



PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL
Mexico Project

making space for peace



15 years in Mexico for the Right to Defend

Annual Report **2015**

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PBI Mexico: Fifteen years defending the right to defend



UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst, during interview with PBI © PBI UK

When the UN's mandate on the situation of human rights defenders was created fifteen years ago, its primary mission was to document, alert to and make recommendations on the situation of those who promote and support fundamental rights and freedoms around the world. When we see all the effort that has been made during these fifteen years, we can say that much has been achieved to give visibility to the situation of defenders and the need to protect them. There is still a lot to be done, however. If civil society seems to be stronger and more visible than ever today, a high price has been paid for this achievement. In countries throughout the world, and, particularly in Latin America, there is a latent and insidious threat that weighs daily on the activities of promotion and defence of human rights. While attacks are directed to individuals (smear and harassment campaigns) or restrictions faced by the organizations they work in (limitations to the organisation of public activities, restrictions on funding, etc.),

the sources of these threats seem endless and there are multiple offenders.

The situation is critical. In 2015, for the first time since the approval of the [Declaration](#) on Human Rights Defenders, a very strong and hostile wave of resistance from various States has tried to prevent a United Nations [resolution](#) that would enable

better protection of those who defend and protect our rights. With regard to the situation in Mexico, several reports, declarations and field visits of international organizations converge towards the same statement: it is urgent not only to enhance the protection of those who risk their lives for human rights, but also to build a culture that actively acknowledges the contribution of these people. Unfortunately, in the last years, several cases have been recorded which tend toward the increasing

criminalization of social protest, frequently trying to portray defenders in the role of political opposition or, even worse, terrorism. The polarization of the debate around national security has direct consequences on the activities of civil society

“ Human rights are and should be recognized above all contexts. They are our horizon and our most valuable common ground. ”

and HRDs. On several occasions, I have heard stories about discrediting and attacks against defenders, as a result of the collusion between economic, political, religious or media powers. All this to silence people who oppose those decisions that are against international, regional and national commitments on human rights.

The Mexican government, aware of the critical situation of defenders in the country, has [enacted a law](#) for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists in 2012. However, the implementation of that law faces [multiple challenges](#) and civil society urges that the necessary means for an efficient implementation be granted. In addition to the protection mechanism, there are several initiatives at state and local level. The mobilization of civil society has enabled the creation of support networks throughout the country and in the Central American region. In particular, certain networks have been able to help indigenous communities and women defenders, empowering them, contributing to the rupture of isolation and vulnerability. In this context, **the work of organizations such as Peace Brigades International (PBI) is essential. They not only provide immediate support by accompanying defenders in their activities for the defence of human rights, but also help them strengthen their work and make it more visible.** In many cases, this accompaniment provides them with the necessary support and energy to overcome fear and remember that their actions are changing the lives of thousands of people.

In the midst of a landscape that looks inevitably grey, and that worries me every day, these initiatives bring hope. However we should remain alert and work in synergy. Each of us has the responsibility to translate the language of human rights into a tangible, concrete, and long-lasting reality for everyone, no matter where they are. We must exit this truncated and dangerous dead-end street where we should choose between our safety and respect for human rights. Human rights are and should be recognized above all contexts. They are our horizon and our most valuable common ground.

Michel Forst,
United Nations Special Rapporteur
on Human Rights Defenders

Defenders face “human rights crisis”

In 2015, the international community has paid special attention to the human rights situation in Mexico, in part because of the [disappearance of 43 students](#) in Ayotzinapa in the state of Guerrero. The Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) [presented its report](#) detailing the shortcomings in the investigations as well as rejecting the official investigation line, the “Historical Truth” presented by the attorney general. It discovered a corruption network involving organized crime groups, security forces, and political authorities. The search for truth and justice brought a [delegation of relatives and CSOs](#) to Geneva to participate in the session of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED) that reviewed Mexico. This Committee [determined](#) that “the information received illustrates a context of widespread disappearances throughout the Mexican territory, many of which could be described as forced disappearances”. Along the same lines, the Special Rapporteur on Torture [said that](#): “torture and ill treatment in detention are widespread in Mexico and occur with impunity”. The [recommendations](#) made by the CED and the Working Group on forced or involuntary disappearances refer to structural changes that Mexico must implement embodying the crime of disappearance. In this context, certain advances can be seen, such as the [constitutional reform](#) that opened the door for Congress to develop general laws on torture and disappearance in 2016. This step has been favourably accompanied by the establishment of dialogue spaces between the legislative branch and Civil Society. However, the organizations and groups of victims’ families that presented citizen initiatives for the development of the legislation, say there continues to be [room for improvement](#) in the proposals presented by President Peña Nieto.

During the run-up to the federal mid-term election campaigns, there were [70 attacks](#) on politicians, including 20 assassinations. Similarly, there were [multiple confrontations](#) throughout the country on Election Day, resulting in an extrajudicial killing and 127 arrests, [according to the Cerezo Committee](#). In this context, 56 CSOs from Oaxaca expressed concern over the militarization of the state, with the [massive deployment](#) of police and military forces. At the same time, the Federal Police were under investigation for having taken the lives of five people and executed one more in Apatzingán, Michoacán, [according](#) to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH).

The Southern Border Strategy was also consolidated this year, indicating a change in migratory routes and better control over the border with Guatemala. According to human rights defenders, migrants are [being pushed](#) into more dangerous routes, at the mercy of organized crime and cut off from the network of shelters that offer humanitarian assistance, increasing the risk for migrants and those who defend them.

The lack of legal protection for migrants has been pointed out by various organizations, for which the [creation](#) of the investigation unit for crimes against migrants and the Mexican foreign search and investigation support mechanism are welcome.

Regarding the threatening situation for human rights defenders, this year brings a gloomy outlook, with 76 cases of human rights violations and reported attacks in a [preliminary report](#) by Red TdT. After his visit to Mexico, the UN High Commissioner for Human rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, [noted](#) the continuous harassment human rights defenders and journalists endure for the work they do, perpetrated in an atmosphere of violence and impunity by state as well as non-state actors. Similarly, after a visit to the country, an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) delegation confirmed the critical [human rights crisis](#) that especially affects the most vulnerable groups, such as human rights defenders. A wide range of CSOs continue to identify defenders of land and territory as one of the most vulnerable groups; between May 2014 and June 2015 the Mexican Centre for Environmental Law (CEMDA) reported [11 assassinations](#) of environmental defenders in Mexico, an increase from previous years.

The murder of five people in the Narvarte neighbourhood in July, where photojournalist Rubén Espinosa and human rights defender Nadia Vera were killed, highlighted the high risk for journalists. In response, several CSOs [pointed to flaws](#) in the Governmental Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, as it was unable to prevent the attack, despite prior requests for protection measures to Rubén Espinosa.

At the beginning of the year, PBI presented a report highlighting that, despite the official line, a “Mexico in Peace” has [not been observed](#) during the first two years of the Enrique Peña Nieto government. Instead, the worrisome impacts of public security policies on human rights have continued. It also added that with regard to the [Merida Initiative](#) “the United States Congress has the ability to retain 15% of the funds if Mexico does not meet the minimum standards regarding human rights”, which occurred for the first time in 2015 since [according to the Department of State](#) they have not “been able to confirm that Mexico totally fulfilled the specified criteria”.



Relatives of the Ayotzinapa students disappeared in September 2014 during a march in Mexico City © PBI Mexico

2000	2000	2001
Opening of PBI Mexico	Change of government	Office in Chilpancingo
In 1998, PBI’s General Assembly decides to open a project in Mexico; since 2000 it maintains a permanent presence in the country.	After 70 years of PRI government, Vicente Fox Quesada, from the PAN, becomes president .	PBI opens an office in Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero , and becomes the first international NGO with a permanent presence in the state.

Activities in 2015

Advocacy

Meetings with authorities

Municipal and state authorities in Guerrero	2
Municipal and state authorities in Oaxaca	27
Municipal and state authorities in Chihuahua/Coahuila	67
Federal authorities	15
Diplomatic corps and embassies in Mexico	29
Foreign Affairs Ministries and International Bodies outside Mexico	63
Total	203

Speaking Tours

Europe	2
North America	1
Total	3

Physical Presence

Accompanied Organisations and Defenders

	Accompaniments	Meetings
Total	63	151

Other NGOs and INGOs

	Accompaniments	Meetings
Total	3	157

Roundtables, Events and Demonstrations

Events facilitated by PBI	37
Events observed by PBI	59
Total	96

Consultancies in Security, Protection and Advocacy

Workshops and Consultancies

	Direct Beneficiaries
Security Workshops	8 — 87
Consultancies	15
Advocacy Workshops	2 — 15
Total	25 — 102

Social Networks

Followers on facebook	3,016
Average monthly reach on Facebook and Twitter	31,946
Followers on Twitter	1,710
Video views	12,129
Monthly Newsletter Reads	4665

Publications

Interviews	14
Thematic publications	4
Videos	8
Total	26

Tita Radilla

How one woman transformed the Mexican legal system



Tita signs her photo on PBI's book on Women Human Rights Defenders "Dignas" © PBI Mexico

Tita Radilla's story began when she started accompanying her father to several social activities. Rosendo was a peasant leader, he built schools, donated land for the only hospital in the village, served as town mayor, confronted the local chiefs and sang songs where he reported the abuses by authorities.

