

## The forced displacement and human rights violations against women

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### Operation Genesis: Ten years later

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Amnesty International  
Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD) (through PBI Cataluña)  
Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) (through PBI Spanish State)  
Appletree Foundation (through PBI UK)  
City Council of Palencia (through Sodepaz)  
City Council of Vitoria (through PBI Vitoria Gasteiz)  
Broederlijk Delen  
Cafod  
Canadian Autoworkers (through PBI Canada)  
Central Missie Commissariat (CMC)  
Christian Aid  
Diakonia  
Diakonisches Werk

Fons Mallorquí  
Government of Cantabria (through PBI Spanish State)  
Government of Navarra (through Mugarik Gabe)  
Intermon-Oxfam  
Kerkinactie  
Law Society (through PBI UK)  
Lonely Planet  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France (through PBI France)  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland (through PBI Switzerland)  
Misereor  
PBI Germany  
Project Counseling Service (Heks)  
Raising Trust (through PBI UK)  
Civil Service of Peace (through PBI Germany)  
Trocaire

According to Human Rights Watch<sup>1</sup>, “Civilians suffer the brunt of the conflict, as every year thousands become displaced by the violence, losing their homes and livelihoods. Forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, threats, and kidnappings remain commonplace. The vast majority of abuses remain unaddressed”. We would like to draw your attention to the following two reports: the first is from the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ)<sup>2</sup>, attacking the problem of forced displacement; the second comes from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR)<sup>3</sup>, highlighting the serious situation faced by women in the conflict.

## Forced displacement: a strategy to expropriate others' land

**A**ccording to the CCJ report, “in many cases, forced displacement has been utilized as a method to consolidate the monopoly over farmland, through violence and legal traps carried out by mainly paramilitary groups, either with the support of or lack of intervention by the Colombian armed and police forces, in conjunction with local and national authorities. (...) Currently, some of 21 the most important governmental policies support large scale legalization of the land seizure carried about by paramilitary groups.” According to the CCJ, government proposals for the demobilization of paramilitary groups serve the same purpose, pointing out that the High Commissioner for Peace, Luis Carlos Restrepo, has clearly expressed this intention: the objective of “programs of productive projects for peace”, destined for ‘reinserted’ paramilitaries, is “termination of a rural non-productiveness which had become a way of life in various regions of the country due to the presence of illegal groups”, “converting them (the paramilitaries) into property holders and integrating them into viable businesses”.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with this phenomenon, “in various parts of Colombia, communities of displaced persons or those at risk of forced displacement, men and women small farmers and communities of African descendents and indigenous peoples all oppose this policy and are demanding, through legal action and civil resistance, their right to a life with honor, the restitution of their territories and a return to these same territories under secure and dignified conditions. Nevertheless, these initiatives have been either disregarded or labeled by the government as contrary to peace.”

## Women as victims, and also bearers of hope



Indigenous Embera © Jorge Mata/Surimages

**I**n their report, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) “communicates and reiterates its serious concern for the suffering endured by Colombian women because of the violence and discrimination aggravated by the armed conflict”. Furthermore, the report points out “the extraordinary efforts by Colombian women to cope with the adversity of the internal armed conflict”, that they are “not only victims of structural discrimination and violence, which is exacerbated by the internal armed conflict, they are also the bearers of initiatives of inclusion, democratization and authentic peace-making for the Colombian State and society.”

Particularly serious are the numerous occasions in which women’s rights are diminished within the context of armed conflict simply because they are women. Violence against women is used as a war strategy by actors in the armed conflict, in their effort to gain control of land and communities. The Commission’s Rapporteur identified four main manifestations of violence that especially affect women. “First, the actors in the armed conflict employ different forms of physical, psychological and sexual (...), dehumanizing the victim, injuring



Peasant-farmer in settlement of displaced persons, La Honda, Medellín

her family circle and/or spreading terror in her community (...). In this kind of violence, women can be direct targets or collateral victims (...). Second, there exists violence intended to cause the forced displacement of women from their territory and the consequent removal from their homes, daily lives, community and family. Third, sexual violence can be involved in the forced recruitment of women, destined to make them render sexual services (...). Fourth, there is violence intended to constantly subject women to measures of social control imposed by the illegal armed groups (...). The situation for indigenous and Afro-Colombian women is particularly critical, as they are victims of multiple forms of discrimination, such as racial and ethnic, in addition to the fact of being a woman”.

