The forced displacement and human rights violations against women

Operation Genesis: Ten years later
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Raising Trust through PMB
Center of Peace through PMB Germany
Danzing
According to Human Rights Watch, " Civilians suffer the brunt of the violence, as every year thousands become displaced by the violence, losing their homes and livelihoods. Forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, threats, and kidnapings remain commonplace. The vast majority of abuses remain unreported." We would like to draw your attention to the following reports: the first is from the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), attacking the problem of forced displacement; the second comes from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR), highlighting the serious situation faced by women in the conflict.

**Forced displacement: a strategy to expelprotections of others’ land**

According to the CCJ report, "in many cases, forced displacement has been utilized as a method to consolidate the geographic control of armed groups, as evidence of violence and illegal activities carried out by paramilitary groups, and the repercussions of the conflict, and the displacement of people."

According to the CCJ's report, "the forced displacement of the population has been used as a strategy to consolidate the territorial control of armed groups, and to expel the population from their homes."

**Women as victims, and also bearers of hope**

In their report, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) "called for the protection of women, recognizing the importance of their role in the armed conflict. It emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to address the violations committed against women, including access to justice, reparation, and prevention."

The report highlights the particular vulnerability of women and girls in situations of armed conflict, emphasizing the need for specialized protection measures. It calls for the adoption of measures to prevent and address gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and for the establishment of mechanisms to afford adequate investigation and prosecution of such crimes.

The ICHR report also underscores the importance of ensuring the full participation of women in the peace process, including in decision-making and in the design and implementation of peace agreements. It calls for the adoption of mechanisms to ensure the protection of women's rights and the promotion of gender equality in all aspects of the peace process.

**Image:** Indigenous Emberá © Jorge Mario Carballo
In the Ukam region, residents of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community released a public statement expressing concern about a group of 30 to 40 armed men, wearing AUC (United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia) bandannas, who entered Ukam, a town close to San José de Apartadó. The supposed paramilitary group asked for names of local leaders and declared their aim was to implement the mandate of the Peace Community. They accused the Community of being guilty and indicated that the presence of "guerillas" represented the seed weather ahead for the implementation of the group's oposition.

Similarly, in the Chocó region, Enrique Pérez and his neighbors of the Camburí Humanitarian Zone have also experienced an increase in hostilities. Since April of 2006, PNB has been present, working to create a sense of safety, through the accompaniment of the Catari-Ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission (CEJPA), in the presence of the farmers' consumption of the zone on Don Pedro's property. Up until April, this had been dominated by the illegal authorities of African plain, but persistence on the part of these farmers has led to the formation of a humanitarian zone on a small piece of land. However, from achieving respect for their rights, the community has been unable to live in peace. In October, CIP condemned a conversation that took place between land workers which suggested that Don Pedro "must be removed, whether it is not. This threatening comment occurred one month after he had received another verbal intimidation; "at the moment it is not possible to touch Enrique Pérez because he is always with the guerrillas, but we will get at what hurts him the most, his family."

CIP reports that the threat is from the region of a paramilitary group identified as the "Aguilas Negras".

International Human Rights Day does not go unnoticed in Bogotá.

To mark International Human Rights Day, the Rayuela Organization called upon 4,000 women from all over the country to come together to build a monument for peace. Deposed for mourning, thousands of women walked together on the side of the road, from Bolívar Plaza, the city center, to the park on 93rd Street, and along 7th and 15th Avenues. Carrying signs with slogans calling for justice and truth, the women walked the length of the streets in remembrance of those who had been killed, disappeared or kidnapped during the armed conflict. Along the way, there were tent camps from organizations such as the Movement of Vicinos, the organizations Daughters and Sons for Remembrance and Against Impunity, and Family Members of the Victims of the Violence. In order to provide information to passersby about the numbers and massacres that have occurred over the years in the Colombian conflict. Many of the thousands of people who pass by each Sunday on the public bicycle route, slow along as the morning of December 10th to ask about the event and read the names of the deceased, engraved on the bricks lining the streets. Perhaps, when they see the sign that day, they might even know it was International Human Rights Day. However, thanks to such an initiative from civil society, this day finally did not go unnoticed.
Recognition in Germany for the “untiring and intrepid work” of Anita from CAVIDA

In the presentation of the Solidarity Award this past December, the German city of Bremen recognized the work of two Colombian women accompanied by PBI: Ana del Carmen Martínez de CAVIDA and Carolina Pardo Jaramillo of Inter-eclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission. The judges highlighted that both women distinguish themselves in their “untiring and intrepid work” in favor of the Humanitarian Zone in the border region with Panama, where they have constantly been exposed to threats and persecution by armed actors.

Anita, as Ana del Carmen is lovingly referred to in her community, spoke with PBI in her return to the Humanitarian Zone “Nueva Vida” about the importance of the award for CAVIDA.

What is significant about receiving the Solidarity Award from Bremen?