"My dad disappeared on 25 August 1974 at a military checkpoint [...] in the city of Atoyac".¹ He had visited his small vegetable garden and was on his way back to Chilpancingo, where his family was exiled due to the threats they had received because of his activism. His 11 year-old son, Rosendo Radilla Martínez, was the only witness, and he testified that the arrest was under the pretext that his father was composing songs that praised the social leader Lucio Cabañas.

That period of time was known as the "Dirty War" because of the State's response to citizens' outrage in the 60s, which resulted in several social movements in the 70s. Human rights violations against civilians multiplied, particularly against activists and social leaders. During that period, Atoyac de Álvarez, a town in the Costa Grande region of Guerrero, registered between 450 and 500 disappearances, the largest number during the Dirty War.

Therefore, Rosendo's case was a reflection of the wider context of a repression strategy that victimized several peasant leaders.

Thus, for Tita, what was initially a struggle to find her father gradually extended to a search for all those disappeared during the Dirty War, and later to the political disappearances of the 90s. "When investigating Rosendo's whereabouts, information about other persons should come out because he disappeared during a period of repression during which many others disappeared [...]. The goal is not to find only Rosendo, but all of them."

"The AFADEM [Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared, and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico] emerged on the 3 October, 1978 due to the need to find an organised answer about our missing relatives in order to together seek full reparation to redress the damages in the cases we have; some are executions, direct victims, but the vast majority are disappearances. Sometimes there are entire families in our movement, since we started a long time ago and, we, the elders, have brought along our children and grandchildren."

"Our relatives were people who fought for just causes and deserve to be treated as such."

The investigation of these cases has only taken place, however, since the creation of the Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past (FEMOSPP) in 2001. This office was devoted not only to the Dirty War, but also to the repression during the nineties, such as the paradigmatic Aguas Blancas Massacre that resulted in the killing of 17 peasants. The FEMOSPP, despite having contributed to a greater knowledge of the historical truth of the events, closed in 2006, not having delivered any convictions, a decision that was considered by its former head as a "message of impunity".

Implications of the search for truth and justice

"There are moments when I feel more insecure because we don't know what the intentions of the people responsible for the disappearance of our relatives are. Our children worry because, in doing this job, you are at risk. But also when you leave the family and don't share time with them, there are important moments where you cannot be present. Also, in regards to health, the anguish, the fear, psychologically you also think you are at risk, I'm under constant stress, the doctor says. [...] Thinking about this and listening to the comments of our relatives, suggesting that we take precautions and not expose ourselves, makes me feel a bit worried. [...] There is a lot of fear, many relatives say that now with drug trafficking and all the violence they can attack us and blame other people. A lot of colleagues have told me to be very careful because they believe something like this can happen. [...] We know there are people that don't appreciate the ruling and would like us to forget what happened. We know they are there, they exist."

Tita's tireless struggle

Due to that latent risk, in August 2003, shortly after opening an office in Guerrero, PBI began accompanying Tita Radilla and the AFADEM, pursuant to a request by Julio Mata Montiel, president of the organization. Tita, who affectionately refers to PBI volunteers as her white angels, considers that "PBI has been very important in this process since their accompaniment gives us strength. It personally gives me a lot of security, it gives me strength. PBI's presence also influences the Mexican state to see that we have international scrutiny on the case."

Throughout their struggle, the Radilla family went through all the sages of proceedings within the Mexican legal system and, after exhausting all domestic remedies, they took the case to the Inter-American human rights system.

"My dad's case was brought before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in May 2001 and, at the same time, we were litigating here, domestically, before the prosecutor's office." The Commission considered that "[more] than 33 years after the events, there is total impunity because the State has not criminally punished the persons responsible for these events or secured appropriate reparation for the relatives" and for that reason the case was brought before the Court.

"We did not agree to leave it in the Commission because we wanted this case to help all the relatives." Then, some days after PBI organized an advocacy tour for Tita in London, "on the 23rd of November 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACoHR) issued a judgment against the Mexican State. The Court's ruling took into consideration the context in which the events took place, and determined that the State must investigate what happened, everything that happened during that time. [...] That made us very happy because it is not only Rosendo we are searching for, but each and every disappeared detainee."

A true citizen's fight transformed the Mexican legal system

The IACoHR's ruling confirmed the magnitude of the Radilla case. It was the first time that Mexico appeared in an international court accused of crimes against humanity and it was sentenced to: investigate the events; to continue the effective search and immediate location of Mr. Radilla Pacheco or, as the case may be, of his mortal remains; to adopt the relevant legislative reforms to bring article 57 of the Code of Military Justice in line with relevant international standards; and to adopt relevant legislative reforms to bring article 215A of the Federal Criminal Code into line with the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons and other international standards on the matter.

In July 2011, the Federal Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN) confirmed the ruling of the IACoHR in a fundamental step for domestic case law regarding the protection of human rights in Mexico. The SCJN established that the judgments of the IACoHR are binding for all Mexican authorities. It also established that judges at all levels have the authority to review laws for conformity, that is, to analyse the compliance of a law or act with the Constitution and international treaties and apply all international treaties on human rights to the cases that come before them, even to the detriment of Mexican legislation.

Another essential precedent was the restriction of military jurisdiction – an issue that PBI had actively lobbied, particularly within the UN Universal Periodic Review – which implied that military personnel accused of violating human rights of civilians



Tita Radilla, in Atoyac, during the commemoration of the International Day of the Disappeared © PBI Mexico

be judged by civil courts, declaring unconstitutional the article 57 of the Military Justice Code, which allowed crimes committed by soldiers against civilians to be judged under military jurisdiction, "now, no one, no civilian, will go to military courts, now all civilians must go to civil courts". Likewise, the SCJN established the unenforceability of the restriction of access to information regarding the preliminary inquiries in cases of severe human rights violations in compliance with the Federal Law for Transparency and Access to Public Government Information.

"Another aspect is that the restriction of information and the interpretative statement of the Mexican government on the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons were declared null and void." It lays down the obligation to adopt international legal standards in relation to the investigation and punishment of forced disappearances. This is currently an ongoing process and the Federal Congress should pass a General Law on Disappearances at the beginning of 2016, in which it is expected that the criteria established in the judgment of the Radilla case will be taken into account in order to prosecute those responsible for forced disappearances.

The magnitude of the SCJN ruling was such that the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) recorded it in its Memory of the World Program, while the IACoHR described them as "of great significance for the consolidation of human rights in the region".

This essential progress would not have been possible without the courageous determination of Tita Radilla. "To me, this struggle has become my objective in life, and it is

difficult for me to give it up. It would mean that all the cases had been resolved and I'm afraid that this is impossible. I think I won't live long enough, but that is the goal." More than 40 years after the disappearance of Rosendo Radilla Pacheco, his daughter Tita keeps fighting and PBI continues to stand by her side.

"We hope that the Mexican State will comply with the obligation to investigation so we can know what happened with our missing relatives. This is what AFADEM members have requested for many years, to know what happened, where they are, and that they are returned to their families"

¹ The different quotations from Tita Radilla were selected among several interviews given to PBI Mexico.

2001	First Accompaniments	2001	Arrest of the Cerezo Brothers	2001	Murder of Digna Ochoa	2001	Accompaniments in Mexico City	2001	Nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize	2002	Accompaniments in Guerrero
PBI accompanies dissident colonies from Acapulco and Ranferi Hernández, who returned after 3 years in exile due to his support to the widows of the Aguas Blancas Massacre.		Héctor, Antonio and Alejandro Cerezo are arrested together with two colleagues and accused of terrorism. Since 2002, PBI accompanies the Cerezo Committee, created to demand their release.		The WHRD Digna Ochoa y Plácido is murdered in October in Mexico City.		After Digna's murder and subsequent threats received by other CSOs, PBI accompanies the ProDH HRC and the Red Tdt's Technical Secretary.		The AFSC nominates PBI for the Nobel Peace Prize, highlighting its work "to open spaces for peace".		PBI extends its work in Guerrero and accompanies the José María Morelos y Pavón HRC and lawyer Inedina Cervantes Salgado.	

