the Highlands (CCDA) - Las Verpases Region, the Union of Campesino Organisations for the Verapaces (UVOC) and the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón, are all organizations accompanied by PBI who have continued their work despite the terrible circumstances experienced in 2020. These organizations are based Alta and Baja Verapaz, departments which were already facing difficult situations but which have worsened due to the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic and the impacts of Hurricane Eta and Storm Iota, increasing the isolation of many communities. The massive damage to infrastructure such as bridges and roads has kept communities isolated for long periods of time. They are unable to travel and have been left without access to electricity, telephone, internet, and basic subsistence goods. All of this has led to an increase in vulnerability and attacks against human rights defenders, a trend that began when the government started declaring States of Prevention in the months before the pandemic.

Entire areas have faced prolonged isolated and are virtually defenseless against violent attacks. This is the case of the community of Washington (Baja Verapaz), which in April, at the height of the pandemic, experienced a violent and illegal eviction at the hands of private armed actors. The houses, belongings and crops of several families were burned, leaving them in a situation of total defenselessness. The National Civil Police did not arrive until a week after the events. Neither PBI, nor other organizations who provide support to this community were able to get there due to the prohibitions on travel decreed because of the pandemic. At the same time, an association of farmers in the region called for more evictions, and defamed the leaders of the CCDA - Las Verpases Region, maliciously linking them to organized crime and claiming the defense of human rights was linked

to illicit activities. Lesbia Artola and Imelda Teyul, both leaders of this organization, have formal charges pending against them at the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) of Cobán, which were brought in the context of acts of stigmatization, defamation and criminalization against the CCDA and against Lesbia, according to the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

In addition, CCDA and UVOC are accompanying dialogues with the Secretariat of Agrarian Affairs (SAA), in cases of agrarian conflicts processes. These cases have been completely neglected and communities are now facing a situation of total uncertainty following the dissolution of this institution by the government. This is a very worrying situation, and Alta Verapaz is one of the departments most affected by these conflicts.

Regarding the criminalization and prosecution of human rights defenders who are members of these organizations, the delays in the hearings of two cases are worrying and discouraging. Bernardo Caal Xol is a member of the Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón and

defender of the territory who opposes the construction of several hydroelectric dams in the region for not having carried out the obligatory prior, free and informed consultation with the affected communities. Bernardo was sentenced to more than seven years in prison "on charges of illegal detention and aggravated theft of a drill, a toolbox and fiber optics" in a trial whose proceedings have faced international criticism. This sentence, according to four Special Rapporteurs and the Business and Human Rights Working Group of the United Nations "appears to be unconscionable and was based mainly on testimonies of Oxec company affiliates". They also state that it is "an apparent attempt to silence and discredit the legitimate exercise of the rights of the indigenous community". The other case is that of Justino Xollim, a resident of the La Primavera community (Alta Verapaz) and member of UVOC, who in September was indicted for crimes against forestry resources. The accusation against him was brought by people linked to a logging company and occurred when the human rights defender went to the Public Prosecutor's Office to denounce illegal logging activities in his community.



The criminalized q'eqchi' defenders Marcelino Xol Cucul, Jorge Coc Coc (CCDA Verpases) and Bernardo Caal Xol (Peaceful Resistance of Cahabón) in the Cobán prison.

Advocacy and communications



Building bridges for advocacy

As we have reiterated throughout this report, the context created by the pandemic during 2020 has posed great challenges for the work of human rights defenders in Guatemala. It has resulted in greater vulnerability to attacks because of the near impossibility of denouncing aggression and employing protection measures, among other reasons. As such, it has been a particularly harsh year.

Faced with this reality, PBI Guatemala have deployed our creative resources towards building “digital bridges” to overcome these obstacles. In the face of emergencies, we have created **Alerts** to highlight these incidents and we have continued our advocacy work by holding telephone meetings and videoconferences with local, regional, national and international authorities, sharing our concerns and recommendations for promoting the implementation of protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.



