15 years in Mexico for the Right to Defend

Annual Report 2015
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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 that would enable resolution 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 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 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.

"Human rights are and should be recognized above all contexts. They are our horizon and our most valuable common ground."
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 can 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 favorably 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 72 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 156 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”.
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

**Speaking Tours**
- Europe: 2
- North America: 1

**Physical Presence**

**Accompanied Organisations and Defenders**
- Total: 63
- Meetings: 151

**Other NGOs and INGOs**
- Accompaniments: 3
- Meetings: 157

**Roundtables, Events and Demonstrations**
- Events facilitated by PBI: 37
- Events observed by PBI: 59

**Consultancies in Security, Protection and Advocacy**

**Workshops and Consultancies**
- Security Workshops: 8
- Consultancies: 15
- Advocacy Workshops: 2
- Total: 25

**Direct Beneficiaries**
- Total: 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: 4,665

**Publications**
- Interviews: 14
- Thematic publications: 4
- Videos: 8
- Total: 26
Tita Radilla
How one woman transformed the Mexican legal system

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 Part (FEMOSPP) in 2001. This office was devised not only to the Dirty War, but also to the repression during the military regime, as the paradigmatic August Manzur Mancera case that resulted in the killing of three peasants. The FEMOSPP, despite having contributed to a fundamental reorganization of the Mexican historical truth in social science, has not been given any recognition, a decision that was considered by its former head as “criminal negligence”.

Implications of the search for truth and justice

“Those are moments when feel more at peace because we don’t know what the intentions of the people responsible for the disappearance of our relatives and friends is. Or we don’t know where they are. But also when you leave the family and don’t stay true with them, there are important moments when 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, ‘Don’t think about this. Thinking about this and listening to the comments of our relatives, suggesting that we take precautions and not express ourselves, makes me feel a lot worse.’ [...] There is a lot of fear, many relatives say that now with drug-trafficking and all the violence that can attack us and blame other people. A lot of communities say that we have to be very careful because they believe something like this can happen. ‘We know there are people that don’t appear on the rules’ and won’t more exactly what happened: We have no trace of them, they are lost.”

Tita’s tireless struggle

Thus, for Tita, what was initially a struggle to find her father personally extended to a search for all those disappeared during the Dirty War, and later to the political disappearances of the 80s. “When investigating Rosendo’s whereabouts, information about other persons should come out because he disappeared during a period of repression during which several persons disappeared. [...] The goal is not to find only Rosendo, but all of them.”

To the Triumph of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared, and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico, emerged on the 3 October, 1989 due to the need to find an organized answer to our missing relatives in order to together take full advantage of the redress in the damages that we have; some are executions, direct victims, but the vast majority are disappearances. Sometimes are entire families in our movement, since we started a long time ago and we, the elders, have brought back our grandchildren and godparents.”

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

“My dad’s case was brought before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in May 2002, and at the same time, we were negotiating, domestically, before the prosecutor’s office. The Commission considered that ‘more than 40 years after the events, there is total impunity because the State has not criminally punished the persons responsible for these events without specific appropriate reparation for the relatives’ and that reason because this case was brought before the Court.

“We did not agree to leave it in the Commission because we wanted the case to help to the relatives.” Then, some days after PBI organized a promotional for the Titita London, “symposium” of November 2011, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (AMICHR) 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 period. [...] "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 Mexican Human Rights Commission (COMDEHRED) presented the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in 1999, who requested that Mexico bring its case to the IDH. As a result, the Mexican State was referred to the IACHR. The Mexican State finally admitted the disappearances and the fact of the death of Rosendo Radilla. The Mexican State agreed to present the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), which will rule on the merits of the case.

In 1996 we managed to locate several people who had been arrested and temporarily disappeared. They had been tortured, but at least we found them alive.”

“This is what we want to achieve: that all those cases that were left behind and the disappeared are recognized. I know we won’t be 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 investigate so we can know what happened with our missing relatives. This is what AFCAMP members have requested for many years, to know what happened, where they are, and that they are returned to their families.”

