

PBI MEXICO – January 2014

Accompaniment in Coahuila

Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation

The Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation has worked for over a decade in the Coal Mining Zone of the state of Coahuila, insisting that the bodies of 63 miners still trapped in the Pasta de Conchos mine be retrieved, while also demanding better safety conditions for miners who continue to work in the area. PBI has accompanied the organisation and its director Cristina Auerbach since 2014 due to the high level of risk they face stemming from their legitimate work in defence of human rights.

The Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation ([PCFO](#)) was formed in 2006, after the [disaster](#) in Mine Number 8 of the Pasta de Conchos Unit, located in the San Juan Sabinas municipality in Coahuila and managed by the Grupo Mexico corporation. After the disaster, 65 miners were trapped inside the mine and perished. This led the families of the miners to come together and demand that the bodies be retrieved; only two bodies have been recovered to date. Little by little, they began to raise awareness about the precarious working conditions faced by miners in the area, especially regarding workplace safety.

Human rights defender Cristina Auerbach then joined forces with the families, and together they formed the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation. Thanks to their analysis and [documentation](#), the organization has been able to bring the Pasta de Conchos case both to the [IACHR](#) (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights) and to the [ILO](#) ([International Labor Organisation](#)). Nevertheless, [10 years](#) have passed since the tragedy and the impunity persists.

Since 2009, the PCFO has taken up other cases, like the collapse of the [Lulú Mine](#) in Muzquiz which left two dead, or the explosion of [BINSA Well 3](#) in Sabinas, where 14 miners lost their lives. Over the years, the organisation has been broadening its line of work, inspecting workplace safety conditions in mines, documenting workplace accidents, and accompanying local miners

through judicial proceedings. Through this work, the PCFO has helped make mining labor rights a priority in Mexican public opinion.



Members of the PCFO with Commissioner Tracy Robinson from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission

In April 2015, the organisation opened an office in Cloete, in the Sabinas municipality, with hopes of assisting locals who claim that both [their health and their property](#) have been affected by coal mining in the area. Local testimonies allege that different mining companies have created open pit mines, causing harm to the [property and the environmental wellbeing](#) of the hundreds of families that live in Cloete. According to the PCFO, these activities do not respect [agreements reached in 1996](#) that forbade “exploration or extraction of mineral coal within the premises of the urban area, defined as extending 350 meters beyond the last house in the towns of Sabinas, Villa de Agujita, and Villa de Cloete.”

Due to their struggle against coal exploitation, the residents of Cloete have been [threatened](#), harassed, and slandered, which has led the PCFO to present diverse [complaints](#) of human rights violations related to mining activity in Coahuila to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). Recently, other communities in the area have joined forces with the resistance efforts in Colete, as they are confronting similar challenges in Nueva Rosita, Palaú, Esperanzas, y La Florida.



PBI volunteers with PCFO members during a memorial

Because she faces such high levels of risk, Cristina Auerbach is a beneficiary of the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, and in 2015 was invited by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to a [hearing](#) on the criminalization of human rights defenders in the Americas.

The need for protection

After an exploratory mission that covered various states in Mexico, PBI [identified](#) Coahuila as a high- risk area for human rights defenders. This analysis was supported by a later [report](#) by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) which found Coahuila to be “one of the five states with the highest number of reports of aggressions against human rights defenders.”

The Coal Zone where the PCFO works is the principal coal extraction zone in Mexico, confirmed by the CNDH's [report](#) stating that mining is “the most important production activity in the region.” In the same report, the CNDH adds that, in the Coal Zone, “mining is done irregularly, without the necessary permits ... [and] without the safety conditions needed to guarantee the integrity and safety of the miners.” The region is also notorious for its significant isolation from the cities where decisions and policies are made, which heightens the risk faced by defenders working there.

It is in this context that various members of the organisation have been threatened and harassed on numerous occasions due to the work they carry out. The organisation's director, Cristina Auerbach, has been [harassed](#), beaten, [threatened](#), and [slandered](#).

Therefore, PBI has accompanied the PCFO and Cristina Auerbach since 2014 through regular visits to the Coal Zone and by sharing international concern for the safety of the organisation's members with state and federal authorities. Due to the heightened risk faced by Cristina Auerbach and the wave of smear campaigns directed at her in March of 2016, PBI released a [public statement](#) making the three levels of government aware of our deep concern for the situation. After PBI's activation, Front Line Defenders came out in support of Auerbach and published an [Urgent Action](#). Likewise, PBI convened a [meeting](#) with representatives from 12 embassies to inform them on the situation.



PBI volunteer accompanies Cristina to a visit to a mine

For more information about the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation:

- Their [website](#)
- Their [Facebook page](#)
- Their [Twitter account](#)
- PBI's [public statement](#)

For more information about the Pasta de Conchos mine tragedy:

- [“Voices from the Underground”](#) (Documentary, Spanish only, 70 minutes)
- [CNN article](#) (2011)