Following the eviction of the Washington community (Baja Verapaz) in April, we documented the incident and the context which led to the eviction, in order to inform the diplomatic corps present in Guatemala, as well as our International Support Network. As a result, an embassy contacted the Governor of Alta Verapaz to express their concern and their desire to remain informed about the situation. At the international level, parliamentarians reiterated these concerns to their Ministries for Foreign Affairs, requesting information on the matter and urging their embassies in Guatemala to respond with protection actions. The European Union (EU) Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, confirmed that the EU Delegation would monitor the situation closely and address the issue at a meeting of the Filter Group (FG).¹ In April 2020 we presented the critical security situation of CCDA - Las Verapaces Region to the FG, and as a result representatives of this organization held a virtual meeting with the Human Rights Officer of the EU Delegation in May to report first hand on the persistent threats and attacks they have been suffering for some time.

As part of this new pandemic strategy, we have organized **virtual meetings** between human rights defenders, political representatives, and European government authorities. Members of UVOC, CCDA and the Network of Ancestral Healers participated in virtual meetings with representatives of the European

Parliament, as well as with regional government authorities from other countries and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands. We hope that this opportunity to receive first-hand information from the human rights defenders will serve to increase support and that the necessary protection measures will be put in place.

We also carried out **public activities** in which the accompanied human rights defenders were able to discuss their situation in coordination with several PBI country groups. For example, a representative of UVOC participated in a virtual panel with the former UN Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli, on “Systematic patterns of persecution and criminalization of indigenous defenders in Guatemala - cases from Alta Verapaz” organized by PBI and Franciscans International. This occurred in parallel with the session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Despite the many obstacles created by the pandemic we have built bridges to raise awareness of the situation of human rights defenders and promote their protection through these diverse strategies. The lack of access to technology and digital networks in many regions of the country has also highlighted preexisting inequalities and structural exclusion and represents another serious limitation for the participation of the people we accompany in advocacy activities.

¹ Periodic meeting of human rights officers from the EU Delegation; embassies from several EU member countries; Switzerland; Canada; and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), during which the human rights situation in Guatemala is analyzed.

Achievements and Challenges in our Communication Work during the Pandemic

Our communication work has also been affected by the pandemic. Since March we have been unable to visit communities to deliver our printed publications, so they have been stored in a warehouse. We hope to be able to distribute them during 2021.

In February, however, before the health emergency was declared, we carried out two **public activities** beginning with a forum on Hydroelectric megaprojects and their impacts on human rights in Guatemala. Some 200 people participated in this activity including: defenders of territory and natural resources, members of Guatemalan and international social organizations and representatives of the PDH and the French, Swiss, Colombian and Spanish embassies as well as the EU Delegation. The objective of this event was to give voice to people from different departments of the country who peacefully defend Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (ESCR) against the installation of hydroelectric projects. During this forum we screened the documentary *The Blood of the Earth*, directed by Félix Zurita de Higes and produced by PBI and Entrepueblos. It recounts experiences of resistance in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala. The section on Guatemala gives voice to the resistance of Q'eqchi' communities opposed to the Oxec hydroelectric project, owned by Corporación Multi Inversiones (CMI) and built by ACS, a company owned by the Spanish businessman Florentino Pérez. After screening the documentary, human rights defenders shared their experiences in the struggle against hydroelectric projects which were imposed without consultation in Huehuetenango, Alta Verapaz and Chiquimula in a panel moderated by Francisca Gómez-Grijalva.

The second activity was a film screening in which, after screening the documentary, Norma Sancir moderated a conversation with Isabel Matzir, human rights defender and wife of the criminalized Q'eqchi' defender and leader Bernardo Caal Xol, and Gerardo Paíz, ecologist from the Madre Selva Collective. The exchange focused on water scarcity and the social struggles which are responding to this reality, as well as Bernardo's criminalization.