It was very important! The human cost—the support network for CAVIDA—is so very large and it’s important for us to have this international support. People in other countries value us more than they do in Colombia, where they disparage, kill, and uproot us. What has the Government done? Nothing, it just investigates us while the military agencies and para-military take away our land. The European Union governments support us, which gives us strength to keep resisting. The award represents international backing for our project and public recognition of the work so that the truth doesn’t remain hidden, that the truth is spoken.

Who and how was CAVIDA chosen for the award?

Bread for the World nominated Carolina Pardo from the Inter-eclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and me from CAVIDA. Last year we received an invitation to go to South Africa from Missorter. I was afraid to represent the community and what I shared impacted those who were present, they feared for our lives and it attracted the attention of Bremen.

What was your best moment in Germany?

When they gave us the award, CAVIDA is a community that struggles for peace, which is why we won this award. We dedicate it to all those in solidarity who have passed through CAVIDA, they are part of the process, PBI, the Inter-eclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and CAVIDA are like a marriage, they can have problems but no matter what we are and will continue to be a couple.

The future generation of CAVIDA in one of the retreats.

© Jorge Maciel/Cubillas

And the most difficult moment?

The language, I don’t speak German. We translated a long giving speech, and twice we didn’t know what was happening, but I wanted to make use of the moment to show what is happening in Colombia. What is happening in Colombia? Unfair like our country’s parasite, like a thorn. We carry a sign with the 56 dead or disappeared victims of the community. It feels as if you express yourself outside the country. The first people who gave testimonies in Colombia about things they did so can’t live here anymore. Here, when they speak, they’re afraid although they won’t show it.

What do you think about the granting of this award ten years after the displacement?

It’s the first time CAVIDA receives an award like this. The award is economically important, but we only appeal to it so that it benefits the entire community.

What is the significance of the award for justice and reparations?

They gave the award because we assert our rights. It’s important because, although the Colombian government doesn’t recognize it, others do. It’s moral support, like a visa. For ten years we have exposed the contradictions and now even the same State agencies talk about the truth.

What are your wishes for 2007?

That they return the land they took from us, that they let us live. A lot of blood has been shed. We hope that the Inter-Eclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and PBI don’t leave us alone.

Anita from CAVIDA

Victims ofWidget not initialized.

Bremen Solidarity Award

2004 Gisele de Courtenel (Argentina), representative of the Commission of Mothers and Relatives of Disappeared Disappeared from El Salvador and Kostas Maoulis (Greece), spokesperson for the Coalition against Impunity in Argentina.

2005 Sophiya Feher von Píayer (Poland) and Gita Sureka (India)

2006 Magdalena Ramírez de Málaga and Japane Nishii (Japan)

2007 Moso (Bolivia), Hari Amrutani India Samatra (Sri Lanka) and Berghefeldt (Germany)

1995 Hans Deng Pari, China

1996 Andy San Sai, Kyi, Myanmar, Burma

1997 Dave Colombe, social justice leader, Yamnuska, Canada

1999 Father Bishop Mardiros E. Gómez and Tomás de Jesús Rincón, CEPDC, El Salvador

1998 Winnie and Nareen Moodley, South Africa
Operation Genesis: ten years later

The struggle between Colombia and Panama is ancestral and for indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians, who established their communities in this region long before the first signs of progress came to the area. Towards the end of 1996, a military operation carried out by the public security forces began to reclaim the region from the FARC-EP (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia). Operation "Genocide" unfolded in February of 1997 in the Lower and Mid-Atrato River region, which meant indiscriminate brotherhoods by various settlers in the waterways of Salagui, Caucasia and Triunfo. At the same time, in the same zone, there were disappearances and massacres carried out by paramilitaries. The consequences of these attacks were massive displacement of the civilian population, close to 5,000 individuals fled to Turbo, Aparacudí, Quibdó, Medellín, the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and even Panama. The Political Violence Database documents many of the attacks in the region, demonstrating the conflict between the public security forces and paramilitaries. Some of these crimes are barbaric, such as the case of the peasant farmer Martín López Mena, whose severed head was used as a football by the military and paramilitaries present during Mena's execution.

Alternatively, due to the insecurity of the inhabitants in the region, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) sought the adoption of precautionary measures for those who were displaced to Turbo by the violence. Just a few days before the decision of the IACHR was to be handed down, two armed individuals identified as paramilitaries entered the sports stadium in Turbo looking for one of the displaced persons. During this period, PBI volunteers accompanied members of the community while they stayed in the stadium.

4,500 displaced persons from the Caucasia river basin joined together to form Comunidades de Selbst-defensa. Life and Dignity (CAYVID). Throughout the following three years, they negotiated the conditions of their return with the State. Until finally, in 2001, the inhabitants returned to Caucasia to establish themselves in two settlements. Once returned, they saw that the tropical forest had been shared of its hundred-year-old trees, making way for large scale economic projects. Within this context and faced with the presence of different armed groups in the zone, the members of CAYVID decided to establish humanitarian zones, based on the international humanitarian right that demands a distinction of the civilian population from military targets.