14 years making Guerrero visible



Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega during acknowledgment of responsibilities from the Mexican State © PBI Mexico

For [Abel Barrera](#), Director of Tlachinollan, “one of the peculiar elements of Guerrero is its authoritarian and repressive form of government, which has sought to subdue and control the population. Social movements have been continuously repressed by means of violence and with total impunity”. In addition, in 2001, there were defamation campaigns against local CSOs, criminalization of human rights defenders, and little awareness – both at the national and international level – of the human rights situation faced by the people of Guerrero. It is in that context that PBI, in deciding to [open an office](#) in Chilpancingo, became the only international NGO with a permanent presence in the State, thus responding to requests received from Mexican civil society.

The evolution and development of PBI’s work in the state, as well as in the country, has gone hand in hand with progress in human rights in Guerrero. During the ten years following the opening of the office in Chilpancingo, and through the physical accompaniment work, the dialogue with the authorities, the security consultancies, the visibility of the situation of human rights in Guerrero before international actors and the strengthening of support networks for local organizations, PBI managed to contribute significantly to important progress in relation to the situation we had initially found. Notable among them are the cases of Rosendo Radilla Pacheco [page six] and those of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega, two indigenous Me’Phaa women victims of [sexual torture](#) by soldiers in 2002 who were supported by PBI as part of the accompaniment provided to the Organization of the Indigenous Me’Phaa People ([OPIM](#)) and Tlachinollan.

In 2010, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACoHR) issued a [ruling](#) in favour of Inés and Valentina that included reform of Mexican Constitution so that military jurisdiction would not apply in cases of violations committed by soldiers against civilians. This process also resulted in the State’s [admission of guilt](#), the establishment of a [Trust](#) to ensure the fulfilment of the reparation laid down by the IACoHR and the [arrest](#) of four soldiers alleged to be responsible and who, in addition, should be judged under civil jurisdiction.

Another issue on which PBI has worked significantly since its arrival in Mexico is that of arbitrary detentions. Celsa Valdovinos, co-founder of the Organization of Peasant Ecologists of the Sierra de Petatlán (Spanish OCESP),¹ [remarked](#) that “without international support, Felipe [Arreaga] wouldn’t have been released”. Arreaga is a community defender who was arrested in 2004 and acquitted of the charges he had been attributed in 2005. Celsa added that “we have a lot to thank you for. We have received a lot of support because (PBI) were accompanying me, they were always coming, every week, each week. They made me confident and, when they accompanied me, I felt more secure because they were with me”.²

¹ Later renamed as Organisation of Women Ecologists of the Sierra de Petatlán (Spanish OMESP)
² For more information about cases of arbitrary detentions both in Guerrero and Oaxaca please see: PBI Mexico, “[Human Rights Defenders behind bars](#)”, 2010.

In 2011, PBI carried out an assessment of its ten years presence in Guerrero, which concluded that its work had contributed to international awareness of local human rights organizations and issues; strengthening of support networks of accompanied CSOs; sustainable transfer of security and protection tools, and successful lobbying in favour of significant progress in paradigmatic cases. As a result of these conclusions, PBI decided to close the permanent team in order to focus its efforts in less visible areas in the country such as Chihuahua and Coahuila. Although there has not been a permanent presence in the state since then, close monitoring has continued and in 2015 PBI will establish a regional southern team that will monitor Guerrero from its headquarters in Oaxaca.

PBI’s work in Guerrero continues to be a priority and, for example, in June 2014, PBI invited Tlachinollan to the [Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), organized by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, an event around which an advocacy tour was arranged in London and Brussels. In addition, PBI delivered a workshop in Acapulco to several organizations from the state. That proximity remained in 2015 when, within the framework of the first anniversary of the disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, PBI published an [interview](#) with Maria Luisa Aguilar from Tlachinollan and followed the protests that filled the streets of Mexico City to support the relatives and demand that the Mexican State produce results in the investigations. In August, together with other international NGOs, PBI [publicly supported](#) the requests from relatives and several Mexican CSOs to extend the mandate of the Interdisciplinary Group of



Ayotzinapa students’ relatives during the anniversary of Tlachinollan in 2015 © PBI Mexico

“PBI has played a very, very important role because they are risking their lives by facing a government that has a lot of power”
Valentina Rosendo Cantú

Independent Experts (GIEI). Also in August, PBI visited Atoyac during a [forum](#) organized by AFADEM in the International Day of the Disappeared, met with the Attorney General of Guerrero, and took part in Tlachinollan’s 21st anniversary activities, in the city of Tlapa de Comonfort, including the launch of its [annual report](#). In December, PBI signed a [public statement](#) supporting the work of the GIEI and noting that “some groups within the authorities themselves still oppose the opening of new investigation lines and insist upon the validity of the original discoveries.”

“You helped us very much. You’re our window towards the world.”
Cuahtémoc Ramírez, OPIM

“Visibility has been essential at difficult times”

Since its arrival in Mexico, PBI has maintained a close relationship with CSOs in the state of Oaxaca. In 2001, PBI took part in the [civilian monitoring mission](#) of the election process in the Loxicha region, accompanying the lawyer José Luis Gutiérrez – currently director at Asilegal – who remembers that “important procedures had to be made and I’m sure that in the existent context of insecurity, if it wasn’t for PBI, I couldn’t have worked at one hundred percent because I would have had to worry about my safety”. PBI continued to develop relationships in the state, and in response to [requests](#) from local civil society after a “political crisis whose effects were shown during the social conflict in 2006”, eventually opened a permanent field team in 2008. PBI arrived in an environment where Peace Watch Switzerland [noted](#) that “repression, impunity and polarization have led the social fabric to break and apathy, distrust, fear and despair to settle in the people so that they don’t mobilize [...] as a result of the repression policy practiced by the government”. Throughout its eight years of presence in Oaxaca, PBI has supported major developments on human rights. In the summer of 2013, following an [increase in insecurity](#) for defenders in the state, PBI encouraged the opening of a space for discussion between the government of Gabino Cué and Oaxacan CSOs – including the Regional Human Rights Centre Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño (Barca), the Committee for Integral Defence of Human Rights Gobixha (Código-DH), the “Brothers on the Road” migrant shelter founded by Father Alejandro Solalinde, Services for Alternative Education (EDUCA) and Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity Oaxaca (Consortio). As a result of these discussions, which began in November 2013, the government committed to the improvement of the defenders’ security. These actions eventually led to the [establishment](#) in March 2015 of a department within the State Ombudsman Office that specialized on the situation of Human Rights Defenders.

Another issue actively lobbied by PBI was the fight against impunity surrounding the crimes committed during the social conflict of 2006-2007. In this regard, the establishment in 2013 of the [Truth Commission](#) – led by Father Solalinde – represents a major achievement since, with the presentation of its final report, considerable [developments are expected](#) in 2016.

In April 2015, the Migrant “[Via Crucis](#)” – a march of approximately 200 Central American migrants from the Shelter in Ixtepec to Mexico City in order to raise awareness to the situation of the migrant people crossing Mexico – triggered a heavy deployment of public security forces, which led to an alarming climate of tension.

At the request of Father Solalinde, PBI accompanied the march and made contacts with the authorities present. [Alberto Donis](#), also from the shelter, noted that “the advocacy carried out with Ardelio Vargas [Commissioner of the National Migration Institute] was very important. If anything happens to the Father or the people in the shelter, the international community is behind us and the international presence is there by means of PBI. Your presence was very, very important”.

Between November 2014 and July 2015, PBI observed several sessions of the Consultation on the construction of a wind farm in Juchitan, Oaxaca. In accordance with its principles of non-violence, non-interference and non-partisanship, PBI endeavoured to prevent attacks against defenders involved in the process and to make visible the international community’s support to them. On 30 July, the consultation stage concluded with the project’s approval, but in September a federal judge issued an order for the [temporary suspension](#) of the construction works that was reinforced in December by a [final suspension](#) of the project. Social organizations [considered](#) this an important achievement for the indigenous people of the region. PBI is following the development of this matter and, particularly, the security situation of the community defenders that have fought against the implementation of the wind farm and that have been, for this reason, subject to threats and harassment which have been documented in the [reports](#) of the consultation monitoring mission.

It should be stressed that PBI seeks to contribute to the international visibility of the work of community defenders and, with that in mind, the documentary “[Land of Corn](#)” highlighted the case of the wind projects in the region of the Tehuantepec Isthmus. In this regard, Alba Cruz, from Código DH, considered that “visibility has been essential at difficult times and it has helped reduce the risk in the Isthmus”.



