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ANNUAL REPORT **2018**

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PBI Mexico Project Team Members 2018

The people who made up PBI Mexico's team came from 16 countries in Europe and the Americas. Seventy per cent of those involved were volunteers – in the field, as part of the Strategy Committee or in the Training Committee. We would like to extend our profound gratitude for the extraordinary work carried out every day, in order to contribute to the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) in this country. Thank you to each and every team member for their dedication and commitment to PBI Mexico in 2018. The project's work would not be possible without your participation.

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Editorial

2018: a turbulent year for Mexican human rights defenders

2018 has been a challenging year for human rights on an international level, despite hosting the 70th anniversary of the creation of the international legal framework and theory that any human in any part of the world is born with inherent dignity and inalienable rights which should be protected, respected and fulfilled by governments. Many of those defending human rights have been threatened, attacked and undermined, despite the celebration of 20 years of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. PBI remains committed to protecting the space in which human rights defenders continue their arduous work in steadfast conviction that only when this protection is truly guaranteed will peaceful and democratic societies advance across the world.

2018 has been a year of change in Mexico with general elections seeing the first left-wing President elected with an astounding majority, breaking the chain of the Independent Revolutionary Party's (PRI) reign with a 6-year gap filled by the National Alternative Party (PAN). Mexican human rights defenders remain uncertain as to what this change means in terms of their situation of risk, however many are positive that at least on the surface this new government seems more open than previous ones to implement institutional and structural changes to combat the widespread violence sweeping the country and the human rights crisis that has been deepening throughout the past years.

Throughout 2018 Mexico has undergone evaluations by different international mechanisms, including UN Special Rapporteurs and the Universal Periodic Review which takes place every 4 years, all of which have confirmed the structural issues that continue to facilitate the violation of human rights throughout the country, highlighting corruption, impunity, institutionalised discrimination as well as a lack of political will to address the issues at stake. PBI joins the call from other national and international organisations who demand that the government take heed of the conclusions of these evaluations and implement the 2,602 recommendations made towards the Mexican State.

Within this context, PBI has noted that despite change in government, attitudes towards human rights defenders remain skeptical, specifically towards those who defend their land and territory against economic projects. This attitude seems to justify harsh repressive measures against them and the violence they experience in many states of

the Republic. As natural resources become more and more scarce, territorial tensions increase. In 2018 this tension exploded in several areas of the country and manifested itself in attacks against those resisting in their territories and defending their land. In 2017, Global Witness identified Mexico as the third most dangerous country within which to defend the land, territory and environment.

Despite 4 years having past since the disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, the family members of the missing boys are no closer to understanding what happened to them on 26th September 2014. The Mexican government has persisted with its version of the "historic truth" which has been dispelled by several national and international authorities. Lopez Obrador's government has promised to re-open the investigation in the case, and those defending victims of forced disappearance across the country hope this will mean a glimmer of hope in the desperately bleak panorama that the past years have represented, breaking the chain of impunity for cases of forced disappearance.

Despite the many challenges, 2018 has been a year of struggle, of resistance, and of extraordinary bravery from those who, on a daily basis, put their lives at risk to defend human rights. We would like to take this opportunity to recognise the extraordinary role women human rights defenders have played in 2018, pushing forward debates on key issues and rejecting systemic patriarchal violence. Their dignified voices are a beacon of hope for those who believe that change is possible and remain huge inspirations to us at PBI to continue to support human rights defenders as best we can.



Accompaniment to the march commemorating the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, Mexico City ©PBI México

PBI MEXICO IN FIGURES

In 2018, PBI Mexico provided international accompaniment to 14 organisations and two civil society coordination spaces in Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Mexico City.

PBI's accompaniment – which includes physical presence; national and international advocacy; awareness raising; training in security, protection, and the creation and maintenance of support networks; facilitating spaces for dialogue between HRDs and key actors in their protection – benefitted more than

50 Mexico civil-society organisations (CSOs) and 341 HRDs, of whom more than 65% are women human rights defenders (WHRDs). The work of these people and organisations benefits at least 146,351 people, who are thus secondary beneficiaries of PBI Mexico's efforts. This can have a nationwide impact on Mexico's human rights situation.