Ten years after Operation Genesis, many communities have returned in an organized manner to their lands, like in Jiguaní, Cúcuta and Caucasia. These communities, with the support of accompanying organizations such as the Inter-American Peace Commission (CIP), are demanding recognition of responsibility for what happened, an end to the harassment against their initiatives for return and a solution in the form of repatriation and devolution of their land. They also seek respect for their territorial rights and the cessation of palm plantations on their properties. Nonetheless, crimes perpetuated by armed groups, such as persecution, threats and the disappearance of community members continue throughout the Lower and Mid-Atrato. The disappearance and murder of Orlando Valencia, leader of Jiguaní and Cúcuta, on October 15, 2005 is one of the most recent cases and signals the violations suffered by the population in the region.

Meanwhile, the population's implementation of productive projects within collective territory and, according to the Umba Regional Public Defender's office, the strong economic and political power which remains active in paramilitary structures, are proof of impunity. In spite of repeated denouncements, not one person responsible for Operation Genesis has been sentenced.

CAYVID and CIP organized an ecological walk in Caucasia on February 15 in order to forget the violence that took place ten years ago and at the same time to condemn the ongoing violations against Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities of the Lower and Mid-Atrato. The walk turned the same path taken by some of this displaced population. PBI joined the pilgrimage, alongside members of CAYVID and CIP.
Violations of DDHH for Economic Interests

The PPT judges transnational mining companies

The Mining Section of the Permanent Court of Justice (PPT) on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the rights of Communities took place on November 15 and 11, 2006. The PPT represents an alternative justice system for victims in their search for truth, justice, and integral reparations, placing a voice against human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed against the communities by national economic groups and transnational corporations operating within the country. Arguments of the PPT are based on international conventions, separate from judicial structures within the country, representing the ethical conscience of the people.

During the hearing, a careful contextual analysis and meticulous preparation were presented involving the transnational Drummond, CEMEX, Ludritsler Sundale, Holcim, Mascon, General Sirono, Anglo American, BHP Billiton, and Anglo Gold, all of which operate mines in Colombia. These cases were brought before the PPT by social and popular organizations concerned about the active role these corporations play in the social, political, and military conflict in Colombia, as well as their protagonism in an economic model that seriously respects the fulfillment of Colombians' economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights.

The convincing organizations presented cases linking enterprises and paramilitary groups in defense of their interests. They reported the systematic and general use of human rights violations, extra-judicial assassinations, forced disappearances, and arbitrary detention as a strategy to terrorize separatists in the social fabric and dismantle the strategic territorial control of mining corporations. Likewise, organizations denounced various companies for their responsibility in the persecution and murder of trade union members from SINTRAMINERCOL. The tribunal also heard accusations against the Colombian government for violations of the right to self-determination, in its failure to fulfill the obligations of prior consultation with indigenous and Afro-descendant communities before handing over contracts for exploration and exploitation of natural resources in their territories. The rights to territorial self-determination and prior consultation are protected by Convention 169, a contract between indigenous and tribal peoples approved by the Labour Organization in June of 1989 and ratified by the Colombian State on August 7, 1991. Article 7 of the Colombian Constitution also recognizes and protects ethnic and cultural diversity in the Colombian nation.

The mining issue was the second of seven themes submitted for judgment in the PPT between October of 2002 and July of 2006. The tribunal heard a new witness about biodiversity in Cauca, February 24–27.

“Total disrespect for victims”

Where are Angel and Claudia? This is the question their loved ones and members of the Association for the Relatives of the Detained Disappeared (ASPADDES) ask each day. These two active members of this NGO disappeared six years ago right in the city center of Medellín. Investigations indicated that 1,800 telephones of non-governmental organizations and civil servants, including those of Angel Quiroga and Claudia Morañé, had been illegally intercepted under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mauricio Santoyo.

In spite of the illegal operation, Santoyo was promoted to Chief of Security for the presidency after the election of Álvaro Uribe in 2002. And, although in 2004, the Attorney General’s office ordered that he be dismissed from office and prevented from taking up office again for five years, this last December the Ministry of Defense ordered his reintegration to the armed forces and soon Santoyo will return to his path to General. “They set Santoyo free and promoted him. This is total disrespect for the victims,” says Rosa Serna, coordinator of the Medellín chapter of ASPADDES. While the ex-head of the United Action Group for Personal Security (Gudi) ascends the military career ladder, Colombian authorities have not clarified the disappearance of Angel and Claudia and their cases remain in impunity. Their bodies may have disappeared, but their stories cannot be forgotten.
The unveiling of "para" politics in Colombia

In November 2006, the Supreme Law Court issued arrest warrants for three members of Congress and began an investigation into another group of six congressmen for their supposed links with paramilitary head "Jorge 40". The information comes from his computer, along with various recordings and the testimony of ex-paramilitary Juan Carlito. The evidence appears to be so conclusive that the general Sesame published an article entitled "the evidence speaks for itself". This situation has led both the Attorney General and the State Prosecutor to declare that the country is now faced with a new "BOAC" case, referred to as scandal in which ex-President Ernesto Samper Pizano and a group of congressmen were found to be involved in a case concerning the penetration of mafia money in their political campaigns.

