

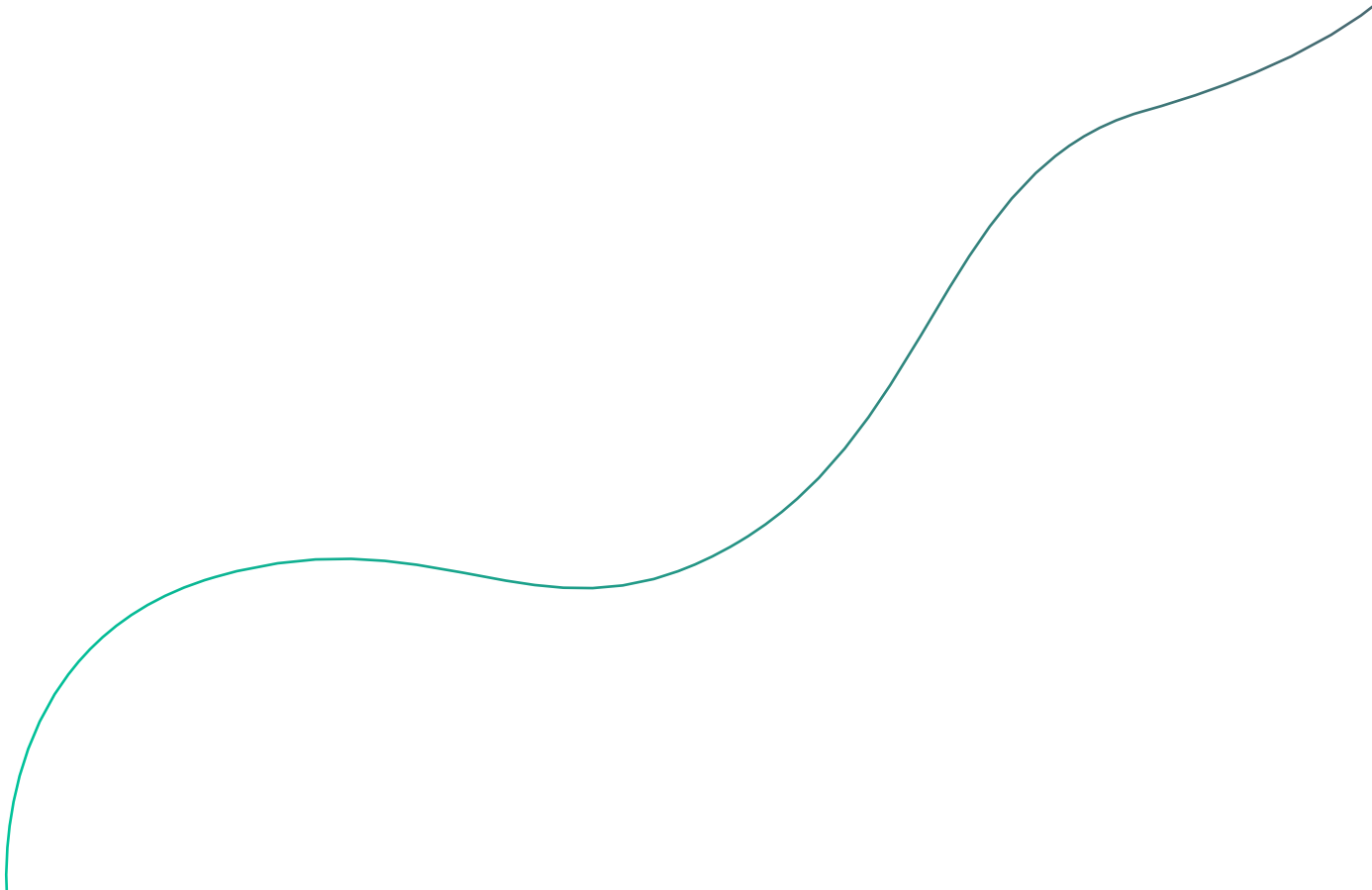
# Annual Report 2024

Peace Brigades International México



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## **PBI Mexico: Annual Report 2024**

Annual Report 2024, PBI Mexico, August 2025

In collaboration with the Catalan Agency for Cooperation of the Government of Catalonia.



Agència Catalana  
de Cooperació  
al Desenvolupament



Generalitat de Catalunya  
Gobierno de Cataluña

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## Who We Are

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non-governmental organization with over 40 years of experience in international accompaniment and a permanent presence in Mexico since the year 2000. PBI's mission is to open and protect spaces for action for individuals and organizations that promote human rights through non-violent means and face risks as a result of their work.

At the request of local organizations, PBI does not seek to replace Mexican initiatives that promote human rights, but rather supports them through its international presence.

PBI conducts regular visits to conflict zones, shares information, and engages in dialogue with civil and military authorities, as well as with human rights organizations and other actors in Mexican civil society. To ensure international visibility and support, PBI maintains ongoing communication with diplomatic missions and intergovernmental bodies, disseminates information, and advocates for external support to help guarantee the safety of Mexican human rights defenders.

Our work would not be possible without the commitment and dedication of volunteers who generously contribute their time and solidarity to our project and to the struggles and resistance movements in Mexico. We are deeply grateful to the 12 individuals from seven different countries who joined our project during 2024:

*José Osmín Jovel López (El Salvador)*

*Luisa Fernanda Rocha Zamudio (Colombia)*

*Yudy Stephanie Sabogal Vacca (Colombia)*

*Yasmin Courtney Millican (United Kingdom)*

*Emma Louise Livesey (United Kingdom)*

*Sara Daniela Aguilar Olivares (Colombia)*

*Chad Galinier (France)*

*Elisa Keustermans (Belgium)*

*Julian Arturo Ordóñez (Colombia)*

*Jeanne Angelique Soulard (France)*

*Constance Eleonora Oudshoorn (Netherlands)*

*Karen Vinasco Jiménez (Colombia)*

*Elyse Taggart (United States)*



In addition, 11 people formed part of the Coordination Office, 3 individuals supported us as members of the Project Strategic Committee, and 11 others contributed through the Training Committee, which helps us review our work and propose adaptations in response to the evolving context.