PBI volunteer observes map of large-scale development projects in Oaxaca © PBI Mexico

2002 The OHCHR is established in Mexico
The OHCHR [opens an office](#) “to monitor the situation of human rights and strengthen national capacities linked to the protection of human rights”.

2002 Security workshops
In response to civil society requests, PBI begins providing security and protection consultancies to HRDs.

2003 Accompaniment of Tita Radilla
PBI accompanies the AFADEM’s vice-president in the search for her [disappeared](#) father. In 2005 PBI organizes Tita’s first international tour in Sweden, the UK and France.

2005 Alejandro Cerezo exonerated
After 3 years and 7 months of imprisonment, the defender [was released](#) and exonerated of all the charges against him.

2005 New accompaniments in Guerrero
PBI begins accompanying leaders from the [OPIM](#) threatened for reporting militarization; Inés Fernández and Valentina Rosendo, [victims of sexual torture](#) by soldiers; Celsa Valdovinos, wife of Felipe Arreaga from the [OCESP](#), who was unfairly arrested.

2006 Tragedy in Pasta de Conchos
65 miners [are trapped](#) in the coal mine and 63 remain buried. Since the opening of our team in the north, PBI accompanies the [Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation](#) because of its high level of [risk](#).

Two years of PBI in the north:

☞ We are in sync ☛



Voluntario de PBI acompaña a Cristina Auerbach en la Zona Carbonífera de Coahuila © PBI México

Even though PBI arrived in Mexico 15 years ago, its presence in the northern states of the country is far more recent. After an exploratory mission, PBI identified a [panorama](#) of systematic human rights violations and a tangible closure of political spaces for defenders, along with a series of accompaniment requests coming from CSOs. The assessment was that PBI could assume an important role in northern Mexico and this led to the decision of opening a team in the city of Chihuahua, covering the states of both Chihuahua and Coahuila. With PBI's arrival in the north, the diplomatic corps proved their strong commitment to PBI's and defenders' work. The [opening event](#) of the team in October 2013 was attended by representatives of 7 embassies and of the UN, as well as by authorities at different levels of government and 12 civil society organisations from Chihuahua and Coahuila. Civil Society interventions in that first space for dialogue illustrated the context of violence and impunity in which they work, especially since the launch of the so called "war on drugs". This and the public security policies implemented since then that have focused on "fighting organized crime through a strategy of militarization which resulted in a strong increase of human

rights violations", as concluded by the publication "[Peace in Mexico? Security strategies and Human Rights](#)". In this context, it was also obvious that PBI's role in the north would have to begin with a strategy of opening dialogue spaces between civil society, Mexican authorities and the international community, raising awareness of the work of defenders, broadening their national and international support networks, and strengthening their capabilities for protection. One year after the initial launch of the team, the diplomatic corps reaffirmed their support to CSOs from Chihuahua and Coahuila, highlighted by their presence as the team's [first anniversary](#). PBI signed its first accompaniment agreement in the north in October 2013 with the Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre ([Paso del Norte](#)) of Ciudad Juárez, to which a second one was added in February 2014 with three CSOs from Coahuila: the [Saltillo Migrant Shelter](#), the Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre ([Juan Gerardi](#)) and the Fray Juan de Larios Diocesan Centre for Human Rights ([Fray Juan de Larios](#)). The Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation ([Pasta de Conchos](#)), which works in Coahuila's coal mining area, completes our cast of accompanied organisations in northern Mexico.

Disappearances

According to official data, the whereabouts of more than 27,000 people in Mexico are unknown.¹ The impact of disappearances is particularly high in northern Mexico, where Chihuahua and Coahuila occupy, respectively, the sixth and seventh place at national level. In northern Mexico, PBI accompanies and supports several organisations and groups that work on the issue of disappearances. In this framework, the team has accompanied defenders during protests, fora, hearings, meetings and review boards in cases of missing persons. PBI volunteers attended a [regional encounter](#) about disappearances in northern Mexico where a [proposal](#) for a General Law on disappearances was drafted, which includes [recommendations](#) such as the creation of a comprehensive protocol for searching for missing people, the creation of a record of missing persons, a database of forensic evidence, context-based investigation and integral reparation. Likewise, the team extended its action radius in order to provide a more comprehensive accompaniment to those they accompany. In September, the team conducted an accompaniment to Paso del Norte during a search process conducted by the Prosecutor's Office of Chihuahua close to the city of Escalon, on the border between the states of Chihuahua and Durango where several cases of disappearances have been reported.

Through its accompaniment to [Fray Juan de Larios](#), PBI provides support to United Forces for our Disappeared in Coahuila ([FUUNDEC](#)), a group that has promoted important initiatives at state level, such as the Programme of Attention to the Relatives of Disappeared People ([PROFADE](#)), the UN consultancies, a visit of [Colombian experts on the subject of disappearances and, more generally, the acknowledgment of the issue by the state government](#).

With the goal of raising awareness of the issue of disappearances and strengthening the support networks of the defenders working on the issue, PBI invited [Silvia Méndez](#) from Paso del Norte to an advocacy tour in Europe at the end of 2014 and Michael Chamberlin from Fray Juan de Larios visited the United States at the beginning of 2015.

1. 27,638 missing persons, according to the official record. Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System. National Registry of Missing or Disappeared Persons, <http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/rmped/consulta-publica.php> (Consulted on 5 January 2016).

Migration

"The shelters and migrant human rights centres at the northern border face a permanent situation of insecurity" according to a [report](#) by PCS that documented 168 assaults against migrants' rights defenders between 2010 and 2014. Indeed, both Juan Gerardi and the Saltillo Migrant Shelter have suffered attacks, among them threats, defamation in the media, and [forced entries](#).

For this reason, in October, PBI facilitated a [visit](#) to Mexico by four experts from the Boston University human rights clinic, who met with the accompanied organisations and the authorities at different levels. Moreover, PBI coordinated the [European speaking tour](#) of Juan Jose Villagómez from the [Saltillo Migrant Shelter](#), who focused on the disappearance of migrants and the risks faced by migrant rights defenders. In March, the Shelter [submitted](#) to the IACHR the results of its documentation of cases of disappearance and [torture](#) of migrants. Furthermore, Father Pedro Pantoja, co-founder of the shelter, received on behalf of the Network of Shelters and Human Rights Centres of the Northern Region, the 2014 Equality and Non-Discrimination [prize](#) from the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED).

Torture

After the resolution of the [Bomb Car](#) and [Figueroa](#) cases in 2014, Paso del Norte established itself as a leading Mexican organisation with regard to the fight against torture. In 2015, its work was equally successful, having achieved in December the [release](#) of Cristel Piña Jasso, a victim of sexual torture allegedly perpetrated by officers from the State Police of Chihuahua in 2013. Throughout the legal proceedings, her relatives and members of Paso del Norte were victims of harassment and threats. For this reason,

"I feel that making our work public before national and international authorities is important, and it also raises the centre's profile. This will result not only in better knowledge of what we do, but also it's important with regard to the security of human rights defenders." Father Oscar Martinez, Paso del Norte

on, PBI volunteers accompanied [Diana Morales](#), a lawyer from Paso del Norte, to visit Cristel in prison and were present during the hearing in which, after two years and three months of incarceration, Cristel was [acquitted from the charges](#) of extortion fabricated against her. In its dialogue with Mexican authorities, PBI has expressed its concern about the safety of victims of torture and how these circumstances may also impact the security situation of members

of [Paso del Norte](#), particularly bearing in mind that the judge ordered that an [investigation be opened](#) into the state policemen identified as the perpetrators.



NGO representatives, relatives of disappeared persons, and PBI volunteers during the [northern regional encounter](#) on disappearances in Mexico © PBI Mexico

Another essential case of gender-based violence in Ciudad Juárez is the Arroyo del Navajo case, in which organisations with close relationships to PBI such as Justice for Our Daughters and the Roundtable Network of Women of Ciudad Juárez are involved, resulted in a [ground-breaking sentence](#) for murder and human trafficking of women, issues of great concern in Chihuahua.

Women defenders

Cristina Auerbach, a defender from Pasta de Conchos, who receives PBI accompaniment, has spent the last [10 years demanding](#) the rescue of the bodies of 65 miners who became trapped after an explosion in one of the mines of Coahuila's coal mining region. Despite the risk faced by Cristina and other members of Pasta de Conchos, the organisation's work has expanded with the opening of a new office in San José Cloete, which was visited by PBI's team on three occasions this year. This initiative came about through requests from the local

population, who face [risk of eviction](#) due to the exploitation of coal mines in the village, and marks the beginning of engagement of Pasta de Conchos in issues regarding the defence of land and territory. Another important moment for the organisation and its cause was Cristina's participation in the IACHR's [hearing](#) on defenders of women's rights and the



Migrants and staff of the Saltillo Migrant Shelter during one of PBI's visits © PBI Mexico

environment held at the organisation's headquarters in Washington DC.