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2007”  
<sup>2</sup> Colombian Commission of Jurists, “Revivir el destino de forzado: protección y restitución de los territorios usurpados - Obstáculos y desafíos para garantizar el derecho al patrimonio de la población desplazada en Colombia”, 2006  
<sup>3</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “Violence and discrimination against women in the armed conflict in Colombia”, October, 2006  
<sup>4</sup> High Commissioner for Peace, press release, “El Gobierno adjudicará 700 hectáreas de tierra a desmovilizados”, September 29, 2006, www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/noticias/2006.

## Increase in harassment and threats against defenders

**D**uring the last few months of 2006, members of PBI Colombia observed a sharp increase in threats and harassment leveled against accompanied human rights defenders and communities in many regions of the country.



In the Urabá region, residents of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community released a public statement<sup>1</sup> expressing concern about a group of 30 to 40 armed men, wearing AUC (United Self-defense Groups of Colombia) handkerchiefs, in a home close to San Joseito. The supposed paramilitary group asked for names of local leaders and declared their main mission to be the extermination of the Peace Community. They accused the Community of being guerrilla and indicated that the presence of “gringos” represented the sole roadblock in the implementation of the group’s mission.

Similarly, in the Chocó region, Enrique Petro and inhabitants of the Curbaradó Humanitarian Zone have also experiencing an increase in hostilities. Since April of 2006, PBI has been present in process of creating this zone, through the accompaniment of the Inter-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP), in their support of the farmers’ construction of the zone on Don Petro’s property. Up until April, this land had been dominated by the illegal cultivation of African palm, but persistence on the part of these farmers has led to the formation of a humanitarian zone on a small piece of land. However, far from achieving respect for their rights, the community has been unable to live in peace. In October, CIJP condemned<sup>2</sup> a conversation that had taken place between palm workers which suggested that Don Petro “must be removed, willingly or not”. This threatening comment occurred one month after he had received other verbal intimidation: “at the moment it is not possible to touch Enrique Petro because he is always with the gringos, but we will get at what hurts him more, his family”.<sup>3</sup> Added to these threats is information from the region of a presumed paramilitary group identified as the “Águilas Negras”<sup>4</sup>.

Intimidation has also knocked on the door at the Manuel Cepeda Foundation in Bogotá. In November, men armed with assault weapons stopped the vehicle assigned by the Administrative Security Department (DAS) to Iván Cepeda and Claudia Girón, both of whom are members of the Manuel Cepeda Foundation. Neither was in the vehicle at the time, but the men proceeded to search the other passengers, presenting themselves to the

driver and bodyguard as members of the National Police Intelligence Unit. Later, this same governmental entity denied any such operations at the time and place of the incident.

Meanwhile, in Valle del Cauca, the existence of a presumed legal set-up against thirteen social leaders, unionists, political organizers for the opposition and human rights defenders has come to light. The set-up seeks to link these individuals with rebellion and terrorism. Included is a list in which Berenice Celeyta Alayon, president of NOMADESC who receives accompaniment from PBI, is named alongside Marta Ascuntar and Fernando Sánchez, both coordinators of the Valle de Cauca chapter of the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSP). Ascuntar and Sánchez were forced to leave Colombia temporarily after their names appeared in this missive<sup>5</sup>.

This harassment is causing adverse effects on the development of the work that these human rights defenders seek to carry out in Colombia. At this time, the responsible entities have not offered any clarification regarding the investigations into these threats.

