

Annual report **2021** PBI Guatemala



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Cover Photo: Accompanying the March for the Day for the Dignification of the Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict, organized by the National Platform of Victims' Organizations, February 25, 2021.



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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.



Physical accompaniment



Political accompaniment / advocacy



Publications



Strengthening capacities

➤ 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



2021 continued to be defined by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, which has continued to impact the work of PBI Guatemala. There have, however, been changes since the previous year and a gradual return of the Project's face-to-face activities. The return to a relative normalization of work has occurred within a context that is increasingly hostile to the defense of human rights in Guatemala. The closure of spaces for any actors promoting the defense of rights, or fighting against impunity and corruption, is a very worrying reality which has particularly impacted Guatemalan human rights defenders (HRDs) as well as international actors such as the accompaniment organization ACOGUATE. ACOGUATE have experienced a campaign of defamation and criminalization which places serious limitations on their ability to continue working, with the resultant harm that this implies for all the human rights defenders they accompany.

Despite this difficult and uncertain situation, PBI Guatemala has continued its work, trying to open and maintain spaces so that the human rights defenders we accompany can carry out their essential work.

After almost a year of virtual activity, we analyzed the situation at the beginning of 2021 and came to the conclusion that it was essential to move, little by little, towards holding some in-person activities, as the people we accompany were calling for this which demonstrated a clear need. The next consideration was how to go about this while minimizing risks of infection as much as possible. We implemented biosecurity protocols in response to this risk which have worked very well.



The first face-to-face activity to resume was in providing physical accompaniment. We began accompanying judicial hearings in the capital, and then resumed visits to the interior of the country, first to departmental and municipal capitals, and later to some communities. All of this helped to strengthen the security of human rights defenders we accompany as well as our relationship with them. Other areas of our work such as advocacy and capacity building remained largely virtual, although we closed the year with the first face-to-face meeting of women human rights defenders, which was held in Cahabón, Alta Verapaz. The women human rights defenders had said there was an urgent need to meet in person and so we decided to respond to this request. In this case, in addition to applying the biosecurity protocols, it was PBI who traveled to the community where the meeting was held, so that the level of exposure of the participants, for example during travel, was minimal. Holding this meeting in person, after so many months of virtual activities, was very successful and a moment great joy for all of us.

In September we held the first face-to-face assembly for the project in two years. Several people based outside the country travelled to this assembly to meet with our colleagues in the field and to evaluate and plan the work for the next semester. The meeting was very exciting, and it was very comforting to be able to work together again in person. In December we also returned to face-to-face training and the selection of new volunteers, holding a face-to-face meeting in Spain.

The year closed amid concerns over the complex situation faced by Guatemala, but at the same time we remain hopeful for the future and the peace for which the organizations, people and movements that we accompany are fighting. We hope that 2022 will be the final year of the pandemic and the return to all in-person activities.

Context

In Guatemala, as in other countries with structural problems of inequality, poverty and a denial of basic human rights, the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus, had a serious impact. Furthermore, the hurricane and tropical storm Eta and Iota which hit the Central American region hard at the end of 2020, exacerbated this situation. The Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies (ICEFI) estimates that an additional 1,236,000 people

will be added to the 8.5 million who were already living in poverty before the pandemic, and about 110,000 people will fall from poverty into extreme poverty. This adverse situation has brought to light pre-existing conditions of inequality, meaning that the impacts of this crisis have been felt differently across diverse populations where gender, ethnicity, geographic area or income level all influence the impact of these crises.





This situation is further aggravated by the high levels of corruption in Guatemala. According to Transparency International (TI), the most corrupt countries have had the poorest response to Covid-19, with weak and chaotic reactions that have left more room for illegal practices. According to the latest Corruption Perception Index (CPI)¹, prepared by TI, Guatemala is among the 5 most corrupt countries in the Latin American region. Within this context, the decision of the Attorney General and head of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP), Consuelo Porras, to dismiss the head of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Corruption and Impunity (FECI), Juan Francisco Sandoval, in July, was of particular concern. Sandoval's dismissal provoked a wave of protests, demands for the resignation of the Attorney General and the President and the organization of a Plurinational Strike called by indigenous authorities who were demanding structural changes. They highlighted how indigenous peoples are the most affected by corruption and impunity. Following the Plurinational Strike, indigenous and ancestral authorities filed a criminal complaint with the MP against President Alejandro Giammattei in September, accusing him of mismanaging the Covid-19 pandemic, discriminatory acts and inconsistencies in the purchase of Russian vaccines, among other irregularities committed during his administration.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) published a communiqué on August 6

in response to Sandoval's dismissal, in which it expressed its concerns over "actions that weaken judicial independence in Guatemala". According to the Commission, "the dismissal occurs in the context of a series of actions that seek to weaken the independence of justice operators."

The process of electing new magistrates to the Constitutional Court (CC), a key entity in the fight against corruption and impunity, has also been a cause for concern and has represented a setback in the fight for justice in Guatemala. This process concluded in March 2021 with the election of 10 new magistrates for the period 2021-2026. In the opinion of the Vice President of the Government, Guillermo Castillo, the process was not very transparent and, according to the independent deputy Aldo Dávila, "the appointment of the magistrates consolidates the mafias operating in the country, identified as "the corruption pact", a name given to a group of politicians and judges who seek to co-opt the Justice system to avoid being prosecuted for corruption".

Together with the above, and motivated by the crisis unleashed as a result of Covid-19, there has been a gradual remilitarization of the country. According to the generalized interpretation of social organizations, this responds to the need to impose extractivist projects, infrastructure, monocultures, etc. by force. On July 14, President Alejandro Giammattei decreed a State of Prevention for 15 days, arguing that he was doing so to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

¹ <https://bit.ly/3s6Y3VJ>



Photo courtesy of Prensa Comunitaria

According to human rights organizations^R, the real purpose of this measure was to limit the protests demanding the resignation of the president.