PHYSICAL PRESENCE

Accompaniment, observation and monitoring **115**

Meetings with Mexican civil society organisations **293**

Emergency and preventive activations **6**

ADVOCACY

Advocacy meetings with Mexican authorities at local, state and federal levels **116**

Advocacy meetings with representatives of the international community (diplomatic corps, foreign governments, parliamentarians, multilateral systems) **104**

Awareness raising through thematic publications, articles, letters, communiqués and monthly bulletins **71**

Participation in events in Europe, North America and Mexico to raise awareness the situation of human rights defenders **17**

TRAINING

Training workshops in security and protection; creation and maintenance of support networks; and analytical spaces **11**

Training of trainers (ToT) **1**

Capacity-building activities **9**

CREATING SPACES FOR DIALOGUE

Organisation and organisational support for international advocacy tours to Europe and North America **7**

Facilitating spaces for dialogue between civil society organisations and key actors in the Mexican government and/or international community **25**



Mexico City, ©PBI Mexico

PBI provided international accompaniment to the following organisations in 2018:

OAXACA:

Committee for the Integral Defence of Human Rights (Código-DH); Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Gender Equality Oaxaca (Consortio Oaxaca); Father Alejandro Solalinde and the staff at migrant house, 'Hermanos en el Camino'; Services for an Alternative Education (EDUCA)

GUERRERO:

Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico (AFADEM); 'Tlachinollan' Human Rights Centre; José María Morelos y Pavón Regional Human Rights Centre

CHIHUAHUA:

Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre; Sierra Madre Alliance (ASMAL)

COAHUILA:

Saltillo Migrant House; Fray Juan de Larios Diocesan Human Rights Centre; Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre; Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation

CIUDAD DE México:

Comité Cerezo, Mexico; Espacio_OSC: Space for Civil Society Organisations; Focal Group on Business and Human Rights

Perfiles



Cristina Auerbach in a workshop organised by PBI ©PBI México

Cristina Auerbach from the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation, is a well-known human rights defender working with miners in the state of Coahuila. She works on the case of the Pasta de Conchos mine where 65 miners were killed in an accident in the mine in 2006 whose bodies have yet to be rescued. She supports the families of these miners and works to assure that these types of incidents do not repeat themselves and that the labour rights of miners are respected. For her work she has received threats, harassment and defamation, but despite everything she continues to be convinced of the importance of human rights defense work and her input has been fundamental in advancing the topics of justice, reparation and non-repetition of human rights violations in Coahuila.

Throughout 2018 the security situation has been compromised for the persistent defamations against her perpetrated by various actors, as well as the critical attitudes towards her for her work in defense of human rights. Within this framework, PBI invited her to an advocacy tour in Europe to increase her support network and give her the opportunity to explain the problems she is living through in the Coal Zone at the moment.



Sandra Alarcón in a workshop organised by PBI ©PBI México

Sandra Alarcón is a lawyer and works with the organisation Tlachinollan Human Rights Center of the Mountain in the state of Guerrero. She has accompanied victims searching for truth and justice in the case of the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the "Raúl Isidro Burgos" College in Ayotzinapa and in the case of two survivors of sexual torture, Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú. Despite the fact that achieving justice in these cases remains difficult, Sandra continues to fight for the recognition of victims of serious human rights violations and for the respect of human rights in the state of Guerrero.

Throughout 2018 the security situation in Guerrero has deteriorated with an increase in armed groups fighting for territorial control in the state. This situation has a direct impact on human rights defenders who find themselves in a situation of high risk as they carry out their work. Sandra went to Brussels and other countries in Europe in order to expose the situation she is living through and seek support and international solidarity.

Achievements in the protection of Human Rights Defenders

During 2018, PBI together with other national and international organisations called attention to the preoccupying trend of increased risk for HRDs. We cited information gathered by Cerezo Committee, Mexico, Urgent Action for Human Rights Defenders (ACCUDEH) and the National Campaign Against Forced Disappearance in Mexico¹, Global Witness², and other organisations, which identified Mexico as one of the most-dangerous countries to defend human rights. Despite this, we

recognise the advances in some emblematic cases against impunity and other important steps towards better protection for Mexican Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). Here we mention the conviction in the case of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and the progress in the Coahuila Contingency Plan as significant advances for 2018.

Justice for Valentina

We highlight the case of Valentina Rosendo Cantú as an important achievement against impunity. Valentina, a Me'phaa (or Tlapanec) indigenous woman from the community of

¹ Defender los Derechos Humanos en México: El Sexenio de la Impunidad (Informe junio de 2017 a mayo de 2018): <http://bit.ly/2OPlcqc>

² At what cost? Irresponsible business and the murder of land and environmental defenders in 2017: <http://bit.ly/2WCZTju>



"Justice for Valentine" video produced by PBI ©PBI México

Caxitepec, in the municipality of Acatepec in the High Mountains of Guerrero, was victim of sexual torture by military personnel in 2002, a case in which Mexico was judged and found guilty by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in August 2010.

PBI welcomes the fact that on 1 June 2018, 16 years after the events occurred, Judge Iliana Fabricia Contreras Perales from the Seventh District Court of the State of Guerrero issued a historic sentence convicting the soldiers Nemesio Sierra García and Armando Pérez Abarca for the crimes of rape and torture. She imposed a penalty of 19 years, five months and one day of imprisonment, ruling that they pay reparations for damages caused by their crimes against Valentina in 2002.³

This case is paradigmatic both nationally and internationally, as it recognises the victim's testimony as primary admissible evidence and signals that crimes of this nature occur without it being possible to access witnesses. It establishes a precedent for the development of the terms "sexual torture" and "institutional military violence" and consolidates Ms Rosendo Cantú as a reference point for defending women's right to a life free of violence and sexual torture. In Mexico, according to the executive director of Amnesty International Mexico, Tania Reneaum Panszi, impunity remains at 98%, a figure which evidences the transcendental importance of this guilty verdict.