<sup>1</sup> “Las amenazas persisten”, Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó, September 26, 2006

<sup>2</sup> “Nuevos planes de actuación contra Enrique Petro y Zonas Humanitarias”, Inter-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission, October 23, 2006

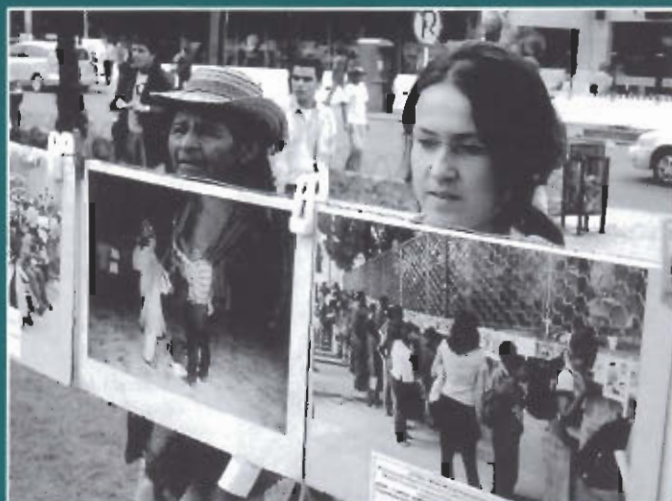
<sup>3</sup> Informe 75, Inter-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission, September 22, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> “Planean detención masiva contra destacados dirigentes del Valle del Cauca”, Urgent Action published by FCSP, NOMADESC, SINTRAEMCALL, etc. October 2, 2006

## International Human Rights Day does not go unnoticed in Bogotá

**T**o mark International Human Rights Day, the Rayuela Organization called upon 4000 women from all over the country to come together to build a monument for peace. Dressed for mourning, thousands of women walked together on the side of the road, from Bolívar Plaza, in the city center, to the park on 93<sup>rd</sup> Street, and along 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Carrying signs with slogans calling for justice and truth, the women walked the length of the streets in remembrance of those who have been killed, disappeared or kidnapped during the armed conflict. Along the way, there were tents from organizations such as the Movement of Victims, the organizations Daughters and Sons for Remembrance and Against Impunity, and Family Members of the Victims from the Patriotic Union, in order to provide information to passersby about the murders 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 drew closer that morning of December 10<sup>th</sup> to ask about the event and read the names of the deceased, engraved on the bricks lining the streets. Perhaps, when they set out that day, most didn’t 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 of CAVIDA and Carolina Pardo Jaramillo of Inter-ecclesiastical 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 cord – the support network for CAVIDA – is 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 displace, kill, and uproot us. What has the Government done? Nothing, it just investigates us while the military agencies and paramilitaries 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 works 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-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and me from CAVIDA. Last year we received an invitation to go to South Africa from Misereor. I went alone to represent the community and what I shared impacted those who were present, they learned of our story 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 of those in solidarity who have passed through CAVIDA, they are part of the process. PBI, the Inter-ecclesiastical 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 settlements

© Jorge Mata/Surimages

### And the most difficult moment?

The language, I don’t speak German. We traveled a lot, giving speeches, and there were times I didn’t know what was happening, but I wanted to make use of the moments to show what is happening in Colombia. Uribe talks like our country’s a paradise, but it’s not. We carry a sign with the 86 dead or disappeared



Anita, from CAVIDA

victims of the community. It feels safer to express oneself outside the country. The first people who gave testimonies in Colombia about what they did to us 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 and we’re going to invest it so that it benefits the entire community.

### What is the significance of the award for justice and reparation?

They gave us 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 vitamin. For ten years we have exposed the connections and now even the same State agencies realize 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-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and PBI don’t leave us alone.