In October and November, Giammattei declared a State of Siege followed by a State of Emergency in the area of El Estor, in response to the conflict which has existed for years between the indigenous communities of the area and the Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN-Pronico), a subsidiary of the Swiss-based Solway Investment Group. The conflict originated with the installation of the Fénix mining project without consultation with the affected communities. The Maya Q'eqchi' Anti-Mining Resistance blocked the passage of the company's trucks, as a protest against the lack of compliance with a ruling issued by the CC in June 2020, which stipulated the need for a consultation with the population regarding the installation of the project. The IACHR, in a communiqué published on November 4, repudiated the excessive use of force exercised by the police against the Q'eqchi' population of El Estor in their repression of the protest, as well as the indiscriminate use of tear gas and the violence and repression exercised against journalists. Following an observation and verification mission to El Estor, The Convergence for Human Rights also raised concerns about the disproportionate use of force, violations of freedom of the press, raids on the homes of human rights

defenders, violence against children and the illegal detention of Eduardo Bin, a community leader from the Artisanal Fishermen's Union of El Estor.

December 2021 marked the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords, which marked the official end to the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC). According to the organization Impunity Watch, the implementation of these agreements "has been very difficult, because the governments which followed the signing of the Peace Accords have shown no political will nor interest in the peace agenda." There have been a number of serious setbacks in recent years, particularly, such as the forced termination of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2019; the closure of the peace institutions in 2020; the transfer and paralysis of the National Reparations Plan (PNR); the co-optation of the justice system; the dismantling of the FECCI and the Human Rights Prosecutor's Office; the publication, in August 2021, of Decree 4-2020 (NGO Law, which aims to limit the right of free association); the proposal, in June 2021, of Law 5920 (which aims to grant amnesty for all those prosecuted for war crimes). In addition to the above, there has been the weakening of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH) through the systematic delay in the transfer of funds approved in the National General Budget, which, according to the Ombudsman, hinders the fulfillment of its constitutional mandate

and the expansion of the presence of the PDH to parts of the country where there is conflict over land or extractive projects.

Within this political context, the situation for human rights defenders has continued to worsen, maintaining the trend of recent years. The report “Authoritarianism and increased attacks against people, organizations and communities defending human rights in 2021”, published by the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEGUA), registers 839 attacks recorded between January and November 2021 (308 against women, 411 against men and 120 against organizations and/or communities). 2021 was, therefore, one of the worst years for violence against people, organizations and communities defending human rights in Guatemala since the organization began recording incidents 20 years ago. According to UDEFEGUA, “human rights defenders, organizations and communities face an increasingly risky situation while carrying out their work in Guatemala, largely due to the measures taken by the State itself to limit their independence and criminalize critical actors and those who exercise their autonomy.” According to UDEFEGUA, Guatemala is experiencing regressions in the state of democracy and against human rights, in a context of institutional capture of the three branches of



government, the dismantling of peace institutions and violence against anyone demonstrating political opposition.

Despite this situation, justice operators and organizations dedicated to defending the right to justice in Guatemala succeeded in opening high-impact cases relating to crimes committed during the IAC throughout 2021. It is, therefore, not surprising that they are the most targeted actors in the country, according to UDEFEGUA.

We welcome the trial of five former members of the Civil Self-Defense Patrols (PAC), an armed civilian group created by the Guatemalan Army to confront the guerrillas during the IAC. The men were accused of committing the systematic rape of Maya Achi women in the military barracks of Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, between 1981 and 1985. They were convicted of crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence in early 2022 and sentenced to 30 and 40 years in prison. The State of Guatemala has been ordered to implement dignified reparations including economic as well as rehabilitative, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. This ruling comes almost six years after the historic ruling in the Sepur Zarco case, the first case where sexual violence perpetrated during the IAC was tried as a war crime in Guatemala, and the first case of domestic and sexual slavery ever tried as an international crime in a National Court of Justice. Once again, Indigenous women have demonstrated their tremendous courage in seeking justice for grave violations of their right to life and the rights of their communities.

Finally, we must mention the initial hearings against 11 people who, according to the Human Rights Prosecutor’s Office of the MP, participated in the detention and disappearance by the State of Guatemala of 183 people between 1983 and 1985. The victims make up the so-called “*Diario Militar*” (Death Squad Dossier) and were classified at the time as internal enemies. PBI is following this case through our accompaniment of the lawyers from the Human Rights Law Firm (BDH).

Who We accompany

PBI accompanies organizations and social processes in Guatemala who are working peacefully to combat impunity and advocating for equitable access to land and defending of the territory.

In 2021 we provided accompaniment to 15 organizations and social processes (156 people, 88 men, 67 women and 1 of plural corporality).²

We received 15 new requests for accompaniment, 13 were requests for global accompaniment and the remainder related to observation of specific activities which incurred risks for the participants. After the respective analysis:

- We carried out two one-off accompaniments: firstly, to surviving witnesses from the massacre of the community Los Josefinos, La Libertad, Petén (committed in 1982 by the Guatemalan army) and to the organization that is accompanying them through the trial, the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA); and secondly, to community journalist Norma Sancir, during the intermediate phase hearings against three agents and one former commissioner of the National Civil Police (PNC), accused of the crime of abuse of authority relating to illegal detention perpetrated in September 2014 in Ch'orti' territory.
- We accepted two new global accompaniments: to the Nunca Pares (Never Stop) collective, which confronts the violence suffered by women in third level education; and to the Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Authorities of Olopa and Quetzaltepeque, who are fighting for recognition as indigenous communities, the recovery of their spirituality and the right to free, prior and informed consultation in the face of the entry of mining projects in their territories.

We maintained our attention on the situation of human rights defenders in Petén through periodic calls and a follow-up trip to the department.