Defence of land and territory

In 2015, PBI made the strategic commitment to explore alternative ways of supporting organisations that work in the Sierra Tarahumara. With this commitment in mind, PBI conducted its first visit to the region during an accompaniment to the organisation [Tierra Nativa](#) who participated in a meeting of the [Consulting Council](#) of the Copper Canyon Trust. During the meeting, Tierra Nativa gave a letter to the Advisory Board

containing information on consultation mechanisms for the communities impacted by the implementation of projects in that area and in which it made public requests from the native communities that are being advised by the organisation. Additionally, the organisations

[Alianza Sierra Madre](#) (ASMAC) and [CONTEC](#) (Community Technical Consultancy) took part in security workshops delivered by PBI which, in the case of ASMAC, were supplemented by a political advocacy workshop.

"How many international organisations are present in the north of the country in places like Saltillo? There are none. PBI's presence makes us feel accompanied by someone who shares the language, who share the objectives of institutional and personal struggle and, at the same time, accompanies you on your work and defends your right to defend human rights." Alberto Xicotencatl, Saltillo Migrant Shelter

2006	Social repression in Atenco	2006	Conflicts in Oaxaca	2006	Felipe Calderón becomes President	2007	Coordination Office	2008	Team in Oaxaca	2008	Leaders of OPIM arrested
A joint state and federal operation results in 21 complaints before the CNDH (National Human Rights Commission) about arbitrary arrests, sexual torture and excessive use of force, among other things.		After the violent eviction of a group of teachers and other human rights violations that followed, PBI accompanies the "Civilian Monitoring Mission in Oaxaca" which documented violations that had occurred in that context.		In July, Calderón wins the elections by 0.56% amid allegations of fraud and popular discontent. On 11 December, his Government launches the "war on drugs".		With the aim of strengthening relationships with the diplomatic corps and federal authorities, the project opens an office in Mexico City.		PBI Mexico opens a permanent team in Oaxaca in October due to the increased requests following the social conflict in 2006. In 2009, it begins accompanying CEDHAPI (Centre for Human Rights and Legal Advice for Indigenous Peoples) and the 25 th of November Liberation Committee.		5 members of the OPIM are arrested and accused of murder. They are declared prisoners of conscience by AI and several organisations demand their release.	

Promoting the duty to protect



1. Mexican NGOs of the "CSO Space" published the [report](#) on the implementation Protection Mechanism © PBI Mexico
2. PBI convened an event to inform several embassies on the security situation of HRDs in Mexico © PBI Mexico
3. Boston Human Rights Clinic met with authorities from Coahuila during a visit to Mexico organised by PBI © PBI Mexico



Since 2010, PBI has assumed an important role in the collective lobbying process for the creation of a Governmental Mechanism to protect human rights defenders in Mexico. Within this framework, PBI has accompanied the Civil Society Organizations' Space (CSO Space) and worked at the national, as well as international level to support the initiative. With the approval in 2012 of the [Law](#) for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, PBI's focus turned to monitoring its implementation. In July, the CSO Space published a [review](#) of the implementation of said mechanism. At the same time, PBI brought [recommendations](#) on implementation to bilateral and multilateral meetings with the recently appointed Undersecretary of Human Rights, Roberto Camp Carian, and the Head of the Human Rights Unit, Sara Irene Herrera's. In 2015, with the new Undersecretary's leadership, there has been a positive shift, with the Mexican Government becoming more receptive to entering into dialogue with civil society on the mechanisms implementation. PBI welcomes the creation of the Third Unit devoted to Prevention, Monitoring and Analysis: an issue we have lobbied for since the law came into effect. Also, in October, the first meeting between the Third Unit and civil society was held, with PBI accompaniment. On numerous occasions, PBI has met with the Assistant Attorney General for Human Rights to express deep concern over the prevalent [impunity](#) of attacks against HRDs. At the same time, through our advocacy at state and municipal levels, we have raised attention to the lack of coordination and cooperation between state and federal entities in implementing measures to protect HRDs. We consider impunity and the coordination between entities to be the biggest challenges faced by the Mechanism, and our lobbying will revolve around these issues in 2016.

The need to protect and recognize the contributions of human rights defenders

From the start of the Mexico Project, PBI has made efforts to raise awareness, on a national as well as international level, of the risks that human rights defenders face in Mexico. In the same vein, in 2015 – a year in which human rights rapporteurs from the UN and the African and Inter-American Commissions issued a [joint statement](#) on "the critical situation of human rights defenders and the urgent need to protect and recognize their contributions" – we launched the [campaign](#) "PBI Mexico: 15 years for the right to defend". The goal of this campaign is to disseminate the stories of those who are bravely committed to the defence of human rights, in spite of the risks this work involves. At the beginning of 2015, PBI published a [report](#) in which we addressed the issue of public security from the perspective of HRDs, highlighting how the atmosphere of violence and the public security strategies have affected them. At the launch event for the report, CSOs shared their concerns with representatives from the embassies of Germany, The Netherlands, Canada, France, Switzerland, Norway and the European Union. This publication was the basis for an advocacy campaign to bring attention to the risks HRDs face when working on cases of serious human rights violations, such as torture, forced disappearances, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings.

With the goal of facilitating direct contact between civil society and key actors from the international community, PBI supported Ska Keller and Satu Hassi, European politicians, in organizing a scheduled visit to Mexico City and Oaxaca, following the murders of human rights defenders Bety Cariño and Jiry Jaakkola in 2010. One conclusion from the visit that [stood out](#) was the lack of a proper investigation in the case. At the end of the year, PBI invited representatives from nine embassies to a [breakfast](#) to share its analysis of the current security situation for HRDs in Mexico. Among the topics addressed were the implementation of the EU guidelines for human rights defenders, the federal protection mechanism, the GIEI mandate and the fight against impunity.

Raising international awareness and strengthening support networks

In February 2015, PBI supported the European tour of a delegation of relatives of disappeared students from [Ayotzinapa](#) and various CSOs, among them Tlachinollan, which visited Geneva during a review of Mexico before the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. The visit extended to Brussels where the group met with the European Parliament (EP), the European External Action Service, and various NGOs. At the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), there was a space reserved for an exchange of opinions during which family members gave their testimony. PBI also invited Fray Juan de Larios on an advocacy tour to Washington DC, where they participated in bilateral meetings with representatives from the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Department of State, various entities of the IACHR and international NGOs. During the tour, Fray Juan de Larios spoke about the [crisis](#) of disappearances that is currently devastating Mexico and the impunity that persists in these cases. In October, PBI invited the Saltillo Migrant Shelter on a speaking tour in Europe, visiting five countries and meeting with representatives of governments, the EP, the UN, and European civil society. On their visit to Ireland, the Saltillo Migrant Shelter [was recognized](#) for its work by the Mayor of Dublin. The tour focused on the serious risks faced by migrants while passing through Mexico on their way to the United States and how these risks extend to the people who defend them. Along the same lines, PBI inspired a fact-finding mission on the topic of disappearances in Mexico with a specific focus on migrants, carried out by a delegation from the Boston University Law School. The members of the delegation will publish a report on their visit in 2016.

Business and Human Rights in Mexico

Business and Human Rights is a central issue, both in Guerrero and Oaxaca, and throughout PBI's work in Latin America. For this reason, and as a result of the combined efforts of different PBI field projects and national groups, PBI produced a [documentary](#) that illustrates the risks faced by HRDs who are devoted to defending land and territory in Latin America. The [video](#) tells the stories of defenders in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Colombia and was [presented](#) in July during a session of the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) of the Council of the EU in order to discuss the mechanisms to protect human rights defenders that work in the context of large-scale European investments.

In April, PBI facilitated the roundtable on business and human rights during a seminar in the framework of the High-Level Dialogue on human rights between the EU and Mexico, making business and human rights a [central topic](#) of the Dialogue. Mexican and European CSOs whose work relates to business and human rights, as well as representatives from the EU Delegation and the Mexican government participated in the seminar. PBI also began accompanying the Business and Human Rights [Focal Group](#), made up of seven CSOs, with the aim of promoting initiatives for the implementation in Mexico of the United Nations' [Guiding Principles](#) on Business and Human Rights. Throughout the year, the Focal Group has undertaken a lobbying campaign on the need to develop a National Action Plan. For its implementation, meetings have been held with a wide range of actors, including various representatives of the diplomatic corps, the Mexican government and the IACHR. As a result of this lobbying, in September 2015, the Mexican government called the first meeting of a Working Group made up of various parties from the government, civil society and some international chambers of commerce, among others, to discuss the implementation of the Guiding Principles in Mexico. PBI celebrated the inclusion of civil society in these spaces and highlighted the importance of increasing the participation of community defenders and community-based organizations that have been directly affected by the issue of business and human rights. PBI agrees with [other organizations](#) that one of the most vulnerable groups of defenders in Mexico are those who defend land and territory and therefore promotes their participation in the consultation process and dialogue initiatives, as well as the decision-making process on issues that directly affect them.