Senator Alonso Araujo - linked to the scandal - affirmed that if the Supreme Court were to impose a verdict upon him, others would also be implicated, including his sister, former Secretary Consuelo Araujo, who has since resigned, his aunt's ex-husband and Attorney General Eduardo Maya, his cousin and Constitutional Court Judge Jaime Araujo and, lastly, his very own boss, President Alvaro Uribe.

Parallel to the judicial processes, the Alternative Democratic Pole political party, introduced a debate in the Senate about these ties, denouncing paramilitary influence in the State Attorney's office. Additional information appears in the "Jorge 40" computer about the relationship between the public security forces and paramilitaries in the Atlantic coast. The attorney general formally filed charges against ex-Director of the Administrative Security Department (DAS), Jorge Noguera, for helping and handing over information to paramilitary groups. Within its functions, DAS acts as a civil intelligence corps, and a judicial police corps, which in conjunction with the Attorney General protects the President. The president of the Judicial Appellate Court is also compromised in this situation, accused by the disciplinary court of having ties to a member of the Italian mafia.

Although this scandal is focused on the coastal region, other investigations have sprung up in other parts of the country, like Casanare: where there exist links between politicians and paramilitary Ultragua Martín Llanos. Likewise, a document signed in 2001 by four paramilitary leaders, a group of four senators, seven representatives and others - a total of thirty-two politicians from the coastal area reveals their commitment to defend the political thesis of the AUC to "reestablish our motherland".

Paramilitary statements

Paramilitary leaders Jorge 40, Salvatore Mancuso and Diego Vecino declared themselves ready to tell the whole truth. However, during Mancuso'shearings, the press saw "little truth", as various authors of the crimes mentioned by Mancuso are now deceased, imprisoned or fugitives from justice. There was debate regarding whether these hearings should be public. Later, under pressure from national and international human rights organizations, the State Attorney and TV Commission agreed that the "para" commissions should be transmitted live and direct. However, the Committee for Justice and Peace concluded that some parts of the hearings should not be made public in order to protect the investigations and integrity of the victims.

New paramilitary groups?

According to the Espectador newspaper, the Public Defender noted the existence of more than twenty armed structures across the country that, arguing for the preservation of security in those regions which have registered mobilizations, seek to guarantee control of local and regional political and electoral machinery through violent actions and armed incursions. These are the so-called Aguas Negras.

Alongside all of this, it is important to draw attention to the people by the Truth Commission about the state of the Palace of Justice in 1985. These conclusions have been most widely disseminated: the fact that President Belisario Betancourt was a mere spectator of the events, that the bodies of various irregularities received wounds from weapons not used by the guerrilla, showing that the military's intervention prioritized the killing of guerrillas rather than the rescue of victims; and that the M-19 would have received resources from drug-trafficking to carry out the siege.

1 "Estía podrías haber sido el odio", Vanguard, November 2005.

There is no clarification about the disappeared from the Palace of Justice.
CALCP: Welcome to a new accompanied organization

The Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers Collective (CALCP) was born in September of 2001 in Bucaramanga in order to provide accompaniment to social, community and union organizations as well as communities of displaced and vulnerable populations in the region. Currently, CALCP carries out important consultative work for the indigenous peoples Matllán Bari in Catatumbo, who struggle to survive and preserve their ancestral territory. Judith Maidanando, one of the NGO lawyers, talked to PBI about their work.

What were the reasons that encouraged you to found the Luis Carlos Perez Lawyers Collective?

We had all recently graduated from university and had previous work experience with communities, the displaced population, youth, and peasant farmers. We didn’t want to carry out our profession in the traditional way: we wanted to be lawyers serving the people, to practice law in an alternative manner and, above all, accompany social and community causes. At the time, Bucaramanga had become a receiving zone for people forcibly displaced from Magdalena Medio, Catatumbo and Arauca. This is, the zone was undergoing a serious humanitarian crisis, and there was no organization in the region that accompanied social organizations and NGOs from a legal perspective, in their defense of human rights.

Why did you decide to seek international accompaniment from PBI?

Over the years, our risk has increased considerably because of the causes we accompany, the zones we work in and our position on the defense of human rights. We knew of the work and PBI’s commitment to other human rights, NGOs, which led us to explore the possibility of requesting this accompaniment.

Indigenous peoples Matllán Bari

You work in regions that are suffering various humanitarian crises, focusing on the defense of political prisoners, the displaced population, and criminalized social and community leaders. What are the greatest difficulties you encounter in your work?