### **Security Coordination**

Mélanie Paboeuf (France) • Shirin Hess (Germany)

### **Advocacy Coordination**

Manuel Jabonero Prieto (Spanish State)

### **Administration Coordination**

Lilia Díaz (Mexico)

### **Finance Coordination**

Allasein Josué Fernando Ríos Martínez (Mexico)

### **Field Team Coordination**

Dinah Dreher (Germany)

### **Project Coordination**

Riccardo Carraro (Italy) • Giuseppina Zaccaria (Italy)

### **Fundraising Coordination**

Valeria Lemus (Mexico) • Carlos Daniel Berríos Solórzano (Nicaragua)

### **Communications Coordination**

Laura Camila Suárez Rodríguez (Colombia/Costa Rica)

### **Training Committee**

Stefania Grasso (Italy/Switzerland)  
Arianna Bizzoni (Italy)  
Victor Alfonso Ávila García (Colombia)  
Alicja Bradel (Germany/Poland)  
Riccardo Carraro (Italy)  
Giuseppina Zaccaria (Italy)  
Silvia Bellón Sánchez (Spanish State)  
Laura Camila Suárez R. (Colombia/Costa Rica)  
José Osmín Jovel López (El Salvador)  
Yasmin Courtney Millican (United Kingdom)  
Dinah Dreher (Germany)

### **Strategic Committee**

Virry Schaafsma (Netherlands)  
María Clara van Tienhoven Amil (Netherlands)  
Wilman Reina Urquijo (Colombia)



## Donors

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all the institutions and individuals who supported us throughout 2024. Thanks to their generosity and solidarity, we were able to continue providing physical, political, and emotional accompaniment to human rights defenders, organizations, and communities striving to promote a human rights agenda in Mexico and to confront ongoing injustices. We look forward to your continued support in the future so we may carry on this essential work of protection and accompaniment.

- Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation  
(Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament)
- Basque Agency for Development Cooperation
- City Council of Santander
- European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)
- Fédération Vaudoise de Coopération (FEDEVACO)
- Vaud Federation for Cooperation (Fédération Vaudoise de Coopération – FEDEVACO)
- MISEREOR
- Non-Violence XXI
- Maya Behn-Eschenburg Foundation
- PBI Belgium
- Civil Peace Service (Ziviler Friedensdienst – ZFD), German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- Ueli Schlager Foundation
- Parish of Tablat – St. Gallen
- Parish of Wallisellen
- Smartpeace Foundation
- Ford Foundation – UK
- Embassy of Ireland in Mexico
- City Council of Barcelona
- Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development – Terre Solidaire
- City Council of Paris
- For Another World Foundation – PAM.

# 2024:

## Between Structural Challenges and Renewed Commitment to Human Rights Defenders

### A New Political Cycle, Persistent Challenges

In 2024, Mexico experienced a historic election with Claudia Sheinbaum becoming the country's first female president, a symbolic step forward for women's political representation that sparked hopes for change across society. Yet beyond this milestone, the new administration, continuing the political project known as the Fourth Transformation, faces deep-rooted challenges in human rights, justice, security, and democratic transition<sup>1</sup>.

Civil society organizations, including the National Network of Civil Human Rights Organizations "Todos los Derechos para Todas, Todos y Todes" (Red TDT) and Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz A.C. (Serapaz), have underscored the need for genuine dialogue, accountability, and effective protection mechanisms. Concerns remain over the weakening of civilian institutions, the centralization of power, the militarization of public security, and the lack of transparency surrounding extractive megaprojects<sup>2</sup>.

Militarization continued to expand in 2024, with the Armed Forces taking on civilian functions, from migration control to infrastructure construction, without effective oversight. This has been linked to enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions,

and the normalization of military presence in public life<sup>3</sup>.

Mexico remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders. According to Front Line Defenders, at least 24 defenders were killed in 2024, most in struggles over land, environmental protection, and Indigenous rights<sup>4</sup>. Criminalization, stigmatization, and impunity remain common tools used to silence dissent.

1 Red TDT. Six-Year Human Rights Balance in Mexico, 2024

[https://redtdt.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Balance-sexenal\\_Red\\_TDT\\_.pdf](https://redtdt.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Balance-sexenal_Red_TDT_.pdf)

2 Serapaz. Criminalization of Human Rights Defenders 2024. <https://serapaz.org.mx>

3 Human Rights Watch. World Report 2024: Mexico. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/mexico>

4 Front Line Defenders. Global Analysis 2024/25. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-202425>

Internationally, Donald Trump's re-election as president of the United States brought a renewed focus on restrictive migration and security policies. The reinstatement of "Remain in Mexico" and heightened pressure on Mexico to control its borders worsened the humanitarian crisis along the northern frontier, deepening the vulnerability of migrants and asylum seekers<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, the "war on drugs" continued to generate structural violence, forced displacement, and institutional weakening across many regions<sup>6</sup>.

Yet, amid these challenges, civil society—particularly feminist, Indigenous, environmental, and migrant movements—remains a vital force for resistance, organizing to defend justice, dignity, autonomy, and life.

### Strengthening PBI Mexico's Presence and Impact

Against this backdrop, PBI Mexico reaffirmed its commitment to the comprehensive protection, visibility, and legitimacy of human rights defenders' work. 2024 was a year of strategic restructuring and territorial consolidation that strengthened our capacity to respond and act. A major milestone was the opening of a new headquarters in Cuernavaca, Morelos, centralizing our regional teams in one operational hub. From here, mobile teams now provide accompaniment in Michoacán, Morelos, Puebla, Sonora, Oaxaca, and Chihuahua, improving response times, team security, and direct engagement with defenders.

We also consolidated our presence in Sonora, closing the exploratory phase and initiating field accompaniment. This vast state, with extreme climate conditions, significant Indigenous populations, and limited international presence, is central to PBI's thematic focus on land defense and the fight against disappearances.

Our collaboration networks also grew stronger. We began formal accompaniment of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared "Hasta Encontrarlos," mandated by Mexico's Supreme Court to search for two men disappeared in 2007. We also initiated work with the Yoreme Alliance, defending territory, culture, and the Yoremnokki language, and with Ejido El Bajío, engaged in a decade-long legal battle against mining.