Chihuahua's Contingency Plan

On 7 March 2016, 24 human rights organisations in Chihuahua submitted a request to the Interior Ministry's Vice Minister of Human Rights, as President of the Governing Body of the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. They asked for the urgent adoption of an early-warning system which would prevent further attacks against HRDs and journalists in the state of Chihuahua, in accordance

with the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Based on this request, a diagnostic study of HRDs and journalists in Chihuahua was conducted. It was approved in June 2016 by the Governing Body of the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, which also instructed the National Executive Commission to propose a Contingency Plan for the serious human rights situation in which HRDs work.

Once the Contingency Plan was approved in June 2017⁴, a dialogue was initiated between the signatory civil society organisations, federal and mechanism authorities. Thanks to the plan's diagnostic study, specific topics were identified and addressed by a working group. These were: 1) femicides and the vulnerable situation of migrants, sexually diverse groups and gender-based violence; 2) the environment; 3) the situation in the Sierra Tarahumara; 4) violations of freedom of expression; and 5) cross-cutting strategies.

The civil society organisations' request in relation to the Contingency Plan are based on actions and preventative measures they identified, with the aim of eliminating all obstacles that prevent the free and safe defence of human rights in the state of Chihuahua. Accordingly, the civil society organisations requested the appropriate implementation of the Contingency Plan, and expressed their concerns at the working groups' infrequent meetings and limited advances. Despite these challenges, the Contingency Plan represents a positive step towards comprehensive policies of prevention and protection for HRDs, which PBI welcomes and supports.

In addition to these two cases, we recognise the acceptance of the three rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of *Alvarado et al v. Mexico* on enforced disappearance⁵, women victims of sexual torture in *Atenco v. Mexico*⁶ and *Trueba Arciniega et al v. Mexico*⁷ on extrajudicial killings. We also welcome Mexico's public apology to journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro⁸ and we celebrate Tita Radilla Martínez's receiving an Honourable Mention in the National Human Rights Prize⁹, which recognised her untiring efforts as a Woman HRD supporting victims of forced disappearance.

³ Después de 16 años, histórica condena por tortura sexual contra militares en México <http://bit.ly/2YQTrmY>

⁴ See the Interior Ministry's press release (in Spanish): <http://bit.ly/2D03hcU>

⁵ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos *caso Alvarado Espinoza y otros vs. México* – Sentencia de 28 de noviembre de 2018 <http://bit.ly/211n7bP>

⁶ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos *Caso Mujeres víctimas de tortura sexual en Atenco vs. México* – Sentencia de 28 de noviembre de 2018 <http://bit.ly/2OQUjDs>

⁷ Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, *Caso Trueba Arciniega y otros vs. México*, Sentencia de 28 de noviembre de 2018 <http://bit.ly/2WRv1rX>

⁸ "Disculpa pública, a Lydia Cacho, por la violación de sus derechos humanos" <http://bit.ly/2G0pc5F>

⁹ See the President of the Republic's press release (in Spanish): <http://bit.ly/2UA5BBi>



Regional meeting of women human rights defenders organised by PBI, Colombia ©PBI México

The psychosocial focus in the protection of women human rights defenders

“An important strategy for the protection of women human rights defenders is to be articulated, to be in contact, to meet each other and reflect on the violence and mechanisms that we come up against”

- Flor Goche, National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders, Mexico

Being a human rights defender is a job that implies a lot of risk, often in contexts of socio-political violence and an increase in criminalisation. The stress and constant concerns that this work brings with it generates a series of impacts on both physical and emotional levels that do not only attack the human rights defender personally, but also weaken their collective organisational processes of resistance.

In order to talk about the psychosocial impacts that the context of permanent threats cause, the Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders (IMD) and PBI organised a Regional Conference. The conference took place from 8th until 11th October 2018 in Colombia with representatives from each entity of PBI in Latin America as well as 30 women human rights defenders from 20 organisations members of the IMD in Mesoamerica (Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico).

The conference took place in the framework of a project that PBI and IMD are implementing that is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Relations. Through this project the IMD and PBI have begun to exchange knowledge between the two organisations as well as throughout the different PBI entities

about the psychosocial focus, gender, security and protection as well as temporal relocation.