We work within zones under considerable paramilitary, social, economic, political and military control. The State is disinterested in carrying out its obligations, in particular regarding the protection of human rights. In addition, the antisocial and criminal policies of the current government, the open and concealed complicity of the State and its security agencies in the violation of human rights make our work even more difficult, causing labeling, persecution and a general increase in oppression against us.

CALCP advises and accompanies a process of resistance and provides defense of indigenous territory for the Matllán Bari Pueblo in Catatumbo who oppose the presence of oil companies in their territories. How would you define the current panorama of this process and what are the greatest challenges for 2002?

Violation of the rights of the Pueblo Bari has been open, evident and verified, as have the threats to their survival, ethnic integrity and culture. However, the State, through the appropriate agencies, has not responded to the complaints, appeals and petitions of the indigenous people. To protect themselves, the Pueblo Bari implemented legal actions, strengthened their organization, carried out training and acted through political advocacy, visibility and denunciation. This led to the suspension of oil and seismic explorations. However, we believe that this interruption is more closely linked to the interest in starting new initiatives in this strategic zone in order to guarantee displacement and plundering of lands for the eventual return of explorations and exploitations.

How do you evaluate the government’s response to the situation of displacement and violence in the north of the country?

There has been no kind of response and the little attention they have paid is through the use of funds received from international cooperation. It is clear that this situation has been abandoned, even the Constitutional Court has said that, first of all, the State is not aware of the dimensions of the problem, second, it doesn’t have sufficient resources to address the problem and finally, it doesn’t coordinate attention to displaced populations with local bodies and institutions, nor does it invite the local population to participate. This is a region where paramilitaries have an open presence, using the name Aguas Negras. The State has an interest in exploiting the natural resources and installing mega-projects in the region, not in protecting human rights.
Members of the Barrancabermeja team accompanied representatives of the Luis Carlos Pérez Lawyers Collective (CALCP) in a visit to indigenous group Motilón Bari for a march and public hearing in Tibía, North of Santander. The event took place on October 12, 2006 and was organised by the Motilón Bari to denounce serious violations of their human rights, such as restrictions on the free movement of individuals, cultural and subsistence activities, as well as indiscriminate attacks, including bombing and direct aggression against members of the Bari community.

Added to these violations is the Ministry of the Environment’s concession in May 2005 of Environmental License No. 0024 to ECOPETROL to set up in ancestral Bari territory, without prior consultation with community and after the presentation of serious errors in the environmental impact study conducted by the oil company.

The march and hearing brought together approximately 800 indigenous people from all Colombian Cattunobo communities, accompanied by the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations, civil authorities, the Colombian military, Church representatives and local and regional social organizations. More than seventy indigenous Bari came from Venezuela to march in solidarity. Participants from the Colombian government such as the Office on Environment of the Ministry of the Interior and the Licenses, Permits and Procedures Group of the Ministry of the Environment cancelled at the last minute despite having received the invitation two months before and having confirmed their attendance at the event.

December 2006: “Agrarian Encounter in Magdalena Medio”

Event of annual gathering of the space “Tobal Worthy Life” promoted by the ACVC, New Port Fair, Valley of the River Comitana, Northeast Antioquia

The Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (CREHOS) - human rights organization accompanied by PBI Barrancabermeja participated in the occasion of the end of year celebration for the Campesino Association of the Comitana River Valley (ACVC) in Nuevo Puerto Fair of the Comitana River Valley, northeastern Antioquia, alongside other human rights organizations. The three key themes of the event were the humanitarian crisis, forced migrations and the cultivation of coca and violations of human rights and international humanitarian rights which affect the communities of the region.

OFP celebrates International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

The Popular Feminist Organization (OFP) was accompanied by members of the PBI team in Barrancabermeja during the event “Vigil for Peace”, which took place on Camilo Torres Park, Barrancabermeja on November 18, 2006 for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Five hundred seats were placed along the length of one of the central avenues, occupied by the same number of women carrying homemade lanterns, dressed in black, robes and signs announcing the motive and date of death of their family members. All speeches made throughout the course of the event highlighted the theme: “No to death and yes to life”.

Pitufos y Varías Asesinato
Abril 17 de 2006
Barrancabermeja

OFP vigilia en Barrancabermeja (Foto: OFP)
Investigation of paramilitarism in Sucre

ensurers of the Bogotá

Bogotá

the MVD, demanded the mayor's resignation and called for a comprehensive investigation of the evidence submitted by the Movement for Public Hearings.

Vicente victims of violence in Sucre

had the testimonies of eighteen people from the region, who were chosen from the 160 residents gathered in the day leading up to the event. Their testimonies mentioned various forms of displacement, mass graves, local government corruption, links between public officials and paramilitaries, and the insufficient execution of the Peace Accords. According to a public statement from the Mayor's Office, a "study carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), dated from 2000, shows that the paramilitaries controlled 90% of Sucre."