Field volunteer at the Diapodos Mine, Sonora, June 2024



Accompaniment of the Comité Hasta Encontrarlos during a prospecting activity, Oaxaca

<sup>5</sup> Migration Policy Institute. Trump's Return and Mexico's Role in US Border Control (2024). <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-2-immigration-first-100-days>

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group. The Generals' Labyrinth: Crime and the Military in Mexico (2024).

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/106-crime-military-mexico-spanish.pdf>



## Building Tools, Networks, and Collective Protection

In security and advocacy, two initiatives stood out. First, a participatory workshop in Cuernavaca brought together defenders from Michoacán, Morelos, and Puebla to identify risks, priorities, and proposals—informing PBI Mexico’s new Country Strategy, aligned with the 2024–2026 Strategic Plan and developed in collaboration with Civil Peace Service partners such as *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World) and AGIAMONDO.

Second, we launched the updated Security and Protection Advisory Program (PASP) in Mexico City. Marking its tenth anniversary, the new edition integrates an intersectional approach, collective care principles, and con-

text-specific content, complementing rather than replacing the 2014 version, and drawing on a decade of field experience.



## Financial Stability and Looking Ahead

2024 also brought greater financial stability, despite ongoing global funding challenges. By reorganizing our work planning and strengthening internal structures, we maintained and expanded our field operations. This foundation will support progress toward the objectives of our 2024–2026 Strategic Plan, ensuring we continue creating the conditions for safe and free human rights defense in Mexico.

Throughout the year, PBI Mexico has stood alongside those who, from their territories, communities, and organizations, confront structural violence, impunity, and exclusion. In a complex yet resilient landscape, we hold fast to our belief: to accompany is to protect, and to protect is to sustain hope.



Part of the PBI Mexico Team 2024–2025

# 2024

in Numbers

256

follow-up meetings  
with civil society  
organizations in  
Mexico

77

field accompaniments  
and international  
observation at events,  
activities, and meetings

36

workshops on  
security, protection,  
and advocacy

84

meetings with the  
diplomatic corps,  
the international  
community, and  
Mexican  
authorities

12

support actions for  
accompanied  
organizations (risk  
analyses, advisory  
services/consultancies,  
and advocacy tours)

1

international  
advocacy tour for  
human rights  
defenders

2

communication  
initiatives and  
public events

3

emergency  
activation  
actions within  
our support  
network

**“** *[With PBI's accompaniment] you can truly feel a positive impact. It is the first time I have felt supported at the international level (...) with your accompaniment, it feels like we are operating on another level. The situation is not going to improve immediately, but there is hope that it will. It is of great benefit to us.”*

**Defender from the Yoreme Alliance, Sonora**

**“** *During tense moments, such as demonstrations or marches, PBI's accompaniment is key, because there are international observers and that lowers the level of risk.”*

**Defender from the Peoples' Front in  
Defense of Water and Land – Morelos,  
Puebla, Tlaxcala**

**“** *Windows open in dialogue processes. PBI's accompaniment has been important, because many times we are on our own.”*

**Defender from the Peoples' Front in  
Defense of Water and Land – Morelos,  
Puebla, Tlaxcala**

**“** *PBI plays a role in building connections with an international support network. Their accompaniment has a positive effect on our relationships with the authorities.”*

**Defender from the Solidarity Network for  
Human Rights, Michoacán**



# Sonora: Consolidating PBI Mexico's Presence in the State

In 2024, PBI Mexico strengthened its foothold in Sonora through three exploratory missions, building on the groundwork laid in 2023. Each visit was a chance to deepen relationships with organizations, movements, and collectives that defend their territory from both national and foreign megaprojects, fight for the right to self-determination, and confront the state's crisis of disappearances. Dialogue with government authorities was also a key part of the agenda.

Over the course of the year, PBI formalized its accompaniment of two community-led processes: Ejido El Bajío and the Yoreme Alliance.

## **Ejido El Bajío: A Fight Against Open-Pit Mining**

Located in the Sonoran desert between the municipalities of Caborca and Puerto Peñasco, Ejido El Bajío has been at the center of a fierce dispute since 2009, when the mining company Penmont<sup>7</sup> opened the La Soledad-Dipolos mine. Spanning 1,824 hectares, the mine operates as an open-pit extraction site, using highly toxic substances and consuming massive amounts of water in an already arid region. The environmental toll has been devastating — polluting land and water, driving species to extinction, and illegally occupying ejido lands.

In 2013, 67 ejidatarios filed a series of agrarian lawsuits against Penmont for environmental damage. The following year, the Unit 28 Agrarian Tribunal ruled entirely in their favor: the company was ordered to vacate the land, restore it to its original state, return the gold extracted, and compensate the ejidatarios. Yet the ruling triggered a wave of human rights violations: enforced disappearances, killings, internal displacement, arbitrary detentions, intimidation, arson of vehicles, arrest warrants, and defamation in the media<sup>8</sup>.

The ejidatarios of El Bajío are up against one of Mexico's most powerful mining consortia, in a context of entrenched impunity. Although part of their territory is now officially recognized as a Voluntarily Designated Conservation Area<sup>9</sup>, it remains under constant threat.

In 2024, the case reached the UK Parliament, where PBI Mexico and other organizations advocated for a law allowing the UK to sanction companies — or those listed on its stock exchanges — responsible for human rights violations abroad.

PBI continues to stand alongside the ejidatarios through international accompaniment, public observation, and advocacy actions. Their collective resistance remains a powerful example of dignity in the face of dispossession and impunity.

<sup>7</sup> Owned by Fresnillo PLC, which in turn is part of Industrias Peñoles SAB de CV, itself a member of the BAL Group. This group is listed on the London Stock Exchange.

<sup>8</sup> Ejido El Bajío. (May 9, 2023). Official statement from the Ejidal Commissariat of Ejido El Bajío regarding articles published by the newspaper El Universal. Ejido El Bajío. Retrieved from:

<https://ejidoelbajio.mx/2023/05/09/postura-oficial-del-comisariado-ejidal-del-ejido-el-bajio-ante-notas-publicadas-por-el-diario-el-universal/>

<sup>9</sup> A Voluntarily Designated Conservation Area (ADVC) is a legal framework that allows ejidos, communities, or private landowners to voluntarily set aside part of their land for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, regulating its use in accordance with the General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection.