## Bremen Solidarity Award

2004 Else de Oesterheld (Argentina), representative of the Commission of Mothers and Relatives of Disappeared Germans and Kuno Hauck (Germany), spokesperson for the Coalition against Impunity in Argentina  
2003 Sumaya Farhat-Naser (Palestine) and Gila Svirsky (Israel)  
2001 Marguerite Barankitse and Melanie Nitahongendera, Rwanda  
1997 Nadjet Bouda (Algeria), Hetti Arachchi Indra Samanmalie (Sri Lanka) and Brigitte Erler (Germany)

1995 Han Dong-Fang, China  
1994 Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar, Burma  
1992 Davi Copenawa, indigenous leader, Yanomami, Brazil  
1990 Lutheran Bishop Medardo E. Gómez and Tomasa de Jesús Ruiz, CRIPDES, El Salvador  
1988 Winnie and Nelson Mandela, South Africa

## Operation Genesis: ten years later

The jungle between Colombia and Panama is ancestral territory for indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians, who established their communities in this region long before the first signs of progress came to the zone. Towards the end of 1996, a military operation carried out by the public security forces began to reclaim the region from dominance of the FARC-EP (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia). Operation "Genesis" unfolded in February of 1997 in the Lower and Mid-Atrato River region, which meant indiscriminate bombardments<sup>1</sup> over various settlements in the watersheds of Salaquí, Cacarica and Truandó. At the same time, in the same zone, there were disappearances and massacres carried out by paramilitaries. The consequence of these attacks was massive displacement of the civilian population, close to 5,000 individuals fled to Turbo, Apartadó, Quibdó, Medellín, the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and even Panama. The Political Violence Database documents many of the attacks in the region, demonstrating collaboration between the public security forces and paramilitaries. Some of these crimes are barbarian, such as the case of the peasant-farmer Marino López Mena, whose severed head was

used as a football by the military and paramilitaries present during Mena's execution<sup>2</sup>.

In 1997, due to the insecurity of the inhabitants in the region, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) 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 ICHR was to be handed down, two armed individuals identified as paramilitaries entered the sports stadium in Turbo looking for one of the displaced persons<sup>3</sup>. During this period, PBI volunteers accompanied members of the community while they stayed in the stadium.

1,500 displaced persons from the Cacarica river basin joined together to form Communities of Self-determination, Life and Dignity (CAVIDA). Throughout the following three years, they negotiated the conditions of their return with the State until finally, in 2001, the inhabitants returned to Cacarica to establish themselves in two settlements. Once returned, they saw that the tropical forest had been cleared 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 CAVIDA decided to establish humanitarian zones, based on the international humanitarian right that demands a distinction of the civilian population from military targets<sup>4</sup>.

Ten years after Operation Genesis, many communities have returned in an organized manner to their lands, like in Jiguamiandó, Curbaradó and Cacarica. These communities, with the support of accompanying organizations such as the Inter-eccelesiastical Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP), 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 reparation and devolution of their land. They also seek respect for their territorial rights and the cessation of palm plantations on their



Monument in memory of the deceased from CAVIDA (Photo: Sebastian Roetters)

properties. Nonetheless, crimes perpetrated 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<sup>5</sup>, leader of Jiguamiandó and Curbaradó basins, on October 15, 2005 is one of the most recent cases and symbolizes the violations suffered by the population in the region.

Meanwhile, re-population, implementation of productive projects within collective territory and, according to the Urabá Regional Public Defender's office, the strong economic and political power which remain active in paramilitary structures, are proof of impunity<sup>6</sup>. In spite of repeated denouncements, not one person responsible for Operation Genesis has been sentenced.

CAVIDA and CIJP organized an ecological walk in Cacarica on February 15 in order not 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 retraced the same path taken by some of this displaced population. PBI joined the pilgrimage, alongside members of CAVIDA and CIJP.

1 "Sin Olvido 71-20 Asesinados y 11 Desaparecidos forzosamente en Jiguamiandó y Curbaradó (Bajo Atrato chococana entre el 5 y 31 de Diciembre de 1997)", Inter-eccelesiastical Justice and Peace Commission, December 30, 2006.  
 2 Deuda con la Humanidad - Paramilitarismo del Estado 1985-2003, Political Violence Database  
 3 Precautionary Measures agreed upon or extended by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights  
 4 International humanitarian rights and protection of war victims (www.cicr.org)  
 5 Sin Olvido 46 "Orlando Valencia", Inter-eccelesiastical Justice and Peace Commission, October 15, 2006  
 6 "Urabá seguirá bajo control armado, dice el Defensor" El Colombiano, November 14, 2006