-  **Monitoring of various organizations**
-  **Retalhuleu Community Council (CCR)**
-  **Cunén Community Council (CCC)**
-  **Peaceful Resistance La Puya**
-  **Peaceful Resistance La Laguna**
-  **Human Rights Law Firm (BDH)**
-  **Chinautla Multisector**
-  **Nunca Pares (Never Stop)**
-  **Chicoyogüito Neighborhood Association of Alta Verapaz (AVECHAV)**
-  **Peaceful Resistance Cahabón**
-  **Union of Campesino Organisations for the Verapaces (UVOC)**
-  **TZK'AT Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism from Iximulew**
-  **Community Council of the Highlands - Las Verapaces (CCDA)**
-  **'New Day' Ch'orti' Campesino Central Coordinator (CCCND)**
-  **Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Authorities of Olopa and Quetzaltepeque**
-  **Association of Neighbors Against Corruption in Patzicía (AVCCP)**

² According to Chahim Vásquez (TZK'AT – Network of Ancestral Healers), people with 'plural corporealities' are people who are born with bodily expressions that are differentiated from the common ones, e.g. in their hormones and genitalia, which would be more commonly known as 'two-spirit' by North American first nations



MAYAS, XINKA AND GARÍFUN LANGUAGE



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

Who We accompany

Defense of water and food sovereignty on the South Coast: the risks faced by the Community Council of Retalhuleu

The Community Council of Retalhuleu (CCR) is an organization made up of more than 18 communities from across the department of Retalhuleu (mainly in the municipality of Champerico), who are part of the Mam, K'iche' and Ixil Peoples. Their main objective is the defense of life, territory, human rights and, in particular, the right to water and small-scale agriculture.

The communities began organizing to form the CCR in 2015, in response to the adverse effects from the expansion of sugar monocultures and the widespread use of agrochemicals and pesticides by sugar mills in the region.³ In 2016 they organized the March for Water, Mother Earth, Territory and Life through which they highlighted the need for the recovery of river basins, reparations for the damage caused to the environment and people, and the transformation of the agricultural export model into a model of food sovereignty, which would put the respect and recognition of indigenous identity at the center. At the same time that proposals were being put forward to solve the different problems posed by the growth of monocultures, the communities approached the State denouncing the diversion of rivers, the felling of mangroves and forests, the attack on protected species and pollution perpetrated by farmers and sugar mills. As a result of this work, a technical roundtable was established between state institutions and the communities of Retalhuleu and agreements were reached. Nevertheless, the state did not comply with these, to which the communities responded with further peaceful protests.

³ For more information see: PBI Guatemala, The sugar business in Guatemala, Bulletin No.44, Guatemala City, December 2020 (<https://pbi-guatemala.org/sites/pbi-guatemala.org/files/B44ing.pdf>)



One of the peaceful protests organized by the communities in 2018 was used as a pretext to accuse four members of the Board of Directors of the CCR, Anabella España Reyes, Abelino Mejía Cancino, Flavio Vicente and Virgilio García Carrillo, of the crimes of coercion, threats and illegal detentions. Despite the fact that in 2019 the judge in the first instance declared a lack of merit of the accusations, the case was appealed by an adhesive complainant on behalf of the sugar mill “El Pilar” and accepted by the Mixed Court of Retalhuleu.

As a result of the above situation, PBI began to accompany the CCR in April 2020. The accompaniment began with the four criminalized members, and later expanded to the different communities who have experienced attacks for their defense of the right to water and food sovereignty. Within the framework of this accompaniment, we have provided a physical presence in the communities and during the judicial hearings of the four criminalized members. The situation of the CCR has also been addressed in detail during advocacy meetings with the international community, both in Guatemala and abroad, as well as with Guatemalan authorities. In addition, communication, advocacy and security actions have been coordinated with other Guatemalan organizations who are part of RedSur and have already been accompanying the CCR for years.

This has contributed to keeping attention on the conflicts related to land use in the South Coast and on the specific situation experienced by the CCR’s organized communities.

PBI’s advocacy has succeeded in getting the Guatemalan authorities to act in favor of the security of the CCR’s community members, who have been at risk on at least four occasions over the last year. For example, in February 2021, PBI’s intervention contributed to appearance of the National Civil Police (PNC) in the municipality of Champerico at the home of defender Abelino Mejía Cancino, while he was being attacked with stones. The arrival of the PNC caused the attackers to flee.

PBI’s intervention had positive effects on the physical security of the community defenders on two further occasions. There was significant tension in the community of El Triunfo (municipality of Champerico), a member of the CCR, due to the presence of large police contingents accompanying the ENERGUATE company, at the same time that the communities did not have access to an adequate electricity service from the company. PBI’s public expressions of concern about a possible violent escalation of the conflict, resulted in the presence of the departmental representative from the Human Rights Ombudsman’s office (PDH) in Retalhuleu in the community to verify respect for human rights and the security of the population. Likewise, PBI’s calls to the different hierarchies of the PNC contributed to the fact that the riot police eventually withdrew from the area without violence.



“ We experienced moments of great anguish in the community. We were amazed to see how PBI’s actions contributed to achieving a dialogue with the authorities and to stopping the intimidation. ”

(Ricardo Gómez, teacher from the community of El Triunfo).

As a result of this incident, the Human Rights Ombudsman, Jordán Rodas, visited the communities of the South Coast to observe the water shortages related to the actions of the sugar companies and the violations of the rights of the communities in this area.

“ Getting the Human Rights Ombudsman to visit the South Coast has been one of Red Sur’s advocacy goals for several years. We are grateful for PBI’s accompaniment, which has proved an important support in making the work of human rights defenders visible for so many years in Guatemala. ”

(Nydia Medina, Asociación Grupo Ceiba).

Finally, the hearing of the four criminalized members of the CCR was held on October 22. In this hearing, the four human defenders were indicted. However, we believe that the coordinated global accompaniment between the lawyers, the solidarity organizations of RedSur and PBI contributed to the fact that the court imposed alternative measures on the four members, rather than house arrest or pre-trial detention. These have been used repeatedly in other cases of criminalization against human rights defenders.