Defender from Ejido El Bajío accompanied by a PBI Mexico field volunteer, Sonora

### **The Yoreme Alliance: Defending Territory, Water, and Culture**

La Alianza Yoreme está conformada por los pueblos de Buaysiacobe, CohThe Yoreme Alliance brings together the communities of Buaysiacobe, Cohuirimpo, Bachoco El Alto, and Masiacahui, located in the coastal area between the Mayo and Fuerte rivers. From this territory, Yoreme communities defend their right to self-determination, their land and water, and their native language, Yoremnokki.

Their struggle is rooted in a long history of dispossession and structural violence. The Mayo River — a lifeline for the Yoreme — has been concessioned for decades for agricultural and water management projects, without benefiting the Indigenous communities. Today, the river is almost dry.

The Alliance was born out of efforts to defend territory and Indigenous self-determination. In 2019, the communities of Bachoco El Alto, Buaysiacobe, and Cohuirimpo participated in a federal government-led diagnosis that involved recognized community leaders and assemblies. This process gave rise to the Mayo-Yoreme Justice Plan, coordinated by the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) and the Sonora state government. It promised

to restore the Mayo River, ensure access to water, and resolve agrarian disputes, among other commitments. But the four assemblies saw little progress. In response, they issued a statement announcing the formation of the Yoreme Alliance, composed of “Assemblies for the Defense of Territory, Culture, and the Yoremnokki Language.”

Since then, the Alliance has continued its tradition of ancestral agreements to defend territory, identity, and language. It has adopted the motto of the Indigenous Government of Cohuirimpo: “For the rescue of the truth of our ancestors and the truth of our present” — because, for the Yoreme, defending their territory is defending their very body and soul.

For taking a stand in defense of their rights, land, water, and cultural identity, members of the Alliance have endured threats, intimidation, and attacks. The organized dispossession of their land has been compounded by cultural violence — including the burning of traditional ramadas in Masiacahui and Cohuirimpo in August and December 2023, destroying the assemblies’ ceremonial and political centers.

Since 2024, PBI Mexico has formalized its accompaniment of the Alliance, holding observation visits, listening sessions with community assemblies, and advocacy actions to highlight their work. Their collective efforts are essential to protecting ancestral territory, preserving cultural identity, and exercising the right to self-determination.







## Search Collectives in Sonora: An Unrelenting Pursuit

Alongside its accompaniment of Ejido El Bajío and the Yoreme Alliance, PBI worked closely in 2024 with search collectives in both northern and southern Sonora. Four workshops and two advisory meetings on comprehensive security and protection were held. These efforts aim to identify the specific risks faced by the collectives and develop tailored strategies to address them.

The main threats include criminalization, intimidation, attacks, killings, and the inherent dangers of searching for the disappeared in areas controlled by organized crime. These are compounded by stalled investigations, poor coordination with authorities, and limited access to justice — all of which generate frustration, uncertainty, and re-victimization.



PBI leading a security workshop for the Mothers Searching Collective in Sonora, June 2024

## Looking Ahead to 2025

In 2025, PBI Mexico will continue shining a light on the work of human rights defenders in Sonora through international accompaniment, capacity-building, and political advocacy. We reaffirm our commitment to those who, in one of the most challenging contexts in the country, defend life, memory, and territory.



Mural at the Buaysiacobe Indigenous School, Sonora



# Michoacán and Oaxaca: High-Risk Territories for Human Rights Defenders

In Mexico, the situation for human rights defenders remains alarming, especially for those who fight to protect land and the environment. The risks they face cannot be separated from their work: these defenders are targeted with threats, harassment, and even enforced disappearance, all within a broader context of impunity.

In 2024, much of PBI's work in these states focused on accompanying the relatives of disappeared persons. In addition to the pain of searching for their loved ones, families often encounter re-victimizing attitudes from authorities, which obstructs progress in official investigations and the realization of their rights to truth and justice.

One of the most alarming examples of social conflict and violence linked to the imposition of extractive projects was the disappearance of José Gabriel Pelayo Zalgado, a Nahua environmental defender, on March 19, 2024. He vanished while traveling from his community, Coahuayula, to the municipality of Coalcomán. PBI has been monitoring this case since it began accompanying the Red Solidaria de Derechos Humanos (RSDH – Human Rights Solidarity Network). Pelayo's disappearance occurred in a region of the coast marked by generalized violence and a documented pattern of enforced disappearances of human rights defenders, including the cases of Antonio Díaz Valencia, Ricardo Arturo Lagunes, and Eustacio Alcalá Díaz.

Sadly, these violent patterns are not limited to Michoacán. In April 2024, PBI began accompanying the Comité de Familiares de Detenidos



Accompaniment during a demonstration by the RSDH in Michoacán.

Desaparecidos Hasta Encontrarlos (“Until We Find Them” Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared) in Mexico. On May 25, 2007, in Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Edmundo Reyes Amaya and Gabriel Alberto Cruz Sánchez were disappeared after being detained by members of the Mexican Army (SEDENA) and the State's General Directorate of Public Security. Following their detention and disappearance, family members searched hospitals, official detention centers, and even morgues, without finding any answers.

In the absence of results, the families created the “Hasta Encontrarlos” Committee. Their main goals are to demand the return of detained and disappeared persons alive, provide support to families of victims of enforced disappearance, and carry out actions of denunciation, awareness-raising, and public education on the issue in Mexico.

The case is emblematic because it set a key precedent in ensuring the victims' rights to truth and justice. In 2022, Mexico's Supreme Court issued a ruling (Amparo en revisión 51/2020) ordering the creation of a Special Search Commission with a multidisciplinary and inter-institutional mandate to take all necessary actions to locate Edmundo and Gabriel. The Commission is composed of the Attorney General's Office, the National Search Commission, the Ministry of the Interior, the Executive Commission for Victim Assistance, the Ministry of Defense (which has yet to participate), Oaxaca state authorities (also absent to date), as well as the families, their legal representatives, accompanying organizations such as the Comité Cerezo México and the Frente Nacional de Lucha por el Socialismo, and the Office in Mexico of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. This Commission represents a decisive step on the path to justice.