Senator Alexander Lopez and Congresswoman Wilson Borja also contributed, while both Cepeda presented charges and a report compiled by the MVD. In his statement, Cepeda set out a series of accusations against the Mayor of Sucre. Adding to this, Blasén was the sole mayor's candidate because of pressure exerted by Rodrigo Mercado.
Strengthening the organizational capacity of rural farmers in eastern Antioquia

Since April of 2001, the Medellin team has regularly accompanied the Judicial Liberty Corporation (CIL) in its visits to Eastern Antioquia (EA). The population in this region, east of Medellin, has suffered and continues to suffer from various human rights violations and international humanitarian law, including threats, arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial executions and forced displacement, responsibility for which is attributed to illegal armed groups and to the Colombian public security forces. According to CIL, this NGO accompanies the victims, offering legal advice and defense in both Colombian and international courts for cases of human rights violations. CIL also provides workshops in human rights and health within the rural areas of EA, strengthening the organizational capacity of communities affected by the Colombian armed conflict. On November 27 and 28, two members of the Medellin team accompanied a member of CIL to the villages of El Molino and El Jordan, in the Cocora municipality, for the presentation of a sexual health workshop to youth in the area. In the first locality, soldiers were utilizing the installations in the village schoolhouse. Both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations have mentioned that the presence of troops in the heart of a village defies the principle of distinction between combatants and the civilian population, transforming civil property into a military target. Year after year, the United Nations reports various non-compliances with this principle of international humanitarian law, exemplified in the guerrilla attacks with explosives after the Army placed a troop encampment within Pedro Nel Jimenez, School in Panama de Aracata in 2003.1

A day in the Humanitarian Zone at El Tesoro

With the construction of the humanitarian zone on Don Petro’s land in April of 2006, many other communities have also begun to organize and return to their lands and communities in the Cauca region. In October 2008, 35 families returned to El Tesoro. The residents came from the region of Jipijapa and, following their displacement, they lived in the Sierra de Veracruz community. Walking along the route from Don Petro’s land to El Tesoro, the following ten years that the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities have experienced in these territories. We leave surrounded by African palm white, in the distance, high on Cerro Carretera, we hear loud explosions. We see helicopters of the armed forces flying on the horizon. In the middle of the palm, we pass the former hamlet of Andalucia, abandoned ten years ago, where all that remains is a schoolhouse amid the green desert. Ten minutes later, we leave the palm plantations and cross an abandoned farm. Paintings from the paramilitary Newspaper Farmer Self-Defense Groups of Urabá and Córdoba (ACCCU) and BAC (Elmer Cardenas Bello) are still on walls of the house.

The sun hits us hard and sweat is pouring down our backs. It’s a relief to finally enter the thick jungle. We pass abandoned huts, some with houses still intact. The paramilitary and military violence has been displacing the local people since 1997. After a decade of massacres, economic blockades and harassment, hardly anyone remains in these lands. Those that returned found that more than 10,000 hectares of oil palm were planted in their collective territory. After two hours in the jungle, we finally see a sign of life. A small dog approaches and further ahead we hear children’s voices. They are fishing on the side of the stream that has been accompanying us the entire way. Half an hour later, we pass subsistence crops and, some two hundred meters ahead, see the entrance to the humanitarian zone. A complete village, only two months old, in the middle of the jungle. There’s much activity: smoke rising from the houses, chickens, pigs, kids of children looking at us, sleeping at us, everyone working on something: clearing rice, curing wood, preparing food. They hug us, greet us and inform us that these babies have been born since they arrived. After ten years of violence and displacement, the farmers have returned to what is theirs. “My land is nearby, but I prefer to live here in the humanitarian zone. We’ve been through everything together. We still need each other,” says Rebeca, one of the jewels from El Tesoro.
Celebration of PBI’s anniversary in Spain

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\section*{EU missions called on to consult with human rights community}

\textbf{PBI’s European Office of the 20th European Union Human Rights Forum} in Brussels - Women’s human rights defenders were one of the focus of the 20th European Union (EU) Human Rights Forum, organized by the Finnish Presidency in Helsinki and in Brussels on December 4th and 5th.

The focus of this year’s forum was the implementation of EU policies regarding women’s human rights. Participants include the European Commission, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and civil society organizations. The forum provided a platform for discussing the implementation of EU policies, including women’s rights, in the European Union.

\section*{From San José de Apartadó to Holland}

\textbf{From San José de Apartadó to Holland} in Bogotá - David Rigolar, representative of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, visited the home of the Peace Community for some 400 people in Amsterdam, Holland, to discuss how displacements caused by combat between guerrillas and paramilitaries and with violent violations of human rights led the peace community to create the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

During his tour, Rigolar also discussed the impact of the conflict on the community and its members, including the efforts to preserve the memory of those who have been killed.

\section*{EUROPEAN OFFICE (EOO)}

- In December, PBI EOO and PBI Spanish State met with a delegation of the Popular Party in Spain to present a parliamentary resolution regarding human rights defenders.