In April we published the **monograph** of the report *Defend Life! Social struggles in Alta Verapaz*, which addresses the work of four organizations and social movements who we accompany in the region under our three thematic focuses: the fight against impunity, access to land and defense of territory. The research addresses concrete situations of struggle related to the strongest structural problem in Guatemala, access to and control of land and territory. Our initial intention was to conduct a tour of the communities to present the report and feedback the information, but the



pandemic prevented us from doing so. As such, we opted for a virtual presentation of the report, with the participation of Sandra Cael of UVOC and Julio Gonzalez of the Madre Selva Collective. Jordi Quiles Sendra, former PBI Guatemala volunteer and author of the report, moderated the discussion.

Due to travel restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic we were unable to produce audiovisual materials on the struggles of our accompanied organizations. However, inspired by the success of the presentation of the monograph on the struggles in Alta Verapaz and the favorable reactions from the audience, we designed and launched a virtual program to give space and voice to human rights defenders. During a 40-minute slot, called **ACÉRCATE**, guests share their views and experiences on various topics of interest and current affairs. During the second half of the year, we took advantage of this space to learn about and deepen our knowledge of: malnutrition, poverty and food sovereignty; the situation of the TZ'KAT healers as heirs of ancestral Mayan wisdom, the challenges they face in practicing their knowledge as well as advice and remedies to prevent and treat covid; the situation of the Pocomchi and Q'eqchi' communities of the Verapaces living under a state of prevention and its consequences, in addition to the permanent threat of being evicted; the exercise of citizenship and the fight against corruption at the local level; the situation of the communities affected by Hurricane Eta and the storm Iota. ACÉRCATE is here to stay, so next year we will continue to address a variety of issues using this format.

As far as publications are concerned, this year:

- We elaborated and published a Popular Bulletin on peasant and indigenous struggles aimed at protecting land and territory for good living. This bulletin presents the 30+ years of UVOC's trajectory, whose work is characterized by advocacy on access to, use and tenure of land and food sovereignty.
- We translated two Popular Bulletins into Ch'orti': No. 6, "A life without violence and with dignity for women" and No. 7, "PBI's work in Guatemala"; and translated Bulletins No. 7 and No. 8, "The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders", into Q'eqchi'.
- We wrote and published our two biannual Bulletins which cover issues and challenges faced by organizations and collectives.

All our publications and related information are available on our website.

Capacity building in pandemic times

Our work in support of capacity building for human rights defenders has, of course, also been affected by the pandemic. Once again, we have had to adapt to the special circumstances so that these important spaces for meeting, exchange and learning could still take place, even if not in person. This year we organized the following virtual meetings and workshops:

In May and June we offered **two workshops on digital security** to promote safer communications on telephones and other devices. Use of these devices, as well as social networks and messaging applications, has increased exponentially due to the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic. These workshops were proposed because we believe that reinforcement in these technologies was needed at this time more than ever. The digital security expert, Pablo Zavala, facilitated both spaces, which addressed the security risks involved in unsecured communication through these devices, as well as the tools available to strengthen the security of these devices and communication through social networks and messaging applications. Both workshops were attended by human rights defenders from all the organizations PBI accompanies in Guatemala.

These spaces were highly valued by the participants. So much so that although only one workshop was planned initially, the human rights defenders requested a second workshop to deepen their knowledge and skills on this issue.

Medidas de seguridad básica para dispositivos

- Reducir localización y recorridos,
 - dejando en casa,
 - quitando batería
 - Bolsa bloqueadora.
- Usa las últimas versiones y actualiza todos los programas.
- Elimina todos los programas innecesarios (como Flash y Java)
- Que tu dispositivo esté cifrado, considere Cifrar la SD. (Configurar->Seguridad->Cifrar dispositivo)
- Usa contraseñas fuertes (mínimo PIN de 6)
- Usar el firewall del dispositivo o instalar algún monitor del uso de la red (glasswire)
- Tener y usar antivirus

Riesgos en Móviles: Localización

- Hasta los Móviles mas básicos s/GPS

Ubicación

- Dejar en casa
- Apagar, quitar batería
- Meter en estuche bloqueador (amazon "cell shielding pouch")

Recomendaciones en Android

- Cifrar el Móvil, considere Cifrar la SD. (Configurar->Seguridad->Cifrar dispositivo) (Phone Encrypted? app)
- No usar su cuenta de gmail. Crear una nueva y no sincronizar
- Instalar antivirus (AVG, Avira, Malwarebytes)
- Usa k-9 mail para leer correos (o Protonmail) (cifrar con OpenKeyChain, no descifrar, sólo llaves públicas)
- Mensajería/llamadas seguras con Signal (escritorio)
- Usar OSMAnd~ en lugar de Google Maps.