The idea behind this regional conference was the create a space of constructive collective dialogue within which discussions would be held, as well to create a breathing and resting space for the women defenders. With this in mind, the participants brought with them different ideas for self care, collective care and healing exercises which allowed knowledge and good practice to be exchanged. There were workshops on massage, Mayan ceremonies, temazcal, bio-dance, meditation, theater of the oppressed and memorial exercises. With these tools, the idea is that women human rights defenders can improve their working conditions, as well as their physical, emotional and spiritual states in order to generate more sustainable forms of activism on both individual and collective levels. Through these exercises, bonds of trust were built between the participants which helps them to strengthen their organisational capacities as well as their collective resistance, which also ensures better levels of protection.

For PBI this conference was particularly important to understand the needs of human rights defenders, specifically women, on a

psychosocial level in order to work on this focus in our advocacy efforts which authorities to improve public policies in the various countries in which we work. Also, the shared knowledge helps us to improve our psychosocial focus within the PBI entities as well as the gender perspective that we implement in the holistic accompaniment we offer to human rights defenders.

In order to continue sharing knowledge between the IMD and the different PBI entities, a further regional conference will be organised in 2019 in order to discuss the huge challenges facing human rights defenders in terms of their security and protection as well as the option of temporal relocation for those in particular risk.

Forced disappearance

The extreme figures of forced disappearance in Mexico not only speak of the country's crisis of violence, but also the profound need to face structural injustices that permit human rights violations to be repeated without investigation or sanction against those responsible.

The case of the disappearance of the 43 students from de Ayotzinapa¹⁰ is an emblem of the lack of political will that Enrique Peña Nieto's government showed in responding to forced disappearances. Despite the case's global recognition, it has been a complicated process to achieve any progress at a political or legal level. For the mothers and fathers of the 43 students, the case still represents an open scar. The new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has committed to reopening the investigation and responding to the families' demands to learn the truth about what happened.

PBI supports both the organisations Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico¹¹ and the National Campaign Against Forced Disappearance in México¹², who fight to have the issue of forced disappearance recognised, and for victims' voices to be heard and included in the design of public policy on said theme. Both movements underline the need for political will at

all levels of Mexican government, in order to find the people who have been disappeared, identify the remains, and return them respectfully to their relatives. This will grant the victims a dignified funeral and allow the families to begin the grieving process, which is impeded by the uncertainty surrounding the whereabouts of their loved ones.

Excavations in Atoyac, Guerrero

Due to her risky security situation, PBI has accompanied Tita Radilla Martínez, vice-president of the Association of Relatives of Detained-Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations (AFADEM)¹³ since 2003. She has worked untiringly to demand the truth about the enforced disappearance of her father, Rosendo Radilla Pacheco, in Atoyac de Álvarez in 1974, in addition to accompanying dozens of families in their own searches. Because of this, Tita Radilla Martínez and her male and female companions at AFADEM have been the target of continued attacks and rights violations over several years.

On 25 August 1974, Rosendo Radilla Pacheco was detained and disappeared at a military checkpoint by the Mexican army.



Accompaniment to AFADEM, Guerrero ©PBI México

¹⁰ See Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center <http://bit.ly/2JL4Pg4>

¹¹ <https://sinlasfamiliasno.org/>

¹² "2010-2018 Campaña Nacional Contra la Desaparición Forzada": <http://bit.ly/2UcT1bm>

¹³ <https://afademfedefam.wordpress.com/>

Rosendo was taken to the military barracks in Atoyac, where he was tortured. From the first moments, Radilla Pacheco's family denounced the enforced disappearance, as did other families who also sought their disappeared relatives. In 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights handed down a judgement which condemned Mexico for Mr Radilla Pacheco's enforced disappearance which was carried out by soldiers¹⁴.

Despite this ruling, it is important to note that until the end of 2018, no excavations had taken place in Atoyac to seek the remains of Rosendo Radilla Pacheco and the hundreds of other disappeared people in the region. During 2018, preparations to begin excavations were made, which PBI accompanied.

State Exhumations Plan, Coahuila

In the state of Coahuila in Northern Mexico, hundreds of families have been organising over the course of many years to seek their loved ones who were forcibly disappeared. According to the official state figures, between 1995 and 2018, some 1779 cases of disappearance have been registered.

¹⁴ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of Radilla-Pacheco v. Mexico, Judgment of November 23, 2009 <http://bit.ly/2KeyVYO>

Towards the end of 2017, a state law was adopted¹⁵ which aims to identify "each and every disappeared person, as well as remains located in open fields". From this law, a State Exhumations Plan¹⁶ was developed, which organises the work of localising and identifying bodies in the state under the joint coordination of authorities and civil society.

Fray Juan de Larios Diocesan Human Rights Centre¹⁷ is one of the organisations which accompanies this process as well as the collectives composed of disappeared people's family members. Since 2009, it has acted as a human rights organisation, offering legal, psychological and organisational advice to these families to create alternative pathways of hope. PBI has accompanied the centre since 2013. In the specific case of exhumations, PBI is an International Observer of the State Exhumations Plan at Fray Larios' request. PBI recognises the importance of accompanying justice processes related to disappearances which allow HRDs to vindicate their right to truth, justice and guarantees of non-repetition, placing emphasis on the importance to families of participating at all stages of the process.