The security situation of CCR defenders continues to be delicate, and they continue to face risks, even more so in the context of the closure of spaces for the defense of rights that Guatemala is experiencing, and in conflicts with powerful actors such as the sugar mills. For these reasons, PBI will continue to monitor the situation of the communities of the South Coast and accompany community defenders, in the hopes of improving their security.



Who We accompany

Accompanying the paths towards justice for crimes committed during the Internal Armed Conflict

2021 was marked by advances in several emblematic transitional justice cases. PBI has been present for these in our accompaniment of the Human Rights Law Firm (BDH), particularly Edgar Pérez Archila, who is acting as the prosecuting lawyer for the Association of Relatives of the Detained of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA) in the *Diario Militar* (Death Squad Dossier) case. We also accompanied FAMDEGUA to a virtual hearing before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) regarding the massacre at the village of Los Josefinos, Petén, committed by the Guatemalan army in 1982. In February, we accompanied the witnesses as they traveled from Petén to the capital, and within the capital, for the hearings, which were conducted by videoconference from the Courts.

The *Diario Militar* or Death Squad Dossier case began on May 27, 2021, 37 years after the events in question, with the arrest of 11 retired military and police officers. On June 9, 2021, Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez concluded that the prosecution had established sufficient grounds for opening criminal proceedings for the crimes of forced disappearance, murder and attempted murder. The investigation contained testimonies, documentary information on the intelligence plans of the military governments, references to international human rights instruments and background information on the history of the country.⁴ Both the judge and the plaintiffs in the case have received intimidating messages and threats during the initial stage of the process.

The *Diario Militar* was made public on May 20, 1999. This document records the surveillance, detention and extrajudicial executions of 183 people considered “internal enemies” of the State which occurred between 1983 and 1985, in the midst of

4 <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/los-crimenes-del-diario-militar-pasan-la-primera-prueba-en-tribunales>



the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC). The publication of the document made it possible to link the numerous cases with reports that had been filed. It also evidenced how the serious human rights violations of more than 180 Guatemalan families were part of a strategy of persecution, harassment and eradication of people who were struggling to confront the profound structural inequality, poverty, racism and exclusion existing in Guatemala and which, unfortunately, continues to exist. Relatives of the victims of the case hope that the intermediate stage of the process will begin in March 2022 so that justice can be done, the remains of the disappeared recovered and given a dignified burial, to raise awareness in society and to ensure that such events cannot happen again.⁵

In December 2021, the **Inter-American Court of Human Rights** ruled on the **case of the massacre of the village of Los Josefinos**. The court held the State of Guatemala responsible for the disappearance, forced displacement and the violation of multiple rights perpetrated in **Los Josefinos** in 1982. The court ruled that the investigation into these events should be reopened and the conditions for the return of the people who were forcibly displaced should be ensured, as the massacre remains in impunity more than 39 years after its perpetration. Manuel Antonio Farfán, president of FAMDEGUA, acknowledged the tireless efforts by the survivors of the massacre and their families and said that “we

will continue to accompany them on the path to justice and reparation for the incidents in which the State of Guatemala is responsible, and we demand that it fully complies with the Court’s ruling.”⁶

Among the achievements in justice for 2021, it is worth mentioning the case known as the **Achí Women’s case**. Several hearings were held in this case at the end of the year, which culminated in January 2022 with a 40-year sentence for 5 former members of the Civil Self-Defense Patrols (PAC) for crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence against a group of Achí women.

Progress in all of these cases is the result of the tireless struggle of individuals and organizations of victims and survivors, so that justice is done in cases where crimes of extreme cruelty, which cause harm to all of humanity, were committed. Their struggle benefits the human race as a whole. We admire and respect them, we stand in solidarity with them, we are deeply moved by their suffering and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their invaluable work. We would especially like to remember one of the survivors, Don Jorge Hernández López, who passed away in January 2021, who fought until his last breath for justice to be done and thus contribute to leave a better world for the next generations.

⁵ <https://www.prensacomunitaria.org/2022/02/caso-diario-militar-en-marzo-se-preve-el-inicio-de-la-etapa-intermedia/>

⁶ <https://cejil.org/comunicado-de-prensa/guatemala-sentencia-de-corte-idh-en-caso-josefinos-reconoce-que-persecucion-a-poblacion-civil-continuo-por-anos-despues-de-la-masacre/>

Advocacy and communications



The pandemic has continued to mark advocacy work

All meetings with institutions from the European Union, the United Nations in Geneva and national governments were held virtually throughout 2021. This made it possible for the human rights defenders accompanied by PBI in Guatemala to participate in several of the 26 meetings held throughout the year. Sandra Calel of UVOC, Edgar Pérez of BDH, Lorena Cabnal of the TZK'AT Network, Abelino Salvador Mejía of CCR and a representative of the organization Nunca Pares (Never Stop), were among those who participated in these meetings. As such, they were able to directly share information about their work in defense of human rights and about the threats and attacks they experience because of their work with various European authorities. They were also able to share their need for greater protection and for this risky situation to

be addressed by the different governments in the dialogue with the Guatemalan government.

These meetings also addressed the deterioration in the judicial system, with a focus on issues such as the selection of judges for the Constitutional Court (CC), the dismissal of the Director of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI) and the impact that the increasingly unprofessional and unethical system has had on human rights defenders. We also highlighted the government's repeated declarations of States of Siege and States of Prevention and the consequent militarization across the regions, as well as the increase in violent and illegal evictions with the participation of private actors, particularly in Alta and Baja Verapaz.

Several of these meetings and our requests for action focused on the increased criminalization of human rights defenders, mainly those defending land and territory. We urgently request that the international community observe hearings of cases against human rights defenders accompanied by PBI.