Monument in memory of the deceased from CAVIDA (Photo: Sebastian Roetters)

## Violations of DDHH for economic interests

# The PPT judges transnational mining companies

The Mining Section of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) on transnational corporations and the rights of Colombians took place on November 10 and 11, 2006. The PPT represents an alternative justice system for victims in their search for truth, justice and integral reparation; judging crimes against humanity committed against the Colombian people by national economic groups and transnational corporations operating within the country. Arbitrators of the PPT are backed by international conventions, separate from judicial structures within the country, representing the ethical conscience of the people.

During the hearing, a careful contextual analysis and numerous accusations were presented involving the transnationals Drummond, CEMEX, Ladrillera Santafe, Holcim, Muriel, Glencore-Xstrata, 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 socio-political and military conflict in Colombia, as well as their protagonism in an economic model that seriously restricts the fulfillment of Colombians' economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

The convoking organizations presented cases linking enterprises and paramilitary groups in favor of their interests. They reported the systematic and general use of massacre, extrajudicial assassination,



Mine from the Frontino Gold Mines  
(© Jorge Mata/Surimoges)



Judges from PPT in Medellín. (Photo: Gearóid Ó Loingsigh)

forced disappearance and arbitrary detention as a strategy of terror to tear apart the social fabric and guarantee 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 violation of the right to self-determination, in its failure to fulfill the obligation of prior consultation with indigenous and Afro-descendant communities before handing out 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 2005 and July of 2008. The Tribunal hosted a new section about biodiversity in Caicara, February 24 - 27.

## Impunity



Where are Ángel and Claudia? This is the question their loved ones and members of the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES) ask each day. These two active members of this NGO disappeared six years ago right in the city center of Medellín. Investigations indicated that 1,808 telephone lines of non-governmental organizations and civil servants, including those of Ángel Quintero and Claudia Monsalve, 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 re-integration to the armed forces and soon Santoyo will resume his path to General. "They set Santoyo free and promoted him. This is total disrespect for the victims", says Rosa Serma, coordinator of the Medellín chapter of ASFADDES. While the ex-head of the United Action Group for Personal Security (Gaula) ascends the military career ladder, Colombian authorities have not clarified the disappearance of Ángel and Claudia and their cases remain in impunity. Their bodies may have been disappeared, but their stories cannot be forgotten.



## "Total disrespect for victims"

## 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 Jairo Castillo. The evidence appears to be so conclusive that the journal *Semana* 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 “8000” case, referring to a 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 Álvaro Araújo – 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, Foreign Secretary Consuelo Araújo, who has since resigned, his aunt’s ex-husband and Attorney General Edgardo Maya, his cousin and Constitutional Court Judge, Jaime Araújo and, lastly, his very own boss, President Álvaro 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 Appeal 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



Demonstration during Mancuso hearing  
(© Jorge Mata/Surimages)

Casanare - where there links exist between politicians and paramilitary Buitrago ‘Martín Llamas’. 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”<sup>2</sup>.

### Paramilitary statements

Paramilitary leaders Jorge 40, Salvatore Mancuso and Diego Vecino declared themselves ready to tell the whole truth. However, during Mancuso’s hearings, 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” confessions 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.<sup>3</sup>

### New paramilitary groups?

According to the *Espectador* newspaper<sup>4</sup>, 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 demobilizations, seek to guarantee control of local and regional political electoral machinery through violent actions and armed induction. These are the so-called *Águilas Negras*.

Alongside all of this, it is important to draw attention to the report by the Truth Commission about the siege of the **Palace of Justice** in 1985. Three conclusions have been most widely disseminated: the fact that President Belisario Betancourt was a mere spectator of the events; that the bodies of various magistrates 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.