¹⁵ Ley para la Localización e Identificación Forense de Personas del Estado de Coahuila de Zaragoza <http://bit.ly/2MHISwG>

¹⁶ Plan estatal de exhumaciones e identificación forense 2018 <http://bit.ly/2li7cbK>

¹⁷ <http://www.frayjuandelarios.org/>

Land and Territory

During 2018, both PBI and other organisations have called attention to the vulnerable situation of HRDs, especially those who defend land and territory in Mexico, Mesoamerica and the world. In this article, we describe the high-risk situation which these HRDs experience in Chihuahua and Oaxaca, as examples of the processes we accompanied throughout the year.

Sierra Tarahumara

Located in the northern state of Chihuahua, the Sierra Madre Occidental, better known as the "Sierra Tarahumara", is characterised by its mountainous, difficult-to-access terrain¹⁸. Four indigenous populations live there: Ódami o Northern Tepehuán, Pima, Warijío, and the most numerous: the Rarámuri or Tarahumara people, (the latter being the hispanisation of the term, rarámuri). The zone is of economic interest primarily for its large geographical area, of which 70% is forested, as well as its high concentration of biodiversity and natural resources, which makes it attractive for tourism and mining.

The confluence of different actors and interests has positioned the Sierra Tarahumara as one of the regions with the highest levels of conflict. This has led to a significant deterioration of the communities' collective rights and has also generated an ecological imbalance because it exploits the natural resources of the territory's indigenous peoples.

¹⁸ See map <http://bit.ly/2uK7ddk>

Despite and as a result of this context, communities which have positioned themselves to defend their land and territory exist. Some have come together and now receive the accompaniment of HRDs and human rights organisations, such as the Sierra Madre Alliance (ASMAC)¹⁹, an organisation accompanied by PBI. According to ASMAC, the people living in these communities are facing grave risks. Both female and male community defenders are especially vulnerable, as they live permanently in the territory and are thus faced with a multitude of potentially aggressive actors.

In this framework, PBI Mexico deeply laments the death of Rarámuri indigenous leader and community defender, Don Julián Carrillo, who was assassinated on 25 October 20. We stand in solidarity with his family and loved ones. We strongly condemn his assassination and we stand by the demands made to authorities, that they investigate the case and offer protection to Don Julián's family, his community, and the Sierra Madre Alliance as the case's accompanying organisation. Don Julián was a beneficiary of the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists²¹ and his assassination most unfortunately exemplifies, once again, the serious violence that is prevalent in this part of Mexico, and what it means for local HRDs.

¹⁹ <http://alianzasierramadre.org/es/>

²⁰ "Julián Carrillo defended the forest with his life": <http://bit.ly/2EibQKf>

²¹ <https://www.gob.mx/defensorasyperiodistas>



Accompaniment to the Conference "Here we say Yes to Life and No to Mining", Oaxaca ©PBI México

Central Valleys of Oaxaca

Water is worth more than gold, because you can't drink gold! This is how more than 30 indigenous peoples and peasant communities, accompanied by Oaxacan organisations and collectives, phrased their commitment at the Conference of Communities from the Central Valleys Against Mining, "Here We Say Yes to Life and No to Mining".²²

The gathering united people and communities from the Central Valleys of Oaxaca who defend their territory against mining projects, especially in opposition to the establishment of a "mining corridor" of more than 100,000 hectares. The concessions for this corridor have been granted without prior consultation with the affected communities.

According to the organisations which attended the conference, there are currently 322 concessions to exploit natural resources in Oaxaca. Services for an Alternative Education (EDUCA), an organisation accompanied by PBI, emphasises that the multiple concessions granted to mining companies generate massive looting of indigenous communities' lands.

As well as creating networks for information and joint regional activities between different social sectors, the event is relevant because it addresses points like the establishment of agreements to develop a people's community court against

mining. The "Community Assembly in Defence of Life, No to Mining"²³ was also constituted. As the body representing the Central Valley communities, the assembly will take legal action against mining incursions in these territories.

PBI sees the risks faced by HRDs defending land, territory and environment as a serious concern. We believe it is fundamental to highlight the legitimate work of many organisations which accompany and support processes to defend the human rights of communities and peoples, the sovereignty of their territories, and the respect and care for natural resources across national territory

While Mexico has acquired a series of commitments due to its status as signatory to international treaties, the grave security situation for HRDs continues and proposed protection mechanisms do not seem sufficiently effective when it comes to dealing with issues. It is worth pointing out that, for its part, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights states that, in this region, it observed "the failure to adopt and implement effective measures to recognize and protect those who defend and promote the right to territory, a clean environment and to other rights associated with access to land".²⁴

²² Read our article on the subject <http://bit.ly/2VWf1E8>

²³ Read the press release (in Spanish): <http://bit.ly/2uNvUWp>

²⁴ "IACHR issues call for OAS States to Protect Defenders of the Land and Environment": <http://bit.ly/30Reirp>

Political Advocacy 2018

During 2018, PBI held 14 political advocacy meetings at a municipal level, 59 at a state level and 38 at a federal level. In addition, we met with 12 embassies and held 40 meetings with international organisations and members of our support network. Likewise, we contacted various authorities in Europe, Canada and the United States on 18 occasions. This effort forms part of the political accompaniment which we offer to the organisations we work with, with the aim of requesting better protection measures and greater attention to their cases in order to fulfill their basic human rights.