The first anniversary of Tita’s disappearance was celebrated on March 2, 2011. PBI Mexico

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

[Image of Tita signing her photo on PBI’s book on Women Human Rights Defenders “Dignas” © PBI Mexico]

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Since its arrival in Mexico, PBI has maintained a close relationship with CSOs in the state of Oaxaca. In 2000, PBI took part in the national consultation on the election process in the country. Later, the Oaxacan human rights activist Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño (Barca),2 the Committee for Integral Defence of Human Rights Cabildo (Codigo),4 the Outlaw stirring the Rebel (Barca) and the Committee for Integral Defence of Human Rights in Oaxaca (CIDIHO)3, supported the requests from relatives and several Mexican CSOs to extend the mandate of the Interdisciplinary Group of Experts for the Ayotzinapa case in 2015.

In April 2015, the Migrant “Via Crucis” – a march of Via Crucis against the wall and the increasingly restrictive immigration policies in the United States – triggered a heavy deployment of public security forces, which led to an alarming and completely failed international cooperation to avoid multiplying the risks associated with the situation of the migrant people in Mexico. Approximately 200 Central American migrants from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, embarked on the “Via Crucis” in order to reach the United States. Despite this, the arrival of the migrants was stopped in Mexico and, in November 2013, the Mexican Interior Ministry issued an order for their deportation to their countries of origin. Formal residents in Mexico, the migrants refused to depart and continued their journey to the United States. For this reason, PBI again advocated for the protection of the migrants’ rights and was involved in several meetings with the authorities to promote the respect of fundamental human rights. At the request of Father Solalinde, PBI accompanied the march and made contacts with the authorities and the media present. At the moment of the authorities’ decision to return the migrants to their countries of origin, PBI was present and made contacts with the authorities present. In addition, Alberto Donís – the Coordinator of the Committee for Integral Defence of Human Rights in Oaxaca (CIDIHO)4 – led the outburst of the “Via Crucis” and made contacts with the authorities present. At the moment of the authorities’ decision to return the migrants to their countries of origin, PBI was present and made contacts with the authorities present.

1. Lienzo recibido en 2007 por la colectividad de Oaxaca. In 2010, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) issued a “sentence” in favor of Irvis and Valentín that included some reforms to the Mexican Constitution that limited the jurisdiction of the authorities in human rights cases. In the case of the “Barca” and other similar cases, the IACtHR ordered the Mexican authorities to provide a statement explaining what had happened and to adopt the necessary measures to prevent similar situations in the future. In the case of PBI, the statement was called “PBI has not played a very important role in helping them to get their lives back”. Despite the efforts of the authorities, PBI has continued to monitor the situation and to request the implementation of the necessary steps to ensure the respect of human rights in Mexico.

2. The OHCHR is established in Mexico and has a presence in the country. In 2002, PBI accompanied the NAISD to Oaxaca, where it met with the authorities and the media present. The OHCHR in Mexico supports PBI in its work and provides information and support to the organization. In 2005, PBI accompanied the NAISD to Oaxaca, where it met with the authorities and the media present. The OHCHR in Mexico supports PBI in its work and provides information and support to the organization.

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Two years of PBI in the north:

We are in sync

Disappearances

According to official data, the whereabouts of more than 28,000 members of the Mexican population are unknown. The issue 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 from the issue of disappearances, in this framework, the team has accompanied defendants during police, forensic, hearings, meetings and review boards in cases of missing persons. PBI volunteers attended a regional encounter about disappearances in northern Mexico where a protocol for a General Law on disappearances was drafted, which includes institutional changes. This is part of 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 documentation. 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 had occurred.

Through its accompaniment to Fray Juan de la Lanzas PBI provides support to United for the disappeared in Chihuahua (FUNDID), which has conducted important initiatives at state level, such as the Programme of Atention to the Disappeared People (PROPAD). The UN consultations, a visit of the Mexican human rights commission on the subject of disappearances and the visit of the government of Chihuahua to Paso del Norte in order for them to have an acknowledgment of the issue by the state government. With the aim of raising awareness of the issue of disappearances and strengthening the support networks of the defendants’ organisation, PBI met with the Fray Juan de la Lanzas Centre for Human Rights (Fray Juan de la Lanzas) and the PBI received a letter from the local authorities of sierra Tarahumara. With this commitment in mind, PBI launched the “War on drugs the “.