There is no clarification about the disappeared from the Palace of Justice

<sup>1</sup> “Las pruebas hablan por sí solas”, *Semana*, November, 2006

<sup>2</sup> “Así se ‘tejió’ el pacto secreto del 2001 en Santa Fe Ralito”, *El Tiempo*, January 20, 2007

<sup>3</sup> *El Tiempo*, ‘Fiscalía editaría versiones de ex ‘paras’ por televisión’ January 25, 2007

<sup>4</sup> *El Espectador*, ‘El vuelo de las ‘Águilas Negras’, week of January 28’ – February 3, 2007



## CALCP: Welcome to a new accompanied organization

*The Luis Carlos Pérez 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 Motilón Bari in Catatumbo, who struggle to survive and preserve their ancestral territory. Judith Maldonado, one of the NGO lawyers, talked to PBI about their work.*

**What were the reasons that encouraged you to found the Luis Carlos Pérez 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. That 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.



*Signing the contract with CALCP*

**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.

**You work in regions that are suffering serious 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 move 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 Motilón 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 2007?**

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 solicitations 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 denouncement. 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 fumigations in this strategic zone



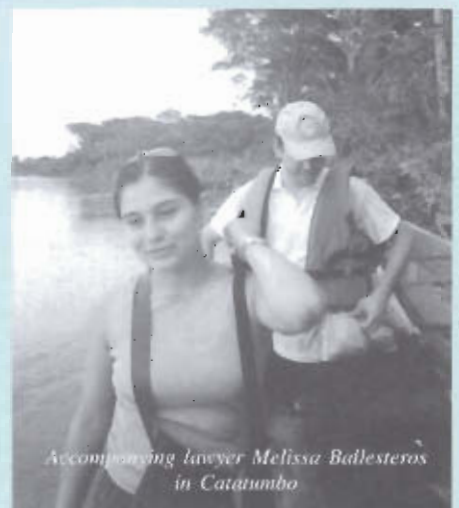
*Indigenous peoples Motilón Bari*

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 northeast of the country?**

There has been no kind of response and the little attention they have paid is through the use of funding 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 population 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 Águilas Negras. The State has an interest in exploiting the natural resources and installing mega-projects in the region, not in protecting human rights.



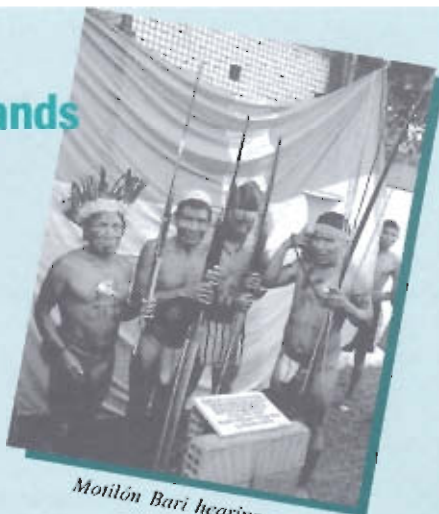
*Accompanying lawyer Melissa Ballesteros in Catatumbo*

## Barrancabermeja

### Motilón Bari claims its lands

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 Tibú, North of Santander. The event took place on October 12, 2006 and was organized 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 aggressions 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



*Motilón Bari hearing*

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 Catatumbo 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 Ethnicity 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 evaluation  
of the space "Table Worthy Life"  
promoted by the ACVC,  
New Port Ité, Valley of the River  
Cimitarra, Northeast Antioqueño



*Accompanying CREDHOS,  
Cimitarra river valley*

The Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (CREDHOS) - human rights organization accompanied by PBI Barrancabermeja - participated in the occasion of the end of year celebration for the Campesino Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC) in Nuevo Puerto Ité of the Cimitarra River Valley, northeastern Antioquia, alongside other human rights organizations. The three key themes of the event were the humanitarian crisis, fumigations 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 in 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".



