

ENTREVISTAS PBI MEXICO

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Entrevistas is a publication of PBI Mexico that highlights issues regarding the defense of human rights, focusing on those situations that increase risks to the physical or psychological integrity of Mexican human rights defenders, or that damage the legitimacy of their work. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions of PBI Mexico.

DOCUMENTATION OF CASES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS The Cerezo Committee Mexico

“Violation that is not documented, violation that does not exist”

The Cerezo Committee is an organization dedicated to the defense of the human rights of political prisoners in Mexico. It was founded after the arrest, torture and imprisonment of the brothers Alejandro, Hector and Antonio Cerezo Contreras and the co-defendant Pablo Alvaredo Flores; all detained in a high security prison in Mexico on the August 13 2001. They are now currently free.

Viento de Libertad is a project of the Cerezo Committee with the aim of documenting cases of political prisoners, extrajudicial executions and “disappeared” prisoners in Mexico. In late August, PBI interviewed Elga Aguilar Gutiérrez and Antonio Cerezo Contreras, members of the Cerezo Committee in Mexico.

What are the projects that the Cerezo Committee is currently undertaking?

Antonio: We are now accompanying the *Campaña Nacional contra las Desapariciones Forzadas* (National Campaign against Forced Disappearances), with a particular concern given to the training process of documenting human rights violations. We are also working on a standard format, a record card of human rights violations and the documentation of these cases. Another important initiative of the Committee is the School of Popular Educators; which began with 16 associates in its first edition and begins its second edition in September. The School focuses on four principal themes: International Human Rights Standards, Documentation of Human Rights Violations, Prisoners and Security. Finally, we have been working on a report; *Saldo de la Represión en México 2009-2010: una guerra contra el Pueblo* (Balance of the Repression in Mexico 2009-2010: a war against the People), which we publicly launched on August 24.

How does the documentation work in general?

A: We are grounded in training people, focusing on the idea of the need for documentation to accompany the struggles of victims in the pursuit of truth. If the victims are empowered, they will no longer have to rely on the support of an NGO or lawyer. It is important that the people have this autonomy. We have a format, a card template for recording human rights

violations, precisely with the objective of allowing anyone to fill it out and use the system. In regards to the process of documentation, we work directly with organizations of victims of violations or directly with victims of violations themselves; we guide them through the documentation process, and then they decide how they want to use it. This plays an important role in the *Viento de Libertad* project.



Elga Aguilar and Antonio Cerezo accompanied by a PBI volunteer © PBI - México

Elga: *Viento de Libertad* originates from 2005 out of the earlier project *No estamos todos*. We started to use more systematized documentation through the idea that it was

necessary to make the victims of political cases visible. We make three distinctions in the documentation of the cases: political prisoners, prisoners of conscience and the victims used for the purposes of breaking the social glue. We focus on the documentation of these cases because in Mexico it is sometimes believed that to put faces to the names of victims of human rights violations is useless, and sometimes because of repression, organizations lose their way and fail to follow up cases of abuse. Furthermore, many victims whose cases are acknowledged in the newspapers are later forgotten and their cases are not investigated.



Members of the Cerezo Committee on its 10th anniversary celebration © PBI - Mexico

Elga, when did you start working on the Committee and what has been your role?

E: Throughout the documentary *Seguir Siendo*, I met up with Emiliana and then later Paco and I saw in them a specific and timely project. I was moved by the solidarity within the Committee. I saw the good job they did in Atenco. I then began to support the economic project, the *cafeteria*, in 2006. After the events of the November 25 in Oaxaca when a raging river of repression fulfilled the objective of generating fear and distrust within the population, I began to devote more time to the Committee. I realized that it was important to document those affected by the violence in Oaxaca, so we began by filling in the information gaps: regarding the prisoners in maximum security prisons, had they been released and judged? We tracked the

information in newspapers and contacted organizations. In our country violation that is not documented, is violation that does not exist. That is when my role really began in *Viento de Libertad*.

A: Elga is the oldest member of the Committee, after Pablo Alvarado, Emiliana and Francisco.

And, what is your role in the project *Viento de Libertad*?

E: I began coordinating the website of the project with the support of Francisco in 2006. We created a system of documentation for the monitoring and investigation of human rights violation cases. For example, we considered whether the cases had already gone through preliminary examination or whether there had been reforms to the law. With this information we were able to form a data- base and develop a mini- file of two pages for each case. The work is difficult, tracking the information in newspapers is normally insufficient and not all bodies and organizations respond to our attempts to find out the information that we are missing. In 2010 the number of political prisoners decreased by a small number, in 2007 we asked for Federal Amnesty as there were nearly 1000 people imprisoned for political reasons. Today we calculate that this number has decreased and is around 110-120 people. The pattern of violations however is changing, and while the number of political prisoners is decreasing, amongst other patterns we note that the number of extrajudicial executions is increasing.

What types of risks do you face in your current job?

A: We have always had a high level of risk, with ups and downs, however recently the risk has increased and the threats are also directed not only towards those working directly with the Committee.

E: When I joined the Committee I knew there were risks but I did not realize what extent. We don't want to leave our life's work. I don't want the threats to force me to change the project. We are concerned for our protection and I work constantly on the idea that if something happens is not my fault.

More information

About Cerezo Committee Mexico, visit www.comitecerezo.org (Spanish only)

Report *Saldo de la Represión en México 2009-2010: una guerra contra el Pueblo* available on internet (Spanish only)

About *Viento de Libertad* Project, visit www.vientodelibertad.org (Spanish only)