One participant commented:

“ Thank you very much to PBI and Pablo for helping us to strengthen our digital security protection measures. These workshops are essential for updating our protection in this area, particularly in the current context. For example, thanks to these spaces, myself and my colleagues in the organization have internalized security practices, we have included them in our routines, and we have noticed that our perception of security has improved a lot. ”

In November 2020, we organized two security workshops with a focus on protection in the context of the pandemic for human rights defenders accompanied by PBI. Arturo Chub, human rights defender and security expert, facilitated both spaces.

His aim was to encourage reflection on the impacts of COVID-19 on the defense of human rights. He also wanted to create an opportunity for human rights defenders to share the strategies they had implemented to continue defending their rights within the context of multiple limitations and restrictions. They also analyzed the security incidents they had experienced and how the nature of these aggressions had changed due to the pandemic. Finally, participants were able to discuss the tools and protection mechanisms available to deal with such incidents in this complex context.

This year, we organized three meetings with women human rights defenders focused on healing as a tool for protection. We have been organizing these spaces since 2011 where the specific risks they face are addressed in a safe environment. They are intimate spaces for women only, where different healing techniques are shared and experiences are exchanged. The meetings are facilitated by members of TZ'KAT Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism from Ixmulew.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs), those accompanied by PBI and others, from across multiple human rights organizations and social movements in different departments of the country participated in these meetings. The meetings took place in June, August and November.

The first meeting aimed to strengthen the networks among the participating women human rights defenders and, in this way, address the lack of contact and the distance imposed to stop the spread of COVID-19. Many of the WHRDs live and work in remote rural areas where communication with other territories was complicated by the pandemic. This space allowed them to reconnect with each other and continue weaving networks of support, healing and protection.

The second meeting addressed the health, emotional and spiritual effects of COVID-19 on WHRDs. Participants shared their experiences and testimonies. The facilitators shared recipes for teas and cures based on local medicinal plants so that the WHRDs could strengthen their defenses.

The third meeting was dedicated to the girls of Guatemala and the multiple forms of violence they face. In addition, WHRDs shared their experiences as members of social movements and the attacks they have suffered for being indigenous, women and human rights defenders. A space for accompaniment and support was created among the participants, where they were able to express themselves freely.



The participants in these spaces were deeply grateful to PBI for the efforts in adapting the work to the constraints of the pandemic and for remaining aware of their situation. Adapting these workshops and activities to virtual platforms has been a logistical and organizational challenge for PBI. The digital divide, so present in rural Guatemala, where most human rights defenders live, is very deep. However, we were

able to overcome most of the obstacles by opening the possibility of participation to people living in very remote regions. We hope that with these workshops and virtual meetings for education, training and exchange, PBI has contributed to the creation of support and protection networks among human rights defenders, thus maintaining spaces for the defense of human rights in Guatemala.

PBI Guatemala volunteers

There are a number of spaces for voluntary work in PBI Guatemala:

- ✓ The field team
- ✓ The Project committee
- ✓ The training team

In 2020 PBI had a total of **15 field volunteers**, 12 women and 3 men from 6 different countries.

♀ 12 + 3 ♂



6 nationalities

Testimony

Probably the most intense experience of my life

My time as a volunteer with the PBI Guatemala team came to an end a year ago. Although I now have a new job and live in another country, not a day goes by that I don't think about my time in Guatemala, sometimes with joy, sometimes with pain.

In retrospect and with distance, I would say it was probably the most intense experience of my life, with memories that will stay with me forever.

I joined the team in March 2019. Before arriving, I was scared to join an already established team because it was the first new intake in several months, but I was welcomed so warmly that my fears soon disappeared. I met some amazing people and many of them continue to be part of my life.