We worked specifically on the security situation for advocates in northern Mexico²⁵, the criminalisation and closure of work spaces for all HRDs focused on land and territory, and on Mexico's assessment at the United Nation's Universal Periodic Review²⁶. We activated our national and international support networks on six occasions during the year: in the case of the criminalisation of members of Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to La Parota Dam (CECOP)²⁷, the security situation in Tlapa, Guerrero; the risks facing HRDs during the elections; the deportation of Alejandro Cerezo from Panama²⁸, the security situation facing the Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre in Ciudad Juárez; and the assassination of Rarámuri leader and HRD Don Julián Carrillo in the Sierra Tarahumara, Chihuahua.²⁹

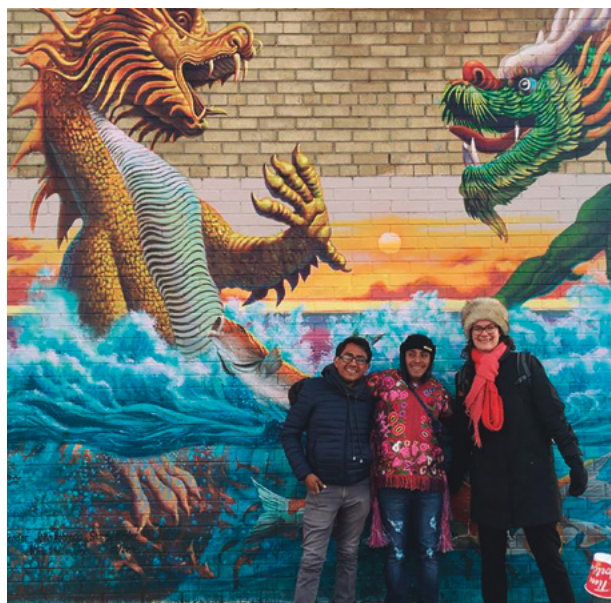
In addition to political advocacy in Mexico, PBI disseminates the information it receives from its field teams to international bodies, to draw attention to the risks facing HRDs in Mexico. During 2018, we supported eight Mexican HRDs in the organisation of political advocacy tours to various countries in Europe, the United States and Canada.

Between 17 and 23 June 2018, three HRDs from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras left their homes for the north of the continent to participate in an advocacy tour organised by PBI in Washington DC. This tour focused on the vulnerability of HRDs who protect land, territory and the environment in the region, the attacks against their work, and their protection needs. One objective of the delegation was to highlight the violence which accompanies "development" in many territories, as well as the damage resulting from military forces' involvements in acts of repression against communities in resistance. José Ángel Rivas Vega, member of the indigenous Ódami community and

field coordinator for the organisation Sierra Madre Alliance, travelled from Mexico to explain the situation he experiences because of his work defending land and territory in Chihuahua's Sierra Tarahumara.

Over three days in September, 40 HRDs from America, Europe, Africa and Asia met in Brussels to share experiences and knowledge on holistic protection. Two WHRDS travelled to Brussels from Coahuila and Guerrero, Cristina Auerbach and Sandra Alarcón. The defenders held meetings with the areas of human and geographical rights of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and with political advisors of the European Parliament. They had the opportunity to listen to the analyses and findings from the work sessions shared by HRDs during the gathering. In addition, they shared recommendations aimed at recognising HRDs' work, improving their protection from a holistic perspective and reversing the situation of widespread impunity.

In November, PBI accompanied members of Services for Alternative Education (EDUCA), a Oaxacan human rights organisation, on a political tour of Canada to expose the risks facing HRDs focused on territorial rights, especially those who defend their lands against economic development projects. Given the significant presence of Canadian mining companies in Oaxaca, meetings focused on the companies' responsibilities and the importance of ensuring respect for the human rights and autonomy of indigenous peoples who reject mining in their territories.



Speaker tour of Educa Oaxaca, Canada ©PBI México

²⁵ Read the report Mexico: *Constantly at the Crossroads* (in Spanish) <http://bit.ly/2XdKaEh>

²⁶ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Mexico <http://bit.ly/2W11xpK>

²⁷ <http://bit.ly/2VZ5Lit>

²⁸ <http://bit.ly/2Kc8ftG>

²⁹ <http://bit.ly/2I4X7tj>

The liberation of Damián Gallardo

Southern team

*“Defending happiness in times of
transitory and definitive absence”*

Mario Benedetti

Understanding happiness as a form of resistance and rebellion is not always an easy process, especially when there are so many reasons not to smile.