Migration

“This Mexican migrant human rights centre at the northern border face a permanent situation of insecurity according to an initiative by the PBI that documented ten assaults against migrants to Porto del Norte between June and June, indeed, both Juan Caracul and the Saltole Migrant Shelter have suffered attacks, amongst them threats, defamation in the media, and beatings.

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 parliament) (European parliament) (European parliament) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) (Spanish) 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PBI has assumed an important role in the collective lobbying process for the creation of a National 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 at international level to support the initiative. With the approval in June of the Law on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and victims, PBI focuses towards monitoring its implementation. In July, the CSO Space published a position paper on the implementation of said mechanism. At the same time, PBI brought recommendations on implementation to bilateral and international bodies, focusing on the recently appointed Inter-American Human Rights, Roberto Camp Casares, and the Head of the Human Rights Unit, Saoine Hennessy.

In 2010, with the new Inter-American 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 worked on the creation of the Third Unit devoted to Prevention, Monitoring and Analysis: an issue that has gone from being a small piece of the larger work to impact. Also in October, the first meeting between the Third Unit and civil society was held, with PBI’s participation.

On numerous occasions, PBI has met with the Assistant Attorney General for Human Rights to express deep concerns over the prevalent impunity of attacks against HRDs. At the same time, throughout its 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 involve around these issues in 2010.

S

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 2010 – 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 the work involves.

At the beginning of 2010, 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 Jiri Jaakkola, European politicians, in organizing a scheduled visit to Mexico City and Guasac, following the murders of human rights defenders Betty Jaakob and Jiri Jaakkola in 2010. One conclusion from the visit was the lack of proper investigation into the cases.

At the end of the year, PBI invited representatives from new embassies to a breakfast to share its analysis of the current 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 OM mandate and the fight against impunity.

Raising international awareness and strengthening support networks

In February 2010, PBI supported the European tour of a delegation of representatives from European chambers of commerce and various CSOs, among them Tactoinitialize, which visited Guerrero during a review of Mexico before the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The visit started in Mexico City and ended in Guerrero. Along the way, PBI met with the European Parliament (EP), the European External Action Service, and various NGOs. At the Subcommission on Human Rights (OHCHR), there was a space reserved for an exchange of opinions during which family members presented their testimony. PBI also invited Fran de la Latorre to 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 ACHR and international NGOs. During the tour, Fran de la Latorre spoke about the cases of disappearances that are currently devastating Mexico and the impunity that persists in these cases.

In October, PBI invited the Sahto Migrant Shelter to speak on tour in Europe, visiting five countries and meeting with representatives of governments, the EP, the UN, and European civil society. On the visit to Ireland, the Sahto Migrant Shelter was recognized for its work by the Minister of Justice. 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 in the second half of 2010.

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. This is particularly true in 2010, 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 story tells the stories of defenders in Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela; and follows a period of review of the Working Party on Human Rights and Business (OHCHR) of the Council of the EU in order to discuss the mechanisms to protect human rights defenders that work in 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 Network, 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 2010, the BKN 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 ACHR. As a result of this lobbying, in September 2010, the Mexican government called the first meeting of a Working Group made up of serious parties from the government, civil society and some international chambers of commerce; amongst others, to discuss the implementation of the Guiding Principles in Mexico.

In addition, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights considered the advice of the 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 mobilizations 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.

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Building bridges for dialogue

One of the main tools to guarantee the involvement of embassies in the strengthening of the security situation of human rights defenders are the 

Network and networking

The guidelines set several suggestions to improve the situation of human rights defenders in different contexts such as to support public awareness, disseminate among human rights defenders, and to foster a different culture that promotes respect for human rights in the region. The recommendations are available on the PBI website and can be requested directly from the organization.

Sustainable change

On occasion of a visit of a European Union delegation to Chihuahua, PBI facilitated contacts with civil society organizations in the city in order to give them 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 delegations to emphasize the protection of human rights defenders. The government, on the other hand, welcomed the visit and assured PBI that it will continue to work on human rights protection.

Within this framework, PBI participates in the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) space and in the Network of Civil Society Organizations, which, in June, published a report on the implementation of EU mechanisms. The work at the national level is currently being carried out by the civil society organizations and the Embassies to protect, support, and influence changes in practices that are deeply rooted in the institutional structures and culture.