The avalanche of information at first was overwhelming and the pace of work very fast, there was always something to do. And so it was all year long. Whether working in the office, at home, in the field, responding to emergencies or just going through the routine, there was always something to do, and the house was always on the move. At the same time, the PBI house became my refuge and my home.

When I think back to that time, I think a lot about my team. Such different people, with different nationalities, backgrounds, characteristics and motivations. Living in the PBI house, although only



for a short time, is so intense and the relationships that are generated are so unique that many of those friendships remain for life. Of course, living with so many people presents challenges and it was not always easy, there was stress and conflict, but even so I remember all my colleagues with great affection.

The thing which most marked this year, and perhaps my life, are the people we accompanied. They have a place in my head and in my heart. I met people who impressed me so much by their strength and their commitment to human rights!

When I think of these people, I smile, because not only have I accompanied them in their struggle, but I have also shared beautiful and joyful moments with them. I could not help that some of them found their way to my heart. And there they are. Above all it was the women, in their diversity, who impressed me the most and who I carry in my heart. Their struggle against all the injustices to which they are exposed as women, as indigenous people, as human rights defenders, impressed and moved me deeply.

When I think of these wonderful people, it not only brings me joy, but also pains me to remember. When my year ended, the situation was difficult: there were very few of us on the team; the pandemic had started and we did not know how it would impact the people we accompanied; we were very concerned about the communities that did not have adequate access to the health system; the political situation was tense and threats and harassment of defenders were constantly increasing. And I left. I wanted to leave because I was exhausted, but I felt like a traitor, someone who abandons people, and that feeling stayed with me for months.

But every once in a while, you notice that something improves, even if it is just a little bit, and as PBI volunteers we have contributed to that by accompanying the people who have dedicated their lives so that the country can change for the good of the majority. They are the protagonists of a better Guatemala, a more just world, and we, the red vests, accompany their struggle. I hope that many new volunteers will find their way to Guatemala and spend a life-changing year there.

Katharina Wagner,
volunteer from March 2019 to March 2020

PBI in numbers

Physical presence

- 136 Accompaniments to organizations and social entities
- 49 Meetings with accompanied organization and social entities
- 49 Meetings with other Guatemalan organizations
- 8 Observations of events organized by Guatemalan civil society

Advocacy

- 50 Meetings with Guatemalan authorities at the state, department, and local levels
- 37 Meetings with diplomatic corps and embassies, OHCHR in Guatemala
- 53 Meetings with Foreign Affairs Ministries and international bodies in Europe
- 1 In person meeting between human rights defenders and international community in Guatemala
- 3 Human rights defenders advocacy tours to Europe

Strengthening local capacity

We facilitated **7 workshops** for **139 participants** from 16 organizations (121 women and 18 men). Due to the sanitary situation and the imposed measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, all workshop were held virtually.

7 workshops

- 2 Workshops on digital security for accompanied organizations
- 2 Workshops on security and protection in the context of the pandemic
- 3 Meetings on healing for women defenders

♂ 18 + 121 ♀ = 139 participants

Publications

- 12 Monthly Information Packages
- 2 Bi-annual Bulletins
- 5 Boletines Populares (includes introduction of Boletines Populares previously published)
- 1 Special report *We defend life! The social struggles in Guatemala*
- 5 Virtual programs ACÉRCATE



Members of PBI Guatemala

Volunteer Team in Guatemala:

Katharina Wagner (Germany), Lucie Costamagna (France), María Lafuente Corral (Spain), Júlia Sierra Sánchez (Spain), Carla Güel Font (Spain), Lina Paola Martínez Reyes (Colombia), Paola Sarti (Italy), Inmaculada Jorge Aymerich (Spain), Alejandro Cerdá Aparicio (Spain), Paulina Martínez Larrain (Chile), Andrea Rey López (Spain), Irene Salinas Cortés (Colombia), Sara Lodi (Italy), Jordi Quiles Sendra (Spain).

Project committee:

(Germany), Maike Holderer (Germany), Erika Martínez (Spain), Adam Lunn (United Kingdom), Paulina Martínez Larrain (Chile), Rúben Carricondo (Spain).