- A new film, "The Democratic Republic of Congo: The Arms of Impunity," was presented in Brussels and in Paris. It explores how human rights defenders and journalists in the DRC have faced threats to their lives. The film documents the efforts of a group of Congolese journalists who have risked their lives to expose human rights violations.

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The San José de Apartadó Peace Community speaks out in Washington

San José de Apartadó Peace Community leader Renato Acevedo traveled to Washington, D.C., as part of his United States tour last November. His sister, Delcyria Ateia, was one of eight people killed from the Community in the massacre of February 2005, a crime for which the perpetrators have still not been brought to trial.

To ensure security for the Community, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered that "provisional measures" be awarded to the Peace Community, insisting that Colombian authorities guarantee the security of community members through a series of actions.

However, armed forces continue to commit aggression against community members. Amnesty International reports that, since the Community's creation in 1997, more than 165 members have been killed or disappeared. The community has suffered massacres, economic blockades, forced displacement and intimidation from all Colombian armed actors — military, paramilitary and guerrilla.

The PBI United States Representatives organized a tour in Washington with the aim of gaining political support for the Community and drawing attention to the reality of the precarious human rights situation in the region today. Between November 14 and 16, the Representative, Renato and a Colombian specialist from WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America) met with twelve members of Congress and with a distinguished Senator's assistant, who spoke at length with Renato and the Representative about new strategies for political work and themes related to community protection.

Renato's tour produced many positive results, including wider political support, broadening of the Support Network. In addition, congressional aides placed calls to the Department of State (DOS) expressing their concern for the lack of progress in the case of the 2005 massacre. During a meeting with the program official for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of DOS, PBI shared their concern about the Community's situation. Members of the DOS answered that they remain attentive to the precarious situation in the Peace Community. Jonathan Faier, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs in the DOS, and two other officials are already planning a visit to the Community.

OTHER PBI PROJECTS

GUATEMALA: The final year of the\nBergen government has been characterized\nby heavy militarization of the country and\nwithin the context of PBI's work, a hostile\nenvironment for accompanied organizations. The\nmost significant example is the arrest\nfor armed treachery and for being a member of a\nquote "terrorist group" in November 2006. Despite\nwhether General and district judge, a political\nmovement is being roused in the country against\nimpunity. For example, Rolly Escobar, coordinator\nfor the organization CENAFRIGAM, denounced\nthe assassination of a colleague from the same organization. Shortly thereafter,\nthe same colleague was killed. Shortly thereafter,\nhe received death threats and was closely\nmonitored. PBI activated its International\nSupport Network, and continues to watch the\nsituation with concern.

INDONESIA: While the peace\nprocess in Aceh continues and local elections\ntook place without any security incidents, the team in Wamena, Papua, reports an increase in tension after the\nDecember murder of two members of the
national army TNI. In Jayapura,\nPapua, the team has accompanied Yohanes Christian Wamisty, director of the\norganization IDH (Institute of\nInvestigation, Analysis and Development\nof Legal Aid), as he realized that he was being observed and was closely\nmonitored by members of the military\nintelligence services. Meanwhile, the\nteam is evaluating new petitions from\nPapua and Yakuarta.

NEPAL: The Seven Party Alliance Government and the Maoists managed to sign a peace\ntruce, agree upon an interim constitution and the terms of Maoist participation in\ngovernment. However, lack of certainty about the future role of the Palace and the National\nArmy means the peace remains a fragile state. The lawyer's organization, the "Advocacy\nForum", member of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), works against impunity for human rights violations and has requested accompaniment from PBI in order to docu-\nment and investigate 12 cases of disappearances in Kathmandu and in the east of the country.

MEXICO: Worry has been\nconfirmed over the new priority that\nis to be given to human rights issues within the new Calderón government's agenda, just as in the\nFox-era. What began as a peaceful\nprotest in Oaxaca in May of 2006 be-\nnanced into a broader social movement\nagainst government corruption and human rights violations. While international\npressure on Mexico has slowed,\nmany human rights organizations\ncontinuing to monitor the situation. From the Mexican Human Rights Network (REHRA) to accompany its coordinators, coordinators\nwere accompanied, initially, in their efforts to help the prevailing violence by\nmonitored and to ensure that human rights are respected and live up, in their mission\ntheir struggle with the government in Mexico, \nand against human rights violations in the context of the conflict.

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Time to say goodbye

Rae Anne Lafrenz, from the United States, and Bettina Priotti, from Argentina, both spent more than two years in the Colombia Project, but they never had the chance to work together. Rae Anne left her mark on the Medellín and Uribá sub-teams, while Bettina shared her wisdom with the volunteers in Barrancas and Bogotá. Before they closed their suitcase of memories and returned to their respective destinations, the two colleagues interviewed each other and shared a snapshot of their time in Colombia.

Bettina asks Rae Anne

What was the greatest lesson you learned in PBI?