Both the defenders from the RSDH and the "Hasta Encontrarlos" Committee have faced serious risks as a result of their work. Over the

past year, PBI has been physically present during prospecting activities, peaceful actions demanding justice, and advocacy with authorities. For PBI and the communities we accompany, it is essential that investigations into cases of enforced disappearance consider all aspects related to the victims' legitimate human rights work, and that they be addressed with a comprehensive human rights approach.

PBI will continue to shed light on the work of those who, through their commitment, expose the lack of protection and guarantees for human rights defenders in Mexico. We reaffirm our accompaniment so they can carry out their vital work without fear of reprisals.



Accompaniment to the "Hasta Encontrarlos" Committee during a search prospecting activity in Oaxaca.



# Defending Land Against Megaprojects: Community Accompaniment and Resistance

Across Latin America, defending land and the environment remains a significant challenge, particularly for Indigenous communities seeking to exercise their right to self-determination. In Mexico, this work takes place in a complex context, where the expansion of extractive and industrial projects often clashes with local realities and can generate social, environmental, and cultural impacts<sup>10</sup>. In many cases, these projects are perceived by communities as disconnected from their needs and priorities, sparking grassroots organizing to defend their rights and ways of life.

Since 2020, PBI Mexico has accompanied the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua – Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala (FPD-TA-MPT), a coalition of Nahuatl communities that, since 2012, has led a peaceful resistance to defend land and the environment. Over the years, the Frente has become a key actor in coordinating collective processes to assert community rights, while facing stigmatization, harassment, and threats to its members' safety<sup>11</sup>.

10 Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA). (2024). Report on the Situation of Environmental Human Rights Defenders in Mexico 2024. Retrieved from. <https://cemda.org.mx/informedefensores2024/>

11 Amnesty International Mexico. (n.d.). Protesting Is Not a Crime. Retrieved from <https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/index.php/campana-protestar-no-es-un-crimen/>; Front Line Defenders. (2023, October 2). New intimidating messages against woman human rights defender Miryam Vargas Teutle. Retrieved from <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/es/case/new-intimidating-messages-against-woman-human-rights-defender-miryam-vargas-teutle>; International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Peace Brigades International – Mexico Project, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Front Line Defenders, and other organizations. (2022, November 29). Mexico: Concern over harassment, surveillance, and possible attempted murder of human rights defender Juan Carlos Flores Solís. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). Retrieved from <https://www.fidh.org/es/region/americas/mexico/mexico-intento-de-homicidio-del-defensor-de-derechos-humanos-juan>



Human rights defenders from the FPD-TA-MPT during a demonstration and press conference in Puebla, May 2024

On April 30, 2024, the situation reached a critical point when state and municipal police forces attempted to reopen access to the landfill. The operation included the firing of live ammunition, physical assaults on demonstrators, the destruction of vehicles, and raids on the homes of people linked to the movement. These events were documented by organizations such as Amnesty International, which raised concerns over the excessive use of force and urged authorities to guarantee the right to peaceful protest; the *Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos "Todos los Derechos para Todas y Todos"* (Red TDT), which denounced arbitrary detentions and acts of criminalization; and Front Line Defenders, which emphasized the need to protect land defenders in high-risk contexts<sup>12</sup>.

PBI has maintained an active presence in the area, providing international accompaniment to members of the FPDTA-MPT through on-the-ground observation, ongoing monitoring of their security situation, and advocacy with authorities at multiple levels. This accompaniment aims to ensure that human rights defenders can continue their work with greater recognition, visibility, and protection.

12 Amnesty International Mexico. (2024, May 3). Amnesty International expresses concern over excessive use of force against people peacefully opposing a landfill in San Andrés Cholula, Puebla. Retrieved from <https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/index.php/amnistia-internacional-expresa-su-preocupacion-por-el-uso-excesivo-de-la-fuerza-contrara-personas-que-se-oponen-pacificamente-a-un-relleno-sanitario-en-san-andres-cholula-puebla/>





# Strengthening Human Rights Defense from the Local to the Global: PBI Mexico's International Advocacy Work

In today's international context—where human rights frameworks are under pressure and violence is intensifying in various parts of the world—it is more urgent than ever to bring visibility to the resistance and alternatives emerging from local territories. At PBI Mexico, we strongly believe in the importance of amplifying the voices of human rights defenders, building bridges between their local realities and international decision-making spaces. Our advocacy aims not only to denounce violations, but also to secure recognition of the legitimacy of defenders' work and to promote their comprehensive protection.

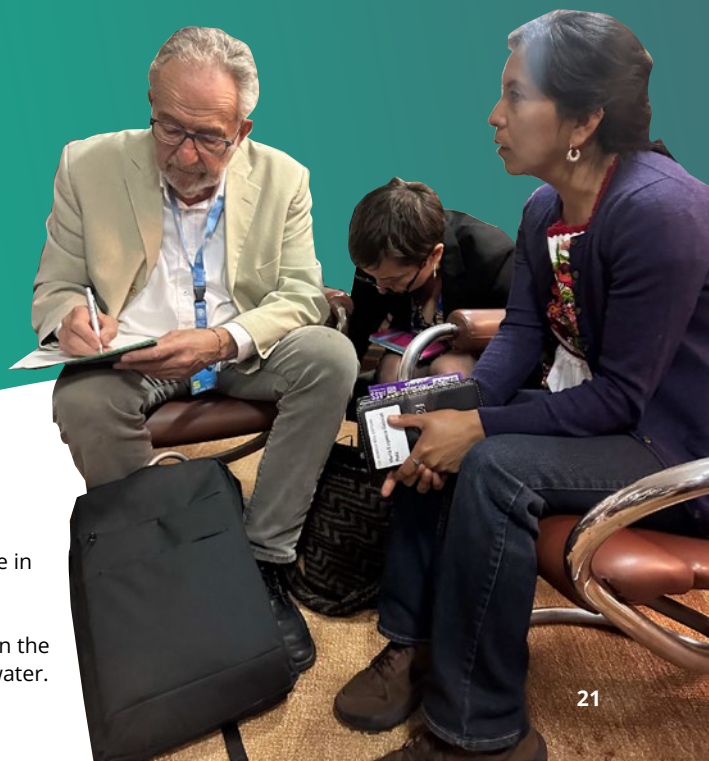
In 2024, we accompanied **María Eugenia Gabriel Ruiz**, a woman from the Purhépecha community of Comachuén in Michoacán and a member of the Red Solidaria de Derechos Humanos (RSDH), on an advocacy tour across several European countries. Together with other RSDH members, María Eugenia works to strengthen community networks based on the principles of autonomy and self-determination, with an intersectional and feminist approach.