Training team:

Erika Martínez García (Spain), Felix Weiss (Germany), Katharina Ochsendorf (Germany), Paulina Martínez Larrain (Chile), Maike Holderer (Germany), Antonia Ignacia Pérez (Chile), Ricardo Henao Galvis (Colombia), Emanuela Lamieri (Italy).

Project Staff:

Amaya de Miguel (coordinator), Kerstin Reemtsma (representative to the European Union), Mayte Quesada (administrator), Ana Fernández Rodríguez (financial supervisor), Anna Bernabeu Berni (fundraiser), Irene Izquieta (field support), Laura Gomáriz Cebrián (responsible for training of future volunteers), Silvia Weber (communication).

Project Consultants:

Evangelina Scarfe (Australia) and Fermín Rodrigo (Catalonia).

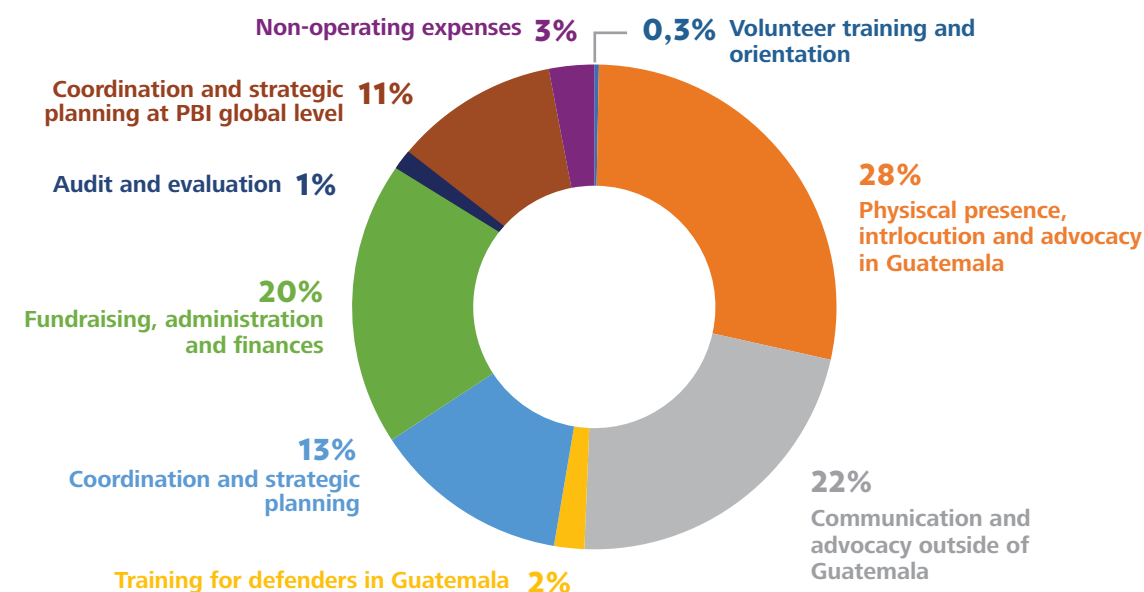
Financial report

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, PBI Guatemala has maintained financial stability throughout 2020 which would have allowed us to carry out all the activities planned for that period. However, the pandemic – as stated before – has had an impact on our activities and as such our outgoings were down 23% compared to the planned spend in the annual budget and 16% less than the outgoings in the previous year. Our income reduced by just over 16% compared to the previous year.

The number and diversity of donors supporting PBI's work in Guatemala has remained practically unchanged in the last three years. At the close of 2020's accounts, we almost achieved a balance in the budget, with a small excess in spending of less than 0.2% of our total expenses.

We thank all donors for the financial support that has allowed us to continue providing accompaniment and international protection to those who risk their lives to defend human rights in Guatemala.

WHAT WE SPENT IN?