2009	Paradigmatic judgments of the IACHR	2009	Cerezo Brothers released	2009	Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce are murdered	2010	Bety Jaakkola and Jyri Cariño murdered	2010	Juan Manuel Martínez released	2010	OPIM member Raúl Hernández, released from prison
	The Inter American Court on Human Rights rules against the Mexican State in the cases of Campo Algodonero (femicide) and Radilla Pacheco (forced disappearance). In 2011, the Supreme Court recognizes the mandatory nature of the Radilla Judgment and restricts the application of military jurisdiction.		In February, Héctor and Antonio are released from prison. PBI continues to accompany the Cerezo Committee in its work for the release of political prisoners		Their bodies were found with signs of torture some days after their forced disappearance. International reactions followed, and two months later PBI arranges a visit of EU embassies to Chilpancingo and Ayutla.		The Finnish activist and the president of CACTUS are murdered during a civil monitoring mission in San Juan Copala, Oaxaca. PBI facilitated contacts between Mexican CSOs and MEPs in their subsequent visits to monitor the case.		PBI accompanied his lawyer, Alba Cruz, from the 25 th of November Committee, in the proceedings that ended with his exoneration and release after being imprisoned since 2008 when he was accused of the murder of the American journalist Brad Will.		The indigenous defender – who was declared prisoner of conscience by AI – is exonerated and released from prison. PBI accompanied the OPIM and their lawyers from Tlachinollan HRC during the proceedings.

Building bridges for dialogue



Vidulfo Rosales and Jorge Verástegui – both accompanied by PBI – during a seminar on disappearances that took place in Germany © PBI Germany

One of the main tools to guarantee the involvement of embassies in the strengthening of the security situation of human rights defenders are the [European European Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#), the result of a process in which PBI actively participated from the beginning. The German Ambassador, Viktor Elbling, mentioned that "thanks to PBI and other organizations, the guidelines have been widely disseminated among human rights defenders. The dissemination, analysis and evaluation that PBI carries out is very valuable to us Europeans. Sometimes it is good for us to be reminded of our own good intentions and be shown how we can become better!"

The guidelines contain suggestions directed at different EU bodies, its member countries and, above all, their missions and embassies to protect, support and reinforce the work of human rights defenders in third countries through concrete actions such as site visits, meetings, public acknowledgments and trial observations, among others.

"A close relationship with the embassies is very important. PBI is like a bridge in this sense."
Sara Méndez, Código-DH

For Father Oscar Enriquez, director of the Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre, these initiatives are extremely important since "the diplomatic corps usually only has access to official government positions, and by having a conversation they can influence changes in practices that are deeply rooted in the Mexican political system."



Mexican Civil Society and representatives of the diplomatic corps during an event regarding the EU Guidelines © PBI Mexico

On occasion of a visit of a European Union delegation to Chihuahua, PBI facilitated contacts with civil society organizations in the city so they had the opportunity to discuss with the European delegates. During the meeting, CSOs expressed great concern over the lack of action by the state government and urged the delegates to emphasize distinct problems such as: gender violence, forced disappearances, the situation of human rights defenders and the grave situation in the Sierra Tarahumara.

The ability to raise awareness of the human rights situation beyond Mexico's borders is a priority for civil society, which is why PBI not only facilitates contacts in Mexico but also promotes advocacy tours abroad. In 2015, PBI supported the European tours of relatives of disappeared students from Ayotzinapa and the CSOs that support them in Brussels and Geneva; it also invited Fray Juan de Larios to Washington, D.C.; and the Saltillo Migrant House to participate in a speaking tour to five European countries.

Networking and national and international collaboration

For Pilar Tavera, director of Propuesta Cívica, an organization that among other goals dedicates its work to the legal protection and defence of human rights defenders, the presence of PBI in Mexico during the last 15 years has resulted in "safer and more strategic progress through accompaniment of human rights defenders and proposals for their protection. For Propuesta Cívica, PBI is essential to ensure well-oriented collective actions with the basic precautions to accompany not only Human Rights Defenders but also lobbying activities where consulting with NGOs such as PBI becomes of the utmost importance in monitoring and influencing public policies concerning the protection of human rights defenders." Currently, one of PBI's primary focuses is monitoring the implementation of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

"PBI has become a constant in Mexican civil society and knows how to bring together numerous actors for a dialogue"
German Ambassador, Viktor Elbling



Juan José Villagómez from the Saltillo Migrant Shelter receives a Mayoral Scroll from the Lord Mayor of Dublin © PBI Ireland

Within this framework, PBI participates in the Civil Society Organizations' Space (CSO Space) which, in June, published a [review](#) of the implementation of said mechanism. This work at the national level is complemented by collaborations with other international NGOs. Maureen Meyer, of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), says that "in Mexico, we see PBI as an important ally in advancing protection for human rights advocates in the country. In Washington, we have jointly lobbied the US government so that human rights and the issue of protection are part of its bilateral agenda with the Mexican government. In recent years, WOLA has also developed a monitoring and advocacy partnership with PBI, regarding the Protection Mechanism, which has had positive results for the dialogue between the US and Mexican governments and improved its implementation. In this work, the close contact that PBI maintains with local human rights defenders has been very important in helping us understand the challenges faced in the implementation of protection measures."

From working closely with WOLA have resulted joint actions like a [public statement](#) in April that called attention to worrisome failures in the implementation of the Mechanism. Networking with other international NGOs also spurred [public support](#) along with the request by the relatives of Ayotzinapa students to extend the mandate of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI). Another important example was the [letter](#) that PBI and various other NGOs sent to the UN General Assembly Member States requesting a vote in favour of a United Nations [resolution](#) on the protection of human rights defenders, which was eventually [adopted](#) in the GA.

Proximity to defenders

Speaking on PBI's work, Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, [shared](#) that "when I speak with human rights defenders, some of them are protected by PBI. They tell me that without the presence of your volunteers alongside them in their daily life, they probably could not dare to remain in their countries. Simply by sticking next to threatened human rights defenders, they feel protected by your organization."

"when I speak with human rights defenders, some of them are protected by PBI. They tell me that without the presence of your volunteers alongside them in their daily life, they probably could not dare to remain in their countries"
Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

You are one of the most useful organizations for protecting human rights defenders in a concrete way".

Viktor Elbling [added](#) that "PBI has become a constant in Mexican civil society and knows how to bring together numerous actors for a dialogue. PBI's international experience contributes

an immense expertise, which is why the organization has the acknowledgment of both governmental as well as non-governmental actors. Thanks to your past and current presence and actions in different parts of Mexico, a big impact has been made throughout the country".

Maureen Meyer concludes that "from the start of the project in Mexico, PBI has developed important work in accompaniment and making the work of human rights defenders visible in the country. Your presence and the accompaniment that you offer mean an option for additional protection, outside of any measure that the government, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) or regional bodies could have implemented. Your persistence throughout these 15 years, years that have seen a lot of violence, and an increase in attacks on human rights defenders, demonstrates your commitment to supporting human rights defenders and working together with them to improve the human rights situation."

2010	IACHR Judgments: Valentina and Inés	2010	New accompaniments in Oaxaca	2011	Execution and torture of Ayotzinapa students	2012	Creation of the Protection Mechanism	2012	Oaxaca state acknowledges responsibility	2012	Exploration Mission
	The IACHR rules against the Mexican State in the proceedings of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega . In 2012, the State publicly acknowledges its responsibility in the cases of Valentina and Inés		PBI begins accompanying Father Alejandro Solalinde and Barca-DH in 2010; EDUCA in 2013 and Consortio in 2015.		The CNDH points out multiple human rights violations carried out by state and federal policemen, including arbitrary detentions, torture and excessive use of force against students from the "Raúl Isidro Burgos" school in Ayotzinapa.		After an extensive lobbying process led by the "CSO Space" and closely accompanied by PBI, the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists is enacted . In 2015, the CSO Space publishes a second diagnosis on its implementation.		The state government acknowledges its responsibility in the human rights violations that occurred during the social conflict in 2006-2007. PBI welcomes the initiatives for the creation of the Oaxaca Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (DDHPO) and the Coordination for the Attention to Human Rights (CADH). In 2015, the specialised Office of the Ombudsman for journalists and defenders was created		PBI visits 6 states to learn about civil society initiatives and its protection needs. As a result, it publishes " A Panorama of the Defence of Human Rights in Mexico " in 2013.