During the tour, she met with political and human rights actors to share the realities faced by defenders in Michoacán, the shortcomings of institutional protection mechanisms, and the impacts that these aggressions have on their daily lives and community work. She also brought attention to emblematic cases such as the murder of defender **Eustacio Alcalá "Tacho"** and the disappearance of **José Gabriel Pelayo Zalgado**, as well as to the resistance against extractive and agroindustrial megaprojects imposed without prior consultation—often



María Eugenia Gabriel Ruiz speaking about the challenges of human rights defense in Michoacán during the Conference for Human Rights in Mexico, Germany.

María Eugenia Gabriel Ruiz in dialogue with UN Special Rapporteur Pedro Arrojo on the challenges and impacts that communities in Michoacán face regarding access to water.



in contexts marked by violence and the presence of organized crime.

The tour also created opportunities to strengthen networks with international organizations and movements, fostering an exchange of knowledge, strategies, and best practices to confront common challenges.

PBI Mexico's advocacy is not limited to international spaces. We also encourage key actors present in Mexico to engage directly with communities, gaining firsthand knowledge of their contexts, struggles, and proposals. We believe that this closeness enables more respectful, effective, and supportive forms of engagement.

In 2024, we accompanied the Embassy of Finland on a visit to the community of Santa María Zacatepec, in the municipality of Juan C. Bonilla, Puebla. This community has a long history of defending water, land, territory, and the environment, with notable participation in struggles such as the defense of the Metlapanapa River, opposition to the Proyecto Integral Morelos, and resistance against the Calpan landfill.

These efforts have had direct consequences for several community members. One example is Alejandro Torres, who was criminalized for taking part in a peaceful protest. In 2023, he stood trial and was acquitted for lack of evidence. Throughout this process, PBI attended hearings as international observers, alongside other organizations and the Finnish Embassy. This led to an ongoing relationship of dialogue and support between the embassy and Alejandro as part of the #ProtejamosSusVoces initiative.

The October 2024 visit deepened this accompaniment. Finnish diplomatic representatives and PBI team members visited Radio Zacate-

pec, a community media outlet where Alejandro is an active contributor. The station not only reports on local and state issues, but also amplifies the voices of communities and movements defending water and the rights of Indigenous peoples in the Cholulteca region and beyond. This visit aimed to publicly support Alejandro's work, highlight his daily efforts, and strengthen the commitment of the international community to protecting human rights defenders.

PBI Mexico's international advocacy is grounded in the belief that active solidarity and international accompaniment can help create safer and more enabling environments for human rights defense. Whether by facilitating direct dialogue with key actors, promoting visits by diplomatic representatives to communities, or supporting defenders' international advocacy tours, we work to ensure their voices are not only heard, but also lead to tangible change.

At a time when human rights defense faces unprecedented threats, reinforcing these global connections—rooted in respect, listening, and ethical accompaniment—is more essential than ever.



Accompaniment during the visit of the Finnish Embassy in Mexico to Radio Zacatepec, Puebla

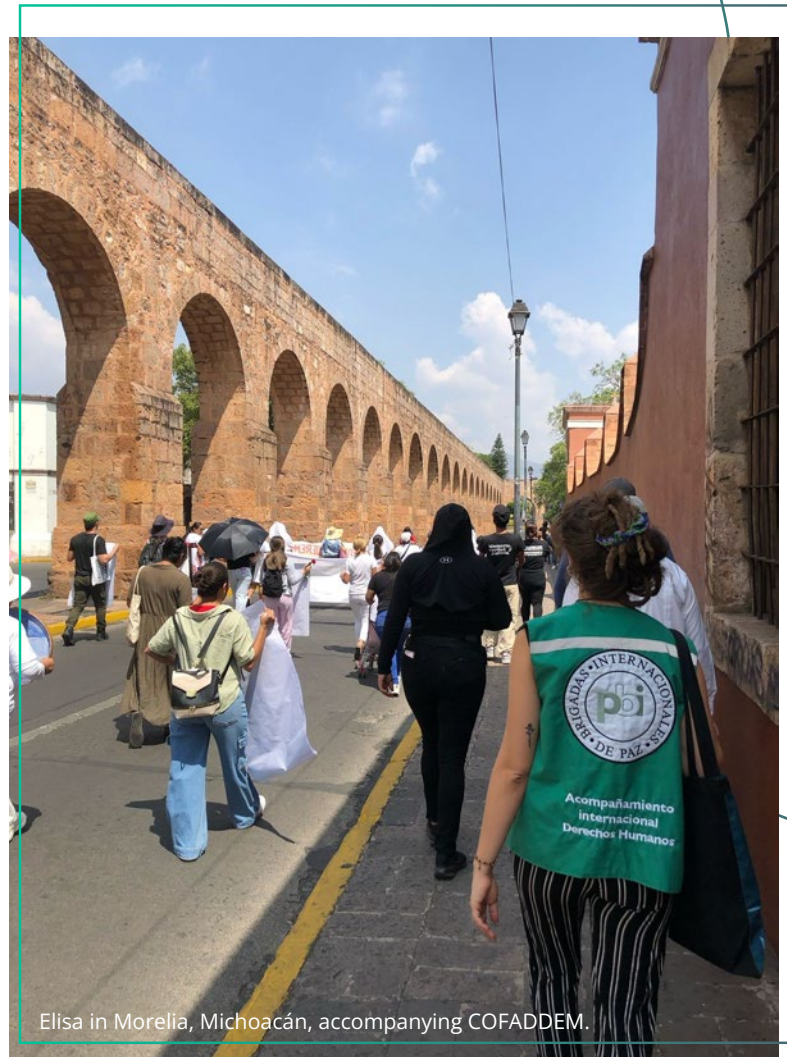


## Being a Field Volunteer with PBI Mexico. Testimony by Elisa Keustermans

Behind every act of international accompaniment are committed individuals who live the experience of being field volunteers with intensity, empathy, and conviction. Elisa is one of them. For 15 months—longer than usual—she was part of PBI Mexico's field team, voluntarily extending her stay out of a desire to keep learning, to deepen her understanding of human rights struggles, and to strengthen the bonds formed within the project.