Some of the results of this work included: virtual observation by the British Embassy and the EU Delegation, of the **public hearing that took place on June 21 before the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) for the cassation appeal filed by Bernardo Caal's defense team who argued that failures and inconsistencies were evident in the sentences issued**; a joint communiqué from the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, as well as the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, dated June 21, which requested information and an explanation from the government of Guatemala regarding several alarming elements in Bernardo Caal's legal case; parliamentary letters expressing concern about the process for appointing magistrates to the CC; the public positioning of several EU embassies regarding this process in April 2021, as well as several parliamentary questions in Brussels and from different member states.⁷



⁷ Many times in collaboration with other organisations and national PBI groups.



Due to Covid-19 containment measures, as well as the difficulties for much of the Guatemalan population in accessing vaccines (particularly in rural areas, where the majority of people accompanied by PBI are based), it was not possible to conduct tours during 2021. However, we were able to organize multiple webinars with the participation of Guatemalan organizations, in coordination with national PBI groups. The audiences for these webinars was very varied and broad, from development students at a Spanish university, to attendees at a human rights forum at the United Nations.

Issues such as the right to water, protection measures for women human rights defenders, or the struggle for the recovery of land taken by the army from the indigenous population during the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC) were discussed in these spaces. Cross-cutting themes included the attacks against human rights defenders and the need for improved protection measures.

To coincide with the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP26), held from October 31 to

November 12 in Glasgow (Scotland), we organized a webinar on November 6 to address the role and situation of defenders of land, territory and the environment. This event was attended by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, David R. Boyd. More than 400 people participated. Human rights defenders from Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mexico and Nicaragua, all accompanied by PBI, shared their experiences regarding the struggles to defend the environment. They all agreed on the importance of organized civil society for the protection of rivers, forests, water and life, but they also highlighted the tremendous risks they run in carrying out this work. The figures provided by NGOs specialized in registering attacks on human rights defenders confirm the gravity of this situation.⁸ All the presentations mentioned attacks, intimidation, criminalization and assassination attempts, often perpetrated by private actors⁹:

“ We are doing everything possible to continue fighting to defend nature and to denounce deforestation, ... [In] the northern region [of Guatemala] there are still rivers, forests, large streams, but there are many lives that have already been lost in the defense of nature.¹⁰ ”

The webinar closed with a call from Colombia to all the people who participated and to civil society in general, to empower themselves, because this is the only way to achieve the transformations needed to save the planet.¹¹

8 See Global Witness reports <https://www.globalwitness.org/es/last-line-defence-es/> and Front Line Defenders: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/resource-publication/global-analysis-2018>

9 <https://www.business-humanrights.org/es/%C3%BAltimas-noticias/nuevo-informe-de-global-witness-revela-que-empresas-est%C3%A1n-detr%C3%A1s-de-la-mayor%C3%ADa-de-los-227-asesinatos-de-personas-defensoras-de-los-derechos-humanos-registrados/>

10 Sandra Calel from Union of Campesino Organisations for the Verapaces (UVOC) in the conference; <https://pbicanada.org/2021/11/07/pbi-hosts-webinar-with-frontline-environmental-defenders-during-cop26-summit/>

11 Danilo Rueda, Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz en <https://pbicanada.org/2021/11/07/pbi-hosts-webinar-with-frontline-environmental-defenders-during-cop26-summit/>



Closure of civil society spaces in Europe

We would like to mention our concern over the closure experienced in civil society spaces, as well as a general loss of interest in Latin American issues in Europe. The measures put in place in Europe, as elsewhere, to prevent and combat Covid-19, triggered multiple restrictions limiting freedom of assembly and, therefore, the active participation of civil society organizations in debates over policy and measures and engagement in open dialogue with authorities. They also limited the transfer of information on risks and human rights violations.

Two years on from the beginning of the pandemic, we call on European institutions to prioritize the reestablishment of spaces for participation and dialogue with civil society, the deepening and expansion of these spaces as well as the facilitation and promotion of alternative formats.

The Human Rights Council's general debates, at the United Nations (Geneva), had previously allowed

for civil society intervention on the human rights situation in countries. These debates, however, were not included in the agenda for the June sessions.¹²

On the other hand, the administrative measures such as those imposed by the European Parliament, where trips by parliamentary geographic delegations to "their" regions have been cancelled, without trips from those regions being reinstated (which has been impossible during the pandemic), have a negative impact on the knowledge and relationships exchanged between the EU and Latin America, which of course impacts on Guatemala.

This has been accompanied by a sharp decrease in the levels of cooperation funding allocated to Latin America: between 2017 and 2021, only 3.3 million of the 79.5 million of the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), was allocated to Latin America.

The PBI Guatemala Project finds this situation to be regretful and calls for renewed attention on the situation of the people, communities and organizations who defend human rights in Guatemala and the rest of the continent.

¹² <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/civil-societys-expectations-for-the-human-rights-council-in-2022/>

Communication

Our axis on informative accompaniment has not been affected by the pandemic, and we were able to move ahead with the planned publications.

The closure of the peace institutions during the previous year struck us as so serious that we decided to dedicate our first **bi-annual bulletin** (No. 45) completely to this theme. Based on analysis from the people we accompanied as well as specialists in political analysis, we explored the aims and intentions behind the dismantling of these institutions (COPREDEH, SEPAZ, PNR and SAA¹³) in depth and analyzed the challenges posed by their closure.