EXPENSES PBI GUATEMALA 2020	EUR	
Volunteer training and orientation	994	0,3%
Physical presence, introduction and advocacy in Guatemala	95.493	28%
Communication and advocacy outside of Guatemala	76.381	22%
Training for defenders in Guatemala	6.373	2%
Coordination and strategic planning	43.003	13%
Fundraising, administration and finances	66.880	20%
Audit and evaluation	3.966	1%
Coordination and strategic planning at PBI global level	36.338	11%
Non-operating expenses	10.168	3%
TOTAL EXPENSES	339.595	
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INCOME AND EXPENSES	-710	

* Todos los gastos e ingresos presentados en este informe son en euros y están en proceso de auditoría externa por la firma guatemalteca Subuyuj Consultores – Contadores Públicos y Auditores.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION 2020	EUR
CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	168.655
Commercial Debtors and Other Accounts Receivable	
Donations and y outstanding agreements	22.595
Accounts receivable PBI International Secretariat	136.383
Health insurance reimbursements receivable	0
Down payments and advances	1.635
Deposits	628
Total Commercial Debtors and Other Accounts Receivable	161.242
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	329.897
NONCURRENT ASSETS	
Property, Plant and Equipment	
Computer and communication equipment	0
Furnishings and fixtures	0
Accumulated depreciation	0
Total Property, Plant and Equipment	0
TOTAL ASSETS	329.897
CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Commercial creditors and other accounts payable	
Accounts payable to third party	8.724
Accounts payable to staff and volunteers	0
Accounts payable to PBI International Secretariat	0
Accounts payable to other PBI entities	7.190
Total Commercial creditors and other accounts payable	15.913
Provisions	
Staff and volunteer benefits	1.489
Other Provisions	6.158
Total Provisions	7.648
Current tax liability	4.726
Other non-financial liabilities (Restricted funds to be executed)	72.963
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	101.250
PASIVO NO CORRIENTE	
Provision for Contingencies	101.250
NONCURRENT LIABILITIES	101.250
EQUITY	
Funds free to execute, starting balance	136.950
Difference between Income and Expenses	-710
TOTAL EQUITY	136.240
TOTAL LIABILITY AND EQUITY	329.897

EUR

Funds received in PBI bank accounts from Donors		332.450
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	29.872
Germany	Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World)	18.000
Germany	Misereor (213-600-1002 ZG)	13.830
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	33.000
Belgium	PBI Belgium	1.300
Italy	PBI Italy	1.214
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	40.557
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Valencia	44.368
Spain	Agencia Vasca de Cooperación para el Desarrollo	23.462
Ireland	Trocaire, GUA 170223	35.000
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	54.951
Netherlands	Dutch Human Rights Fund (DHRF)	6.659
Switzerland	PBI Switzerland	30.237
Funds received during 2020 pending implementation in 2021		-57.952
Germany	Misereor (213-600-1002 ZG)	-530
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	-13.949
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	-13.857
Spain	Diputación de Córdoba	-159
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Valencia	-11.568
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	-32.899
Funds for activities implemented during 2020 that still awaiting end of year payment		21.213
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	3.253
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	825
Spain	Diputación de Barcelona	9.474
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Vila Real	1.327
Switzerland	PBI Switzerland	6.334
Funds received during 2019 pending implementation in 2020		57.952
Germany	Misereor (213-600-1002 ZG)	150
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	2.747
Spain	Diputación de Córdoba	11.692
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Valencia	5.318
Spain	Diputación de Barcelona	2.611
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Vila Real	8.493
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	14.798
Netherlands	Dutch Human Rights Fund	7.590
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	4.553
Other income		232
Private Donors		200
Income from own activities		0
Interests		32
TOTAL GENERAL INCOME		338.884



Contact us

PBI Guatemala office

3a. Avenida "A", 3-51 zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala
equipo@pbi-guatemala.org

Coordination office Guatemala project

Avda. Entrevías, 76, 4º B
28053 Madrid, Spain
coordinacion@pbi-guatemala.org

International PBI office

Village Partenaire, Office 21
Rue Fernand Bernier, 15
1060 Brussels, Belgium
admin@peacebrigades.org



www.pbi-guatemala.org

Follow us:  Peace Brigades International – Guatemala Project