After years working in projects styled more towards “development” and the provision of direct services to marginalized communities, “non-intervention” amazes me. I’ve seen that “not doing” has a more significant meaning for these PBI accompanies because of the trust it implies within the relationship. Traveling at their side, through cities or along rivers, merely assuring that their work continues progressing, has been an important lesson for me in the art of listening and observing with all senses. “Not to doing, but yes” to walking with and listening to, are tools I plan to make use of from here on out.

In the two years you worked as a volunteer, what was the moment that had the most impact on you?

My openness of most “impact” all had a common thread: fear. Not my own fear, I really have no misgivings that might impede the work. I refer to situations in which the mal fea of the accompanied person, or of the people in the communities, catches sight of me and I end up sharing in the terror of the moment. The first time I felt fear for an accompanied person, in a very dangerous situation, it was hard for me to assimilate it, for I’d never felt anything like it. Later, it affected me as strongly as quickly I was able to lower the adrenaline to put into practice the security measures used by PBI in the field. And then the final impact for me: the realization that this fear was not my own, but rather loaned to me from another and, no matter what, I will never be a Colombian human rights defender with death threats. These are moments of intense accompaniment.

You have accompanied the construction process of the Humanitarian Zone in Carhurahú since its beginning. What did this accompaniment mean to you?

I had the good fortune of being able to witness the establishment and growth of a new humanitarian zone in the Carhurahú river region. I feel fortunate because few people in the world have the opportunity to go to know a return of displaced people to their lands and even fewer to see the formation of a new process of resistance dedicated to the protection and organization of rural farmers. Sharing living conditions with the farmers and protecting the defenders who accompany the process of the humanitarian zone have been unexpected gifts for me, which even today fills me with strong emotions. I’m excited about returning to see them again in a year, or two, or three. Living the life in Carhurahú has been rewarding since their forced displacement. Meanwhile, from outside of PBI, I pledge to do my part by spreading the victims’ stories and pushing for justice and truth. After having shared so much with the people of Carhurahú, I cannot be silent.

Rae Anne asks Bettina

You have worked in the Barrancabermeja and Bogotá teams. What stands out for you in each region?

My first commitment was to be in PBI and in Colombia for one year, something that over time, and taking into account the needs of the project, became 15 months in the Barrancabermeja team. The fieldwork simulates you to want to understand more directly how decision making processes and how we carry out our political work, this definitely leads you to want to spend some time in Bogotá, which is where the majority of advocacy work is carried out in Colombia. I would say that I’d made the same choices in the next life, although I’d see a little more breeze in Barrancas.

After working with Witness of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, how would you describe your experience of accompanying a fellow NGO like the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared?

For me to come to Colombia — as the sister of someone who was kidnapped and disappeared as part of State terrorism in Argentina towards the end of the ’70s, then as a militiam in the human rights movement forming part of the Relatives and other organizations like Mothers, Grandmothers and, more recently, accompanying the formation of HIPAS (Children for Liberty and Justice and against Forgetting and Silence) — means that, apart from arriving already sensitized to the issues, I had the expectation of being able to share three experiences with others. I arrived with my soul wide open, knowing that there continues to be victims of such crimes. I lived through these. There were very moved by the families of May 16 in Barrancabermeja as well as by the acts of the Victims Movement, HIPAS, the deaths of Dajabones and Sons, crossing a Bolivar Plaza filled with large and small photos, always in the search for faces and memories. I must confess that it has been hard to not “accompany”, that I have achieved it because I believe that the efficiency of one’s work is based in the ability to be present without opinion, not interfering in the decisions by the organizations we accompany. For me, this has been meaningful and rewarding work and a half year. I expect to accompany with the conviction that there is still much left to do in Colombia and in Latin America, and the one of the most important initiatives that makes a difference in the presence of PBI Colombia. It is working from the South for the South so that this experience can be multiplied across the region.

What will you take as a testimonial of your two years in Colombia?

It was very important to reaffirm my conviction that collective projects and solidarity are still possible, that the nation-wide is not about “money” and without the contribution of PBI may be small, it makes a difference in its way of helping to transform the Colombian conflict.
Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a Non-Governmental Organization registered with the United Nations which since 1984 has a permanent team of international observers/accompaniment in Colombia. Its aim is to protect the space of legally recognized human rights defenders, who suffer repression for their non-violent work on behalf of human rights.

To achieve this objective, the PBI Colombia Team accompanies always through local petitions people or organizations who are threatened, distributes information on the evolution of the conflict and carries out advocacy and lobbying activities with civil and military authorities, as well as with state and military organizations, NGOs, the Church, diplomats and other organizations, promoting international action.

If you consider that PBI's presence is useful to protect the groups who work on behalf of human rights, you could:

- support us financially, as an individual or through an organization.
- cite the PBI group closest to you. Support the international network from your city.
- become a PBI volunteer. (Regardless of origin, race, sexual orientation or religion.)

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