The second Bulletin (no. 46) addressed different issues. One of these was the impact the Covid-19 crisis has had on the lives of the people and organizations we accompany, highlighting the increase in poverty and the difficulties in accessing basic human rights. We also decided to mark the 10th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by analyzing the challenges for their implementation in Guatemala through testimonies from representatives of several organizations we accompany. They shared their experiences in trying to create a fairer economic growth model with us, as well as their demand for free, prior and informed consent in the face of the



13 COPREDEH – Presidential Commission for Coordinating Executive Policy on Human Rights; SEPAZ - Secretariat for Peace; PNR - National Reparations Program; SAA - Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs.

mega-projects being imposed in their territories. Finally, within the context of our accompaniment to the initial hearings of 13 ex-military and police officers charged with serious human rights violations in the *Diario Militar* case, we spoke with Magalí de León, whom we met at the Courthouse. She is the daughter of the detained and disappeared writer Luis de Lión, whose case appears in the *Diario Militar*. Through her testimony we explored the life and legacy of her father, whose main concern was improving the conditions of children’s education, an effort that was vilely interrupted with his kidnapping and disappearance in 1984. In addition to these three articles, we also used a small space in this bulletin to introduce the *Nunca Pares collective*, whom we began to accompany in April 2021.

Our **Popular Bulletin no. 12**, addressed to the communities, people and collectives that we accompany, is entitled “Water is life.” Water scarcity is a very worrying problem in Guatemala which has a great impact on all the people and collectives we accompany. Their right to this vital liquid is at risk. We narrated experiences on this issue from different regions across the country, which were shared in webinars that took place throughout 2020 and which we compiled for this newsletter. We also published Q’eqchi’ language versions of two of our previous popular newsletters.

To mark the anniversary of the violent eviction of the community of Chicoyogüito on July 28, 1968, we shared a **podcast** in which a member of AVECHAV explains the origins of their struggle and their hope for justice.

In the second half of the year we produced **two documentaries** about two communities struggling for their rights to land and the risks they face in carrying out this work, especially the cases of criminalization experienced by some of their leaders. The **video** “Samanzana II”, published in December, recounts the repeated attacks suffered by the community at the hands of landowners who have refused to accept

the resolution of the Constitutional Court (CC) which recognizes the community’s right to the land. The Santa Elena Samanzana II community is a member of the CCDA Las Verapaces. The second video, “From the struggle we grew”, published in March 2022, documents the struggle of the community La Primavera, in San Cristobal, Alta Verapaz, where attacks continue despite the fact the community have secured their land titles. One of the problems identified is the lack of compliance by the institutions with the commitments made at the roundtables for dialogue, which has favored the emergence of conflicts which have led to attacks. In both cases we accompanied the criminalized leaders during their hearings.

In 2021 we continued to carry out our online ACÉRCATE slot in which we address various issues of relevance to the organizations we accompany.



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

Strengthening capacities

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact our work throughout 2021, making it difficult to hold face-to-face meetings. We turned the challenge into an opportunity, however, by organizing several workshops and virtual meetings on topics relevant to human rights defenders. These spaces have allowed for the exchange of experiences of struggle and resistance among human rights defenders from different regions.

The increase in attacks on human rights defenders in the context of the pandemic, led us to organize **security training sessions** designed to address current risk assessments and the development of strategies to address them. These spaces included a gender focus and were coordinated by the Guatemalan human rights defender and security expert, Fernando Us. 35 people (27 women, 8 men and 1 of plural corporality¹⁴), from 20 organizations and social movements participated. We used a communication platform and a secure server to enable the protection of the content of our communications during the delivery of these workshops.

Security was addressed from a human rights perspective during the workshops. We analyzed security incidents and the impact they have on the body, mind and family environment of the people who experience them. We also emphasized how people experience specific risks because of their gender. This was an opportunity to analyze strengths and weaknesses in the face of danger and to reflect on the steps needed to address risk.

At the end of the activities, we carried out an evaluation with the participants, who said they were satisfied with what they had learned and highlighted the workshops' usefulness for counteracting the constant attacks they experience. They also expressed their interest in participating in future events. According to one of the participants: "I consider the knowledge gained as one of the strength of these workshops, the trainings are useful for knowing our rights and how to defend them. These security trainings provided by PBI make us feel stronger."

We also organized **workshops on political advocacy as a tool for the protection of human rights defenders**, facilitated by Juliana Turqui, an expert in the field. 34 people (22 women, 8 men and 4 two-spirit people) from 19 organizations and social movements participated in the three sessions that took place. One of the participants highlighted how: "these matrices for advocacy techniques are good, because I think that as advocates we do all this work, but in a dispersed way. Seeing that these theoretical models exist can help us become more organized."

Furthermore, with support from the Planet Protectors project of the Dutch Embassy in Costa Rica, we organized another advocacy workshop, consisting of two sessions and facilitated by the same expert in collaboration with PBI Honduras and PBI Nicaragua/Costa Rica. The workshops were aimed at representatives from accompanied organizations with the objective of strengthening their advocacy

14 According to Chahim Vásquez (TZK'AT - Ancestral Healers Network), people with plural corporalities are people that are born with bodily expressions that are differentiated from the common ones, e.g. in their hormones and genitalia.

capacities at the local, national and international levels. A total of 18 human rights defenders (8 women and 10 men) from 14 organizations across Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua participated (the Nicaraguan participants connected from Costa Rica where they are currently exiled). Given the regional nature of the participants, special emphasis was placed on opportunities to network with resistances that carry out very similar struggles at the Central American level.

The prolonged isolation, uncertainty and impoverishment caused by the pandemic and the measures taken to contain it, have generated much anxiety and strong feelings of insecurity regarding the future. Women, once again, have been disproportionately impacted by this situation. In the case of women human rights defenders, particularly those defending land and territory, the context of the pandemic has exacerbated their exposure to risks in the performance of their work. This has caused emotional, physical, spiritual and territorial crises. Faced with this increase in the vulnerability of women human rights defenders, we decided to increase the number of **healing spaces** available to them. We held seven meetings, facilitated by Lorena Cabnal and Chahim Vásquez, who are also human

rights defenders and members of **TZK'AT - Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism from Iximulew**. A total of 68 women defenders from 24 different collectives participated in these meetings. Healing as a protective measure was addressed from an holistic point of view, encompassing the emotional, physical and spiritual aspects.