In this interview, Elisa generously shares what this experience has meant to her: the lessons, the challenges, the connections built, and the transformative power of accompaniment.

Her words inspire us and remind us that another way of doing solidarity is possible. Her testimony reflects the deep human impact of international accompaniment and the collective strength that grows out of the everyday work of defending human rights.



Elisa in Morelia, Michoacán, accompanying COFADDEM.

## *How would you sum up your year as a field volunteer in the MEP?*

In one word, my year was intense: being a volunteer in PBI's field team is a unique experience. Living, working, and sharing everything with the same group of people creates intense, yet incredibly strong, bonds—something I find truly beautiful. The intensity of the journey, full of very different experiences in a short time, is what makes it so enriching, inspiring, and full of new personal and collective learnings. It was a lot of work, a lot of responsibility, many stressful and tense moments, but also plenty of laughter, kindness, and release shared with everyone you meet along the way.

## *What are you taking with you?*

I take with me a lot of confidence in myself and in my abilities, thanks to the many new experiences I've lived here. They shaped me, and I expanded my personal toolkit for navigating moments of doubt. I leave with a deep understanding of the Mexican context, experienced from within, and I'm truly grateful for the openness of the organizations and human rights defenders toward us—for trusting us, allowing us in, and sharing their struggles with us. Alongside professional achievements, I take lifelong friends who truly understand who I am, where I want to go, and how I see the world.

## *What are you leaving behind in the MEP?*

I leave behind my affection for my teammates, for the defenders we worked with, for the friendships I built in Cuernavaca, and for the magical country, that is Mexico. I also hope to leave a sense of collective care rooted in empathy, to keep strengthening the struggles, the resistance, and the feeling of connection that drives us forward.

## *What is the impact of our work? How would you explain what PBI does and how it operates?*

Through our accompaniment work and international presence, the goal is to expand the support networks available to organizations and defenders, increase the political cost of aggressors' actions, and broaden the operating space for defenders—focusing on their safety before, during, and after their activities. While PBI's impact is not always easy to measure, because it is about creating broader conditions through specific actions, it can be seen across the different states where we work. The impact lies in what PBI aims to provide and leave behind during and after accompaniment: tools for holistic security, strategies for advocacy at national and international levels, and a wider support network. Our work is defined by its temporality—since our aim is not to accompany forever, avoiding dependency, and instead focusing on long-term impact.

PBI acts as a bridge between the international community and grassroots organizations and collectives. It helps build a strong network that defenders can turn to in order to strengthen their internal security and protection strategies or gain support from international institutions and organizations.



*What is the relationship like with human rights defenders (HRDs)?*

What's interesting is that the relationship with HRDs depends on the context and the organization, since we always work at their request. In general, it's a relationship built on deep trust—it's close, honest, and professional. This solid foundation allows us to collaborate, stay responsive to their needs, and share strategies to expand the space for their work and support them where we can.

*What were your challenges?  
What have you learned?*

My personal challenges were linked to the fast-paced rhythm of work this year, which made it hard to manage time and energy well. Finding and protecting time for myself, prioritizing self-care, and building a support network outside of PBI to disconnect from time to time is not always easy in the "PBI life." At the project level, the challenge was finding the right balance between strategic planning and fieldwork, which usually demands more flexibility and quick responses.

Among my biggest learnings is the knowledge gained about the many ways people resist and organize in their struggles. It's incredibly inspiring to collaborate with defenders who teach you so much about their context and invite you to be part of it. Also, the roles and responsibilities of a field volunteer are so varied that you develop many new skills—and feel supported throughout that process..



Elisa accompanying the Red Solidaria de Derechos Humanos in Morelia, Michoacán.

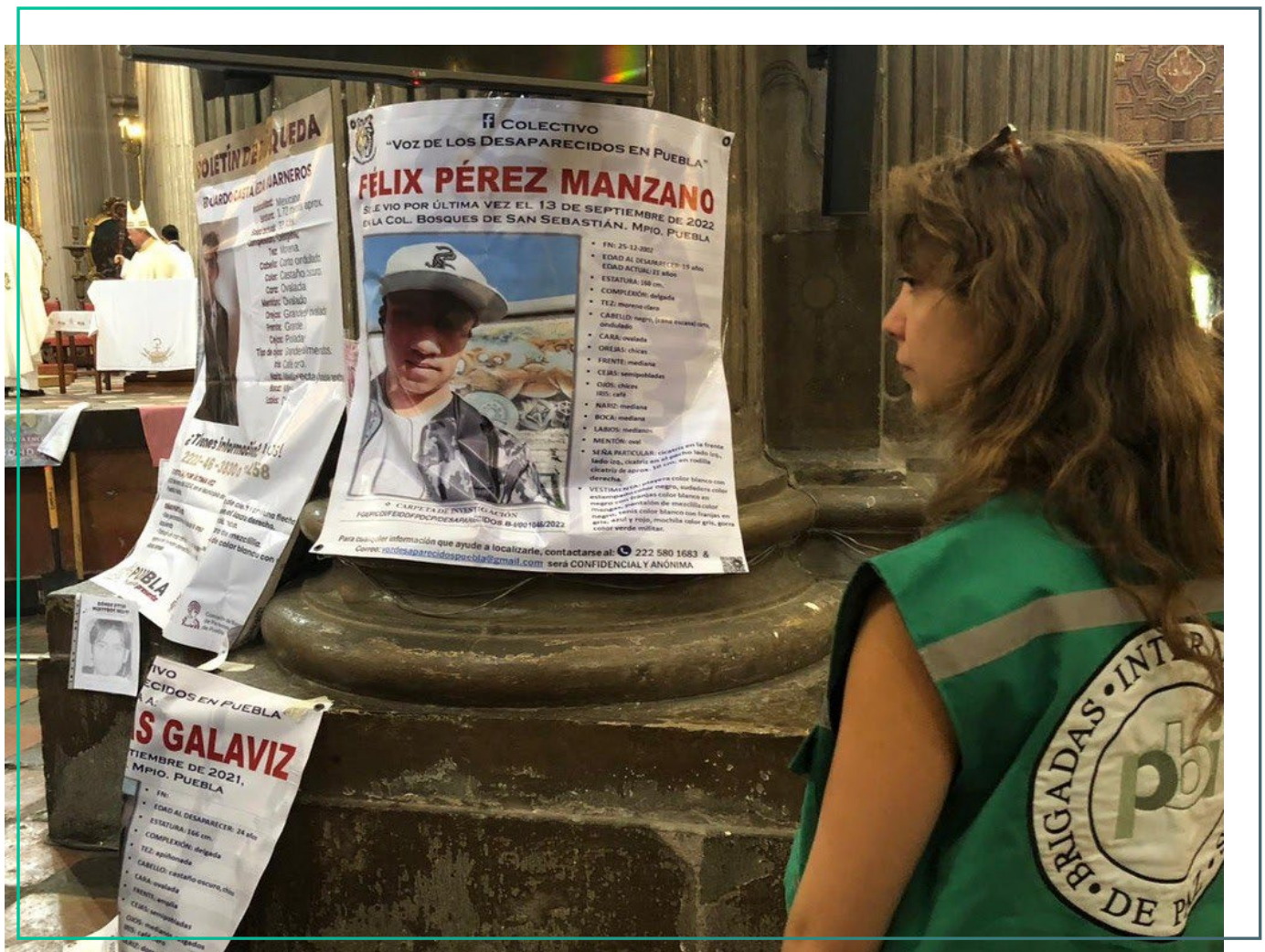
## Why did you decide to stay longer?