15 years of international solidarity with Mexico



PBI volunteers during a Guerrero Team meeting in 2010 © PBI Mexico

Sergi Bach (DF Team 2002-2003, General Coordinator 2004-2010) General Coordinator, PBI Kenya

Sergi Sendra (Guerrero Team 2007-2008, Training Committee 2013-present) Coordinator of the Educational Team of the Education Action Residential Centre, Barcelona

Marianne Bertrand (Guerrero Team 2008-2009, Field Teams Coordinator 2009-2011, European Representative 2012-2015) Human Rights Defender Campaigner in the Americas, Amnesty International

Carla Cavarretta (Guerrero Team 2008-2009, Oaxaca Team 2009-2010, Security Programme Coordinator 2011-2012), Project Coordinator, Oxfam Mexico

Ben Leather (Guerrero Team 2009-2010, Advocacy Coordinator 2011-2013), Advocacy, Training and Communication Manager, ISHR

Rubens Carvalho (Exploration Team 2011-2012, Communication Coordinator 2012-2013), Latin America Coordinator, Earthsight

Manon Yard (Northern Team 2014-2015) Advocacy Coordinator, PBI Switzerland

The participation of volunteers has always been an essential part of PBI's work. Volunteers share all aspects of their private and professional lives during their year of service, and participate in all project activities, from physical accompaniment of defenders at risk to political advocacy meetings with Mexican authorities. Throughout PBI's 15 years of presence in Mexico, more than 150 volunteers from 20 countries have worked in the project. Volunteers are the heart of PBI: they contribute with their competencies, training, dedication and commitment to create and maintain space for peace and ensure the protection of human rights defenders.

As part of the commemoration of PBI Mexico's 15th anniversary in Mexico, we have asked past volunteers to talk about what their experience in PBI has meant to them. Please find here their reflections:

What brought you to PBI?

Sergi Bach: PBI represented an opportunity to leave an office-based environment in London where I was constantly reading reports about human rights violations, international treaties, laws, etc., but I was aware that I didn't know the real context in which these violations were taking place.

Marianne Bertrand: The fact that PBI allows people from varied backgrounds to have direct contact with defenders that are models of perseverance and the struggle for justice.

Manon Yard: The appropriateness of PBI's mandate, a deep agreement with the principle of non-interference, which seems to me both humble and powerful at the same time and leaves room for those who know the context best, local actors, to lead.

What has been PBI's most memorable achievement for you?

Marianne Bertrand: In 2012 the Mexican State acknowledged its responsibility in the sexual torture of Valentina Rosendo Cantú. In this act, Valentina thanked PBI and others who stood by her during her fight for justice. Several PBI teams met and accompanied Valentina during her pursuit for justice and her own process of affirmation not only as a victim of a State crime, but also as a human rights defender. We learned a lot from her bravery, her determination, her courage. The act of acknowledgment of responsibility was a very intense moment, the culmination point of this process.

Rubens Carvalho: The extension of PBI's presence in the northern part of the country, our involvement in the creation of the Protection Mechanism, and the strengthening of PBI's work in lobbying and communication.

Manon Yard: No doubt, the most memorable thing for me was

the construction and maintenance in the North of a solid team of volunteers that cooperate, live together and reflect together in order to achieve a greater relevance and impact.

Sergi Bach: PBI's bet when deciding to accompany the Cerezo brothers.

What has been the most difficult moment for you in PBI?

Sergi Bach: Once when the police stopped a bus that we were traveling in and the driver, after negotiating, paid the bribe in front of all the passengers. No one said anything. It was a huge feeling of impotence and it was highly representative, on a small-scale, of how the silence and the indifference maintain a system of corruption. As a foreigner, I could have said something, with the risk of being arrested, but I have always wondered if the other passengers could afford the "luxury" of assuming the consequences of challenging corrupt police officers.

Carla Cavarretta: There were difficult moments. The year in Guerrero, with constant emergencies, violence, and deaths wasn't easy but, at the same time, at the end of that year I started to think about the accompaniment of defenders not only as a job but also as life's work.

Marianne Bertrand: **The disappearance and killing of Raúl Lucas and Manuel Ponce, two indigenous human rights defenders in the State of Guerrero.** PBI had a meeting scheduled with them and they were killed before they could bring up their situation and we could analyse together the steps to take to accompany them. It was a very tough moment for my team. **I think we all have imprinted in our memory and our skin the feelings, smells, impressions, emotions we felt during the accompaniments directly after the murders to the OPIM and Tlachinollan, organizations that were close to these defenders and whose risk increased because of the context and the fact that these crimes remained in impunity.**

Ben Leather: I will never forget one of my first context analyses in Guerrero. The army had gone to a community in the Costa Grande and tortured the population, including young boys receiving electrical shocks to their testicles. This was detailed in the newspapers, which were full of stories of violence and atrocities. I put up with it. I thought I had gotten over it, but the following Friday, when I went to have a mescal with some friends, everything came out and I cried like a baby. I didn't know I had so much sorrow inside.

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How do you imagine PBI's future in Mexico?

Sergi Sendra: I imagine that PBI is present in more states. Although there won't be additional field teams, PBI will monitor several working spaces between CSOs and the authorities.

Ben Leather: I imagine a future with permanent innovation with regard to communication and advocacy tools and with sophisticated advocacy strategies in order to lobby the Mexican State so that, little by little, it changes its practices and the causes of the current conflict.

Rubens Carvalho: **I imagine a bigger and more flexible geographical presence that is able to meet defenders' needs in a shorter time and with more diverse tools.** I also imagine teams have more sophisticated training in lobbying and communication.

Manon Yard: I hope one day PBI's presence will no longer be required in the country. This is the best I can wish for Mexico.

What was your funniest moment in PBI?

Sergi Bach: In the second week in Mexico City, another volunteer and I were arrested by the police and taken to the police station in Coyoacán because we had left the rubbish on "the public street" according to the policeman's version of the story. The fact that all the neighbours were leaving the trash in that same place for its subsequent collection by the truck didn't seem a convincing argument for them. We were taken to the police station and we had to pay a fine not to spend the night in jail.

"I have no doubt that PBI is the best human rights school on the planet. It gave me experiences, knowledge and amazing opportunities which helped me to learn and grow as a person. I am truly grateful."
Ben Leather

Sergi Sendra: I remember in particular a dinner the Chilpancingo team had during one of the project meetings. There was an incredible environment and after hours of meeting and discussion we ended up in a neighbouring house with friends, it was a very good moment of laughter and dancing.

Marianne Bertrand: The release of the last two Cerezo brothers who had been imprisoned. It

was a night accompaniment because the Committee feared they could be released at any time. We were napping in the car when the intelligence services and the police arrived to check what we were doing parked there. Carla, the other PBI volunteer, and I put our shoes on in a rush and got out of the car half asleep to go with Alejandro and Francisco Cerezo to speak to the authorities. When I stepped out I realized I had one of my own shoes and one of my colleague's... and the same for her!



PBI Volunteers in the Oaxaca office in 2014 © PBI Mexico

Rubens Carvalho: Conducting the exploration. Traveling around Mexico, meeting with many organizations and defenders and learning about the peculiarities of the different states and regions was really interesting.

What impact has being a volunteer with PBI had on your life (personally, professionally, any other aspect)?

Sergi Sendra: **No doubt the way PBI works has given me a huge amount of tools that I apply in my daily life and that I think are necessary to live in harmony with society.**

Carla Cavarretta: From a personal point of view, I can certainly say that PBI, apart from teaching me everything I know professionally, at a human level has given me the opportunity to meet beautiful people, dearest friends with whom I continue to share my life, one way or another.

Ben Leather: PBI changed my life. **I have no doubt that PBI is the best human rights school on the planet. It gave me experiences, knowledge and amazing opportunities which helped me to learn and grow as a person. I am truly grateful.**

Manon Yard: The example of the defenders we accompany, who continue fighting for the respect of human rights despite all the threats, assaults, frustrations and disappointments certainly remains a great paragon for me.