Despite the many challenges we have faced since the outbreak of the pandemic, we ended 2021 with hope. In December we held the first face-to-face event after many months of virtual activities. We held a healing meeting with 25 women human rights defenders in Cahabón, Alta Verapaz, with due consideration for the necessary biosecurity measures. One of the participants described this space as a source of strength in difficult moments: “I thank PBI for accompanying us in this healing process and making it possible. When we feel alone, we can think of these Peace Brigades’ meetings and all the women who are in similar situations of violence and feel understood and accompanied.”



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 2021 PBI had a total of **13 field volunteers**, 11 women and 2 men from 9 different countries.

♀ 11 + 2 ♂



9 nationalities

Testimony

My name is Mélisande Séguin. I am from Canada, I am a lawyer and a PhD candidate in political science. I work on issues such as indigenous women's resistance to extractivism, legal pluralism, indigenous legal traditions and the decolonization of knowledge. I have a strong commitment to human rights and dedicate my life to learning and unlearning ways to decolonize my thoughts, my practices and my daily life.

I have been a member of the Committee of Peace Brigades International since February 2021. Before joining the committee, I was a volunteer with the PBI field team between 2015 and 2016. After returning to Canada in 2016, I participated as a volunteer, board member, project manager and coordinator of the Quebec Guatemala Accompaniment Project, an organization which has been accompanying human rights defenders in Guatemala since 1995.



I became familiar with the work of the GP committee when I was part of the team on the ground in 2015 and it has been a great pleasure to be able to work with its members again over the past year. The commitment, knowledge and dedication of this team of volunteers is impressive and I have a lot to learn from my colleagues on both a human and professional level. In this last year, I have been able to reacquaint myself with PBI's ways of doing things. The committee is involved at various levels of PBI: with the team of volunteers in the field, providing accompaniment in the decisions they make regarding the functioning of the team and the accompaniment of human rights defenders in Guatemala; supporting the office in Guatemala with training, communication, advocacy and administration tasks; providing advice on advocacy, coordination and administration issues to the coordination office in Spain; and finally,

within the larger international structure where the committee participates or supports decisions related to the functioning of the global organization. PBI works horizontally and by consensus. Therefore, the committee team is committed to participating in the decision making process of all these sections of the organization through constant communication. Given that the committee members live in different parts of Europe and America, and that the pandemic has greatly reduced face-to-face meetings, most of the exchanges have been virtual. This has been challenging, but at the same time it has made us more resilient and has allowed us to improve our communication channels. We hope that it will be useful in the future and in the constant work of solidarity with the people and organizations we accompany.

PBI in numbers



Physical Presence

- 154** • Accompaniments to organizations and social entities (including physical and virtual accompaniment)
- 46** • Meetings with accompanied organization and social entities (including physical and virtual meetings)
- 44** • Meetings with other Guatemalan organizations
- 3** • Observations of events organized by Guatemalan civil society



Advocacy

- 74** • Meetings with Guatemalan authorities at the state, department, and local levels
- 40** • Meetings with diplomatic corps and embassies, OHCHR in Guatemala
- 26** • Meetings with Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International Organizations
- 1** • Human rights defenders advocacy tour to Europe



Strengthening Local Capacity

In total we held **12 workshops for 87 participants** from 21 organizations or social movements from 21 organizations or social movements (74 women, 1 plural body, 3 trans women and 9 men). Several defenders participated in more than one workshop. Due to the health situation and the limitations imposed by COVID-19 pandemic, all but one of the workshops were conducted virtually.

12 Workshops

- 2** • Virtual workshop on security and protection in the context of the pandemic
- 3** • Virtual workshop on advocacy
- 6** • Virtual meetings on healing for women defenders
- 1** • Meeting on healing for women defenders



87 participants



Publications

- 12** • Monthly Information Package
- 2** • Bi-annual Bulletins
- 5** • Boletín Popular (includes introduction of Boletines Populares previously published)
- 5** • Virtual programs ACÉRCATE





Members of PBI Guatemala

Volunteer Team in Guatemala:

Andrea Rey López (Spain), Irene Salinas Cortés (Colombia), Sara Lodi (Italy), Jordi Quiles Sendra (Spain), Laura Carolina Saavedra Garzón (Colombia), Alexandra de Almeida Galo (Portugal), Anuja Pathak (Switzerland/Great Britain), Julia Assmann De Freitas Macedo (Brasil), Elisa Molinaro (Italy), Tiago Delgado (Brasil), Karen Vinasco Jimenez (Colombia), Marianne van de Vorle (Netherlands), Siglinde Luthner (Germany).

Project committee:

Montserrat García (Spain), Kerstin Reemtsma (Germany), Maike Holderer (Germany), Erika Martínez (Spain), Adam Lunn (Great Britain), Paulina Martínez Larraín (Chile), Mélisande Séguin (Canada).

Training team:

Katharina Ochsendorf (Germany), Paulina Martínez Larraín (Chile), Maike Holderer (Germany), Antonia Ignacia Pérez (Chile), Ricardo Henao Galvis (Colombia), Emanuela Lamieri (Italy), Daniel Jiménez Hita (Spain), Diana Cabra Delgado (Colombia).