Damián Gallardo was in prison for over 5 years, however, this wasn't enough to dampen or silence his struggle.

When a person is deprived of their freedom, the suffering is shared by their family, friends and colleagues. However, this suffering was transformed into a desire for justice for which different people fought for in different ways, to accompany a person who was on the way to becoming an emblem of struggle and resistance.

This is what happened during the epilogue of 2018 which reserved for us one of the best bits of news of the year: political prisoners who had been imprisoned in maximum security for over 5 years were released, amongst which was Damián Gallardo. The news and its coverage in the press was welcomed with joyfulness by close friends and family, but also by civil society organisations and the social movement that had followed the case so closely and demanded the justice that was finally dealt in this case.

When things are done from the heart, it is clear.

This is what we felt at the celebration of the liberation of Damián.

Family, friends, colleagues and us. All in the same space, with doors open to share. Tears, smiles, music, dance and gratefulness. Food, beer and mezcal.

In the field as a PBI volunteer, we accompany diverse processes that are almost always charged with pain and suffering. Death, killings, funerals, disappearances, threats and intimidation, exile. Seldom are we present at parties, but not because there are no intentions to celebrate, here in Mexico there are plenty, but because there are only few occasions where justice comes to stay permanently...

We learnt a lesson from friends, colleagues, family members and from Damián Gallardo himself: it is necessary to defend happiness as a right!

Accompanying the Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre, Chihuahua

Northern Mexico Team

Ciudad Juárez. This was one of the places my work led me to discover during my year as a volunteer with PBI Mexico. It is one of the little-known territories in the country's north, where in reality, many civil society organisations are working in defence of human rights. In Ciudad Juárez, PBI accompanies the Paso del Norte Human Rights Centre.

Before arriving in Mexico, I had a particular image of the city, dominated by the stories of violence and femicides that are unfortunately strongly associated with Juárez. Now that I have been there several times for PBI, I have a slightly more complex image, which includes stories of violence, but also stories from the residents and the female and male human rights defenders.

Of course, when we go to Ciudad Juárez as PBI, we have a raft of strict security measures, and they inevitably limit you in many ways...

It's such a shame, because Ciudad Juárez has a reputation for being a party city, full of life once night falls, with residents who are friendly and welcoming... The violence and human rights violations don't let us see much of that lively face of the city, from the outside. However, in Ciudad Juárez I have worked with some of the most inspiring female and male activists I've ever met, they are so remarkable! They work within a very difficult context, and they continue to fight despite the very high risks that are part of their work: defending human rights upsets organised crime, or the authorities, or both. I have seen very great achievements (a favourable decision from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, for example) but also very difficult times, that test the bravery of these people and the capacity of their organisations. But the human rights defenders are also amazing because they believe in a vision for Ciudad Juárez that would make anyone want to come and see this northern border city: a human-sized city, vibrating with democratic life, parties and culture, where one can walk around without fearing for one's life or be an activist with risk of being attacked.

The Juárez of the future? I can only dare to hope for it. And if PBI can contribute to that in its way, through the support it offers human rights organisations there, I'll feel proud to have participated in those efforts..



Volunteer of the Northern team, Ciudad Juárez ©PBI México

To the Mexican government:

Mexican governments, at the federal, state and municipal levels, should:

- Initiate a campaign of recognition, highlighting 1) the important role of female and male human rights defenders; 2) the risky security situation they face because of their activities; and 3) the responsibility of governments to protect them.
- Design and implement an overall policy of prevention and protection for HRDs, based on the seven principles proposed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/31/55).³⁰
- Inaugurate specialised prosecution offices or units for crimes committed against HRDs, and the implementation of a specific protocol for the investigation of attacks against HRDs.
- Revise the laws and policies which restrict the freedoms of association, expression and assembly at state and federal level, and avoid the criminalisation of HRDs.
- Implement the recommendations of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/19/58/Add.2)³¹ on the immediate withdrawal of the armed forces from public security operations.
- Provide sufficient resources and trained staff at the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.
 - Design effective cooperation schemes between the federation, states and municipalities to allow the elaboration of protection responses that are consistent, coordinated, rapid and holistic.
 - Ensure that the protection measures granted are based on an accurate analysis of the defender's risk profile, considering the specificities of gender and ethnicity.
 - Enact preventative measures.
- Guarantee timely fulfilment of the right to free, prior, informed and culturally appropriate consultation and consent to indigenous peoples and peasant communities, through effective consultation mechanisms enacted prior to the design and granting of concessions for economic development projects.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.³²
- Ratify articles 31 and 32 of the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance³³, thus recognising the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances³⁴ to receive and examine individual communications from or in favour of the victims.