PBI staff during the project meeting in 2015 © PBI Mexico

2014	Opening of the Northern Team	2014	Car bomb case in Ciudad Juárez	2014	Southern Border Program	2014	43 disappeared from Ayotzinapa	2015	Civil Monitoring Mission	2012	Executions in Colonia Narvarte
PBI opens a regional team covering the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila, thus becoming the first international NGO with a permanent presence in the northern part of the country. It begins accompanying the Paso del Norte HRC and, in 2014 the Saltillo Migrant Shelter, Fray Juan de Larios DHRC, Juan Gerardi HRC and the Pasta de Conchos Family Organization.		The work of Paso del Norte, including legal representation, psychosocial accompaniment and lobbying, resulted in the release of 5 young men that had been tortured in order to force a confession for having exploded a bomb car. The cases of Figueroa and Cristel Piña would have similar outcomes.		The program was announced in July with the aim of "protecting migrants and organizing the border crossing". However, WOLA reports that it coincided with an increase in deportations, militarization of the southern border, and greater for migrants.		After the murder of 6 people and the disappearance of 43 students, the international community condemns the events and urges the Government to carry out an investigation in accordance with international standards and ensure the security of the defenders that are dealing with the case.		A delegation of specialists visits Mexico to observe the situation of HRDs. Their report highlighted the criminalization of defenders, the lack of recognition for their work, and structural impunity		CSOs highlight the failures of the Protection Mechanism after the murder of 5 people, including the photojournalist Rubén Espinosa and the defender Nadia Vera.	

Security Advisories

Empowerment towards protection strategies



PBI team delivers an advocacy workshop to Codigo-DH and the APPJ © PBI Mexico

The project ended with several round tables and high-level meetings and, of special note, an event attended by the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, [Michel Forst](#). The Rapporteur expressed his satisfaction with that project and committed to support the distribution of the tools. In September 2015, 21 women defenders who were participating in the course took part in a [round table](#) with 14 representatives of the diplomatic corps in Mexico, where they issued their recommendations about the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, with an emphasis on prevention measures. Apart from the political support offered, the European Union also funded this project.

The permanent risk faced by Mexican human rights defenders during 2015 led Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to keep approaching PBI with requests for security and protection consultancies throughout the year. Alarming, several organizations pointed out in their requests the need to prevent and establish strategies for reacting to possible break-ins and thefts in their offices. This tendency was marked by [several thefts](#) that occurred in the homes and offices of human rights defenders accompanied by PBI. PBI responded to these requests, which increasingly came from social movements and community defenders, with 8 security workshops from which 87 defenders directly benefited. Additionally, 14 security and protection consultancies were offered, and PBI's Facilitation Guide to replicate security workshops was downloaded more than 700 times. Monitoring progress through consultancies helped strengthen the internal work of organizations on security and protection and apply the acquired tools, build support networks for emergency responses, and increase the capacities of local groups to replicate security workshops with their own beneficiaries.

Multiplying effect in capacity building

With the aim of empowering a wide group of defenders in the use of protection strategies and achieving a multiplying effect, PBI continued participating in the space of Training of Trainers. In this line, PBI has developed strategies for defenders to acquire the tools taught in the workshops, adapt them to their needs and replicate them. Within this framework, PBI worked in 2015 with organizations from Chihuahua that were seeking to strengthen internal security and protection procedures with indigenous communities they accompany in the Sierra Tarahumara. After participating in the first workshop,

1. The facilitation guide of security and advocacy workshops is available on: <http://bit.ly/GuiaPBI>.

a member of Alianza Sierra Madre underlined that: "the workshop was very useful ahead of the meeting on [to review the implementation of protection measures with governmental authorities]. I managed to find out what we needed and focus on that. After the workshop, the insight is different".

Online training platform for Women Defenders

The Comprehensive [Protection Project](#) for Women Human Rights Defenders was created to reach the needs of defenders in more states and create synergies among those trained on security issues. The idea of comprehensive protection includes, in addition to physical accompaniment, attention to wellbeing and self-care, economic security, the security of family members, support networks, empowerment through training, and the creation and development of capacities and abilities. This initiative is the follow-up of an [international conference](#) on Women Defenders held in London in October 2012. The Project has helped create an [Online Platform](#), the Publication "[Empowered](#)" and an online tool kit with resources and references. The Online Platform courses began in 2015 and are designed to strengthen the capacities and abilities of Women Defenders in the areas of lobbying, campaign development, and knowledge of protection mechanisms at national, regional and international level, as well as to acquire tools in order to document human rights violations. The courses, in which 70 women defenders participated, promote a space for analysis where theoretical knowledge and practical experience can be compared and combined based on the ideas and the experience of the participants.



ASMAC staff during an advocacy workshop delivered by PBI © PBI Mexico

2015 International institutions highlight human rights "crisis"

After the IACHR's [visit](#), its president, Rose-Marie Belle, [stated](#) that "she confirmed on the ground the serious human rights crisis that Mexico faces". Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [called for](#) a greater and better protection of HRDs.

2015 The Merida Initiative: blocked funds

For the first time since the agreement began, the USA decided to withhold 15% of the funds from the [Merida Initiative](#), as they "have [not been able to confirm](#) that Mexico fully complies with the specified criteria" with regard to the respect for human rights.

2015 Constitutional Reform

The senate [opened the door](#) to Congress to draft general laws on torture and disappearance in 2016.

Financial Situation

DONORS

euro

GERMANY

Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations / ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), with means of the German Federal Foreign Office (Germany)	153,360
Miseror	6,800
Bread for the World / Brodt für Welt	18,300
Civil Peace Service – Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)	77,995

BELGIUM

PBI Belgium	900
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CANADA

Basilian Fathers (Human Development Fund)	4,122
UNIFOR	4,637
PBI Canada	451
Embassy of Canada in Mexico – The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives CFLI	4,269

SPAIN

Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (Catalonia)	19,184
Santander City Council	6,950
Valladolid City Council	4,814

FINLAND

Embassy of Finland in Mexico	19,500
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FRANCE

Paris Bar Association	4,000
Parliamentary Reservation	3,000

THE NETHERLANDS

HIVOS	4,107
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ITALY

Unione delle Chiese Metodiste e Valdesi	4,000
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SWITZERLAND

Maya Behn-Eschenburg Stiftung	9,684
Reformed Church St. Gallen-Tablat	9,699
Swissfonds Kanton St. Gallen	485
Embassy of Switzerland in Mexico	7,008

UNITED STATES

MacArthur Foundation	31,276
Open Society Foundation	9,418
Overbrook Foundation	2,496

UNITED KINGDOM

Sigrid Rausing Trust	6,569
PBI UK	6,897

MULTILATERAL FUNDS

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights – EIDHR (European Union)	4,911
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OTHER FUNDS

Other programmes	2,240
Individual donations	200

total income 427,271

Financial Report 2015

2015 was a year of transition for PBI's fundraising. PBI Mexico had previously identified this year as a key moment since several donors from past years were finishing their funding terms. After having increased the budget in 2014, the challenge was finding financial resources necessary for the stability of the project's activities and field work.

Thanks to the renewal of previous contracts and agreements with new donors, the current budget level allows for the fulfilment of the activities planned as well as maintaining two field teams in the north and in the south of the country and a coordination office in Mexico City.

PBI Mexico wants to thank all our donors for their financial support, which has allowed the implementation of all planned activities in 2015.

The year's budgetary outcome, pointing to a small deficit, is the result of some unexpected events occurred in the last quarter of the year, where some funds were delayed, and will therefore be received in 2016. For that reason, the outcome, although negative, generally reflects the year's fundraising plans that pointed to a steady year without major fluctuations.

The financial data herein contained are provisional and have not yet been audited. All expenditure and income shown in this report is reported in Euros.

EXPENDITURE IN MEXICO 2015

Accompaniment to HRDs and Field Presence 146,500 €	146,573 €	31%
Strategic Presence and Advocacy 74,134 €	74,134 €	15%
Security workshops programme 19,114 €	19,114 €	4%
Outreach and Advocacy in Europe and North America 57,555 €	57,555 €	12%
General Coordination and Strategy 64,051 €	64,051 €	13%
Fundraising, Finance and Administration 25,320 €	25,320 €	5%
Governance 25,320 €	28,550 €	6%
Project Audits & External Evaluation 4,370 €	4,371 €	1%
Other expenditure 11,950 €	11,950 €	2%
	431,618 €	






PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL
Mexico Project

making space for peace

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a nongovernmental organization with 30 years of experience in international accompaniment and has been present in Mexico since 1999. PBI's goal is to protect the political space for people and organizations that promote human rights in a non-violent manner, and who suffer repression for their legitimate work. PBI only works at the request of local organizations and does not replace efforts by Mexican human rights defenders to promote respect for human rights. Rather, it merely seeks to support their initiatives by standing next to them. PBI regularly visits conflict areas, distributes information, and dialogues with civil and military authorities, as well as with human rights organizations and other civil society actors in Mexico. To promote international attention to the Mexican situation, and to help create the necessary conditions for human rights defenders to continue with their work, PBI also maintains a dialogue with the international community and international organizations such as the United Nations, disseminates information, and generates support from abroad in order to ensure the safety of Mexican defenders.

More information about PBI's work in Mexico can be found on:



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