Within this context, PBI has become a constant in Mexican society and knows how to bring together numerous actors for a dialogue. PBI's experience and expertise in human rights work, especially in Mexico, confirms that the organization has been able to bring together numerous actors for a dialogue, that these persons are aware of their responsibilities and are ready to act.

PBI is one of the most useful organizations for protecting human rights defenders in Mexico, and its work in the country is an important tool for raising awareness and promoting respect for human rights.
The construction and maintenance in 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 Central brothers.

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

Sergi Bach: Once when the police stopped a bus that we were travelling in and the driver, after negotiating, paid the fine in front of all passengers. No one said anything. It was a huge feeling of impotence and it was highly representative, on a small scale, of the silence and the indifference of 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 “hard” in assuming the consequences of challenging corrupt police officers.

Carla Cauetam: 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.

What brought you to PBI?

Sergi Bach: PBI represented an opportunity to leave an office-based environment in London where I was constantly reading about human rights violations, international treaties, laws, etc., but I was aware that I didn’t know the real content 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 modes 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 Mexico, the OPIM and Tlachinolli, HRDs. Their highlighted the criminalization of defenders, report incidents, and were instrumental in the legal protection of defenders.

Ben Leather: I will never forget one of my first contact analyses in Guerrero. The army had gone to a community in the Costa Grande and tortured the population, including young boys recieving electric shocks to their testicles. This was detailed in the newspapers, which were full of stories of violence and atrocities. I told a friend, “It was a night accompaniment because the situation had become too much for me to handle.” I needed to feel that someone else was there with me, and I was not alone. We were the only ones in our group to attend the meeting, but we were not alone because we were part of something bigger.

Manon Yard: No doubt, the most memorable beginning for me was the construction and maintenance in the Costa Grande of a team of volunteers that cooperate, live together and reflect together in order to achieve a greater relevance and impact.

How do you think PBI will face the future?

Sergi Sendra: I imagine that PBI’s role will be more professional. Although there won’t be additional field teams, PBI will monitor several working spaces between NGOs 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 and US authorities to change their 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 a day PBI’s presence will no longer be required in the country. This is the best I can wish for all of them.

What was your most intense moment in PBI?

Sergi Bach: The second week in Mexico City, another volunteer and I were arrested by the police and taken to the police station in Chilpancingo because we had left the “public street” according to the palkoman’s version of the story. The fact that all the neighbours were leaving the street at 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 had to pay a fine next to the expensive jewels.

Ben Leather: I will never forget one of my first contact analyses in Guerrero. The army had gone to a community in the Costa Grande and tortured the population, including young boys recieving electric shocks to their testicles. This was detailed in the newspapers, which were full of stories of violence and atrocities. I told a friend, “It was a night accompaniment because the situation had become too much for me to handle.” I needed to feel that someone else was there with me, and I was not alone. We were the only ones in our group to attend the meeting, but we were not alone because we were part of something bigger.

Marianne Bertrand: The release of the last two Central brothers.

Manon Yard: The example of the defenders we accompany, who constantly fight for the respect of human rights despite all the threats, assaults, frustrations and disappearances constantly remains a greatimpulsion for me.

Ben Leather: I will change 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.

Marianne Bertrand: The example of the defenders we accompany, who constantly fight for the respect of human rights despite all the threats, assaults, frustrations and disappearances constantly remains a greatimpulsion for me.
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, 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.

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**CONSULTANCIES**

**Security Advisories**

**Empowerment towards protection strategies**

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.
### Financial Situation

#### DONORS

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Total income: 427,271 €

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### EXPENDITURE IN MEXICO 2015

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<td>Other expenditure</td>
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Total expenditure: 431,618 €

- Accompaniment to HRDs and Field Presence: 31%
- Strategic Presence and Advocacy: 15%
- Security workshops programme: 4%
- Outreach and Advocacy in Europe and North America: 12%
- General Coordination and Strategy: 13%
- Fundraising, Finance and Administration: 5%
- Governance: 6%
- Project Audits & External Evaluation: 1%
- Other expenditure: 2%
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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mexicopbi