To the international community:

- Offer recognition and political, social and economic support to the work undertaken by human rights defenders, contributing to the construction of a narrative which backs their indispensable labour in societies with the aim of halting their increased criminalisation and stigmatisation.
- Contribute to the fight against impunity, as a principal cause that favours the repetition of violations.
- Ensure access to justice for victims of human rights violations.
- Combat the incremental growth of laws which limit or nullify the right to defend human rights.
- Foment the security and protection of those who defend human rights, from a differential and holistic focus which pays particular attention to the specific protection needs of women HRDs and those working on land and territory or communities.
- Ensure that the presence of foreign investments and international companies does not engender subsequent abuses and violations of human rights.
- Ensure the collaboration, cooperation and complementarity of the diverse mechanisms of the United Nations and the Inter-American Human Rights System.³⁵
- For more detailed recommendations and proposals for concrete actions, read the article 70 years of human rights and 20 recognising defenders.³⁶

³⁰ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: <http://bit.ly/2Wg2dNV>

³¹ Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances: Mission to Mexico: <http://bit.ly/2EIhI6n>

³² Read the protocol: <http://bit.ly/30Qf9M>

³³ Read the convention: <http://bit.ly/2VYvasw>

³⁴ <http://bit.ly/2IcExQq>

³⁵ <http://bit.ly/2I5puIq>

³⁶ <http://bit.ly/2MgRF0W>

PBI Mexico's finances in 2018

2018 was a financially stable year for PBI Mexico. The project continues to apply the same financial guidelines as in previous years: prioritising medium-term financial stability and realistic work plans, matching fundraising applications to the program's strategic needs, and focusing our resources on the protection of organisations and people who defend human rights in Mexico.

Over the course of the year there were staffing changes, and our fundraising structure changed, with a clear investment being made in this area. PBI Mexico decided to create a new institutional development role in the Mexico City office, which, among other tasks, would focus on fundraising. This task currently occupies a significant portion of the roles of General Coordinator, Finance Coordinator and now, Institutional Development Coordinator. This important work area will thus be strategically reinforced.

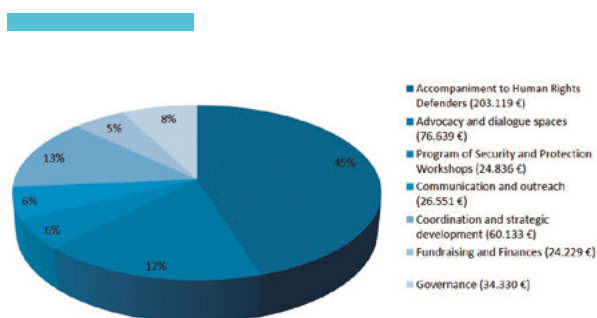
After an increase in income in 2017, the level of funding for 2018 almost reached the same level with the assistance of new donors. Even so, fluctuations in the time periods between confirmation of funding and receipt of moneys have complicated the project's financial management. This demonstrates the need to shore up PBI Mexico's financial reserves.

We highlight again the positive evolution demonstrated by the significant number of multiyear grants: nearly one in three donors to PBI Mexico are bodies which support our work for a period longer than one year. This allows greater stability as we plan our activities.

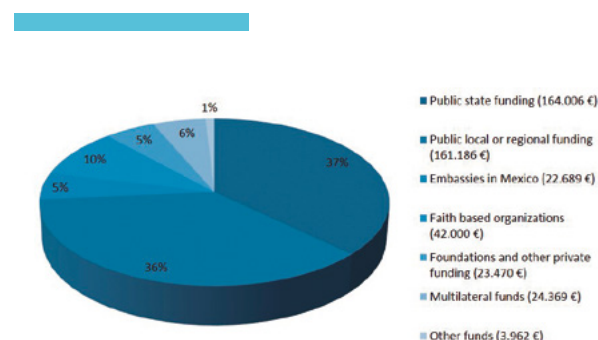
Considering the administrative weight of fundraising during both the application and acquittal stages, one of the project's aims is to maximise each of its funding sources. For this reason, after the recovery in donor numbers observed in 2017, PBI Mexico's aim for 2019 will be to maintain that base and increase the number of multiyear grants to reduce the overall administrative cost.

The provisional, unaudited balance for 2017 shows a deficit of around 3%, the result of a difficult but responsible process of managing the project's finances. With the support of its donors, PBI Mexico should be able to recover this sum for its financial reserves, thus establishing a solid reserve and avoiding the liquidity problems that complicate the day-to-day work of the volunteer teams.


In summary, PBI Mexico continues to find ways to overcome challenges in the difficult fundraising landscape, while maintaining our support and protection for HRDs.



PBI Mexico thanks all its donors for their support, which has allowed us to maintain the same level of work and activities during 2018.



The financial data in this report are provisional and have yet to be audited. All income and expenditure are presented in euros.



Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a non governmental 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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