Project Staff:

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

Project Consultants:

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

Financial report

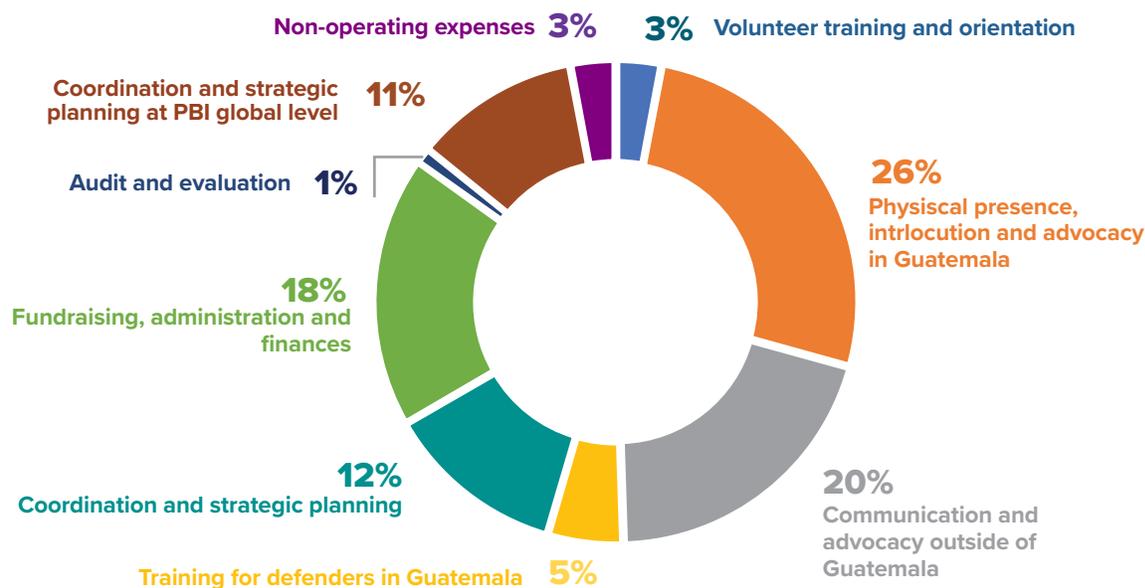
During 2021, and despite the Covid-19 pandemic, PBI Guatemala has maintained a situation of financial stability that would have allowed us to execute our planned activities. However, the aforementioned pandemic has had an impact, so that our expenses were slightly more than 8% lower than those contemplated in the annual budget, but increased by more than 13% with respect to the previous year's execution. As for income, it was close to budget,

being less than 2% below forecast, and increased by slightly more than 13% over the previous year.

The number and variety of donors supporting PBI's work in Guatemala has remained virtually unchanged over the past three years. At the close of the 2021 accounts we are close to a balanced budget, with our accounts showing a minimum excess of income over expenses of 0.3% over total expenses.

We thank all donors for their financial support that allows 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	12.395	3 %
Physical presence, introduction and advocacy in Guatemala	100.608	26 %
Communication and advocacy outside of Guatemala	76.843	20%
Training for defenders in Guatemala	17.996	5%
Coordination and strategic planning	45.962	12%
Fundraising, administration and finances	69.990	18%
Audit and evaluation	5.646	1%
Coordination and strategic planning at PBI global level	42.793	11%
Non-operating expenses	11.771	3%
TOTAL EXPENSES	384.005	
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INCOME AND EXPENSES	1.293	

* All expenses and income presented in this report are in euros and are in the process of being externally audited by the Belgian firm L & S Registered Auditors (BE 0681.575.448).

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION 2021		EUR
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Equivalents		132.339
Commercial Debtors and Other Accounts Receivable		
Donations and y outstanding agreements	30.364	
Accounts receivable PBI International Secretariat	165.639	
Health insurance reimbursements receivable	0	
Down payments and advances	891	
Deposits	685	
Total Commercial Debtors and Other Accounts Receivable	197.580	
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		329.919
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		329.919
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Commercial creditors and other accounts payable		
Accounts payable to third party	10.406	
Accounts payable to staff and volunteers	0	
Accounts payable to PBI International Secretariat	0	
Accounts payable to other PBI entities	5.988	
Total Commercial creditors and other accounts payable	16.394	
Provisions		
Staff and volunteer benefits	3.637	
Other Provisions	5.750	
Total Provisions	9.387	
Current tax liability	4.479	
Other non-financial liabilities (Restricted funds to be executed)	60.622	
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		90.882
PASIVO NO CORRIENTE		
Provision for Contingencies	101.505	
NONCURRENT LIABILITIES		101.505
EQUITY		
Funds free to execute, starting balance	136.240	
Difference between Income and Expenses	1.293	
TOTAL EQUITY		137.533
TOTAL LIABILITY AND EQUITY		329.919

Funds received in PBI bank accounts from Donors		355.183
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	27.319
Germany	Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World)	4.000
Germany	Misereor (213-600-1002 ZG)	18.000
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	34.200
Belgium	PBI Belgium	1.410
Italy	PBI Italy	2.000
Canadá	UNIFOR	10.047
Spain	Cooperación Cántabra	27.101
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	38.318
Spain	Generalitat Valenciana	20.036
Spain	Diputación de Córdoba	26.893
Spain	Agencia Vasca de Cooperación para el Desarrollo	14.700
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Alicante	11.194
Ireland	Trocaire	28.529
France	Paris Bar Association	3.770
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	38.474
Switzerland	PBI Switzerland	49.192
Revenues already counted in 2020 / Donations receivable at year-end 2021		-3.253
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	-3.253
Funds received during 2021 pending implementation in 2022		-60.622
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	-12.668
Spain	Cooperación Cántabra	-602
Spain	Gobierno Vasco	-12.700
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	-8.375
Spain	Diputación de Córdoba	-11.643
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	-14.633
Funds for activities implemented during 2021 that still awaiting end of year payment		72.963
Germany	Misereor	530
Spain	Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament (ACCD)	13.857
Spain	Diputación de Cordoba	159
Spain	Ayuntamiento de Valencia	11.568
Netherlands	Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica	32.899
European Union	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	13.949
Funds received during 2020 pending implementation in 2021		19.563
Germany	Ziviler Friedensdienst (Civil Peace Service)	5.900
Germany	Misereor	1.199
Germany	Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World)	500
Spain	Generalitat Valenciana	11.964
Other income		1.463
Private Donors		1.134
Income from own activities		300
Interests		29
TOTAL GENERAL INCOME		385.298



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