I stayed longer at PBI Mexico because I still had so much curiosity and motivation to be part of the project—to help develop strategies, continue exploring how to accompany defenders, deepen my understanding of the context and their struggles, and feel connected to the broader human rights movement and the many allies I met along the way. That's where I found the strength to keep going.

Also, the atmosphere in the volunteer house, the friendships, and the bonds we built within and beyond PBI are unforgettable and add immense value to the professional side.

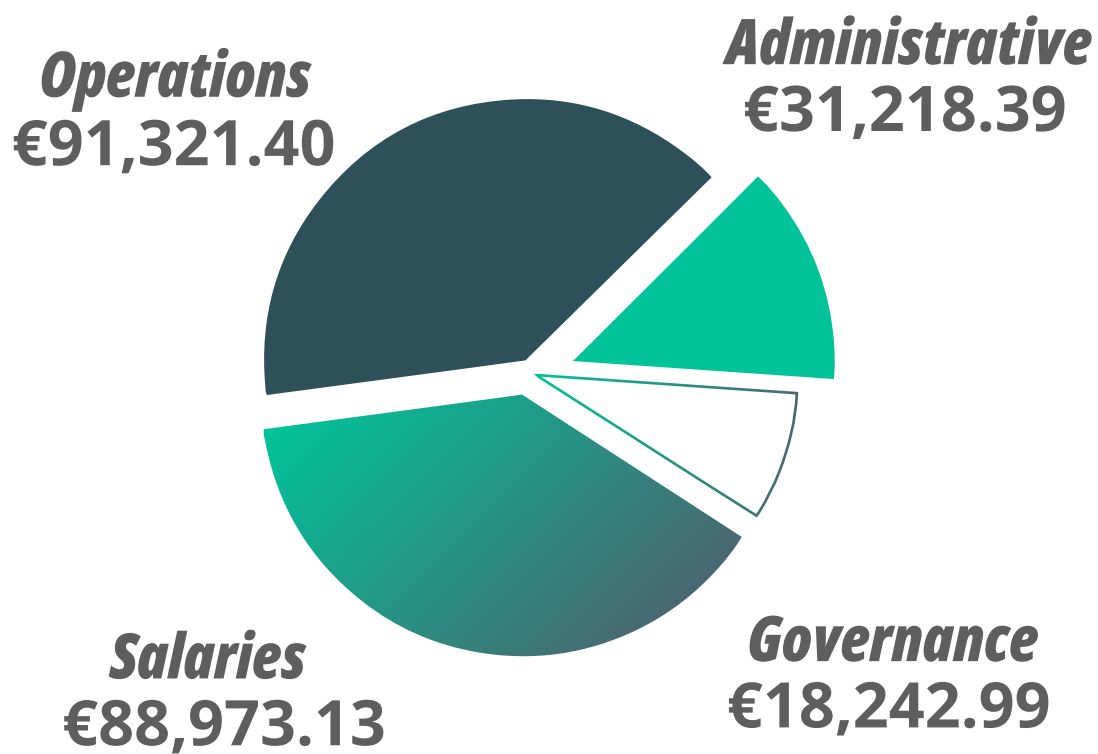
## What do field volunteers bring to the project?

Field volunteers bring a strategic perspective grounded in operational, on-the-ground realities, which is essential for adapting and moving the project forward in a changing environment. They are also key because of their ongoing availability and presence for HRDs, which builds a strong foundation of trust. This connection to local struggles expands our vision and prevents an overly internationalized projection of the work.



Elisa during an accompaniment activity in Puebla.

## ***Expenses***



***Total Expenses***  
**€229,755.91**



Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non-governmental organization with 40 years of experience in international accompaniment and a permanent presence in Mexico since 2000. PBI's mission is to help protect the working space of individuals and organizations that promote human rights through non-violent means and face repression for their work. Acting only at the request of local organizations, PBI does not seek to replace Mexican initiatives that promote respect for human rights; rather, it supports them through its presence.

PBI carries out regular visits to conflict areas, shares information, and engages in dialogue with civilian and military authorities, as well as with human rights organizations and other civil society actors in Mexico. To ensure international attention, PBI maintains dialogue with the diplomatic community and inter-governmental bodies, disseminates information, and seeks external support to guarantee the safety of human rights defenders in Mexico. PBI's aim is to help create the conditions necessary for defenders to continue their work safely.

*For more information about PBI's work in Mexico:*

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