*OFP vigil in Barrancabermeja (Photo: OFP)*

## Bogotá

### Investigation of paramilitarism in Sucre

**M**embers of the Bogotá team attended the Public Hearing on Human Rights in San Onofre, in the Sucre department, close to the Caribbean coast. In this event, held on November 27, PBI accompanied members of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas Foundation, Minga, José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective (Ccajar), the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES) and the Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP). This hearing, convoked by the Senate Commission on Human Rights in conjunction with the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MdV), represented an important step forward in the investigation of paramilitarism in Sucre. Representatives of the public security forces (National Army and National/Departmental Police), Mayor Jorge Blanco of San Onofre, the Archbishop of Sincelejo, Monsignor Nel Beltrán and others were all present at the event. There was also representation from the international community in the form of members of the Canadian embassy, the MAPP OEA<sup>1</sup>, Oxfam and the Colombian Support Network. These participants, along with more than 1,300 citizens from San Onofre and neighbouring villages, heard the testimonies of eighteen people from the region, who were chosen from the 160 reports gathered in the day leading up to the event. Their testimonies mentioned massive forced displacement, mass graves, local government corruption, links between politicians and paramilitaries and the insufferable situation faced by 2,162 families as a result of their displacement<sup>2</sup>. According to a public statement from the San Onofre community, "a study carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), dating from 2005, shows that the paramilitaries controlled 90% of San Onofre"<sup>3</sup>.

Senator Alexander López and Congressman Wilson Borja also contributed, while Iván Cepeda presented charges and a report compiled by the MdV. In his statement, Cepeda set out a series of accusations against the Mayor of San Onofre, adding that Blanco was the sole mayoral candidate because of pressure exerted by Rodrigo Mercado

Pelufo, alias "Cardena" and that "his first decision as Mayor was to illegally dismiss all municipal career civil servants in the administration, replacing them with the political quotas of the paramilitaries who also controlled city council"<sup>4</sup>. Towards the end of his statement, Cepeda, speaking for



*Victims of the violence in Sucre*

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

<sup>1</sup> Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz - Organización de Estados Americanos - Misión to support the Peace Process - Organization of American States

<sup>2</sup> "Renuncio señor alcalde de San Onofre: Segn las indicaciones del presidente Uribe Vélez", Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado, November 29, 2006

<sup>3</sup> "San Onofre: maquinaria paramilitar, terror, impunidad y corrupción", public statement from the San Onofre community reproduced by the Inter-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission, November 23, 2006

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

### Human rights workshop in Casanare

**I**n November, PBI accompanied the Foundation Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSP) to Yopal, capital of the Casanare department, and to the village of Cunamá, close to Boyacá. There were various objectives for this trip, including the accompaniment of FCSP's lawyer carrying out legal work in jurisdiction 45, located within the XVI Brigade, as well as to the Public Prosecutor's office, the Yopal prison, and meetings with various family members of victims of human rights violations. During this trip, PBI met with the second in command and the High Commander of the XVI Brigade. PBI also accompanied FCSP to Cunamá, where the lawyer carried out a workshop on human rights for the peasant farmers of the area. The lawyer shared information about the Colombian state agencies which one can turn to with a case of human rights violation, the mechanisms, and rights of a person suffering such a violation, and rights in the case of arrest. FCSP gathered denunciations and provided legal advice to residents of the area, those who had experienced - either in person or in their family - arbitrary detentions, disappearances and threats by members of the Army, paramilitaries or the guerrilla. FCSP works in the area bordering Boyacá-Casanare, alongside the Association for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared (ASFADDES) and the Social Corporation for Community Consulting and Training (COS-PACC). This is an area in which, historically, there have been many armed actors and where, currently, the public security forces are present.

## Medellín

### Victims want to hear Mancuso's confession

**S**alvatore Mancuso began his voluntary confession on December 19 in the city of Medellín. Mancuso, formerly one of the key leaders of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), answered for his actions as paramilitary chief over a period of more than ten years before a prosecutor of the Justice and Peace Unit. Outside of the Palace of Justice in Medellín, organizations requested that Mancuso's declaration be public. One of those organizations was the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MdV), including a member of the Manuel Cepeda Foundation, accompanied by PBI, together with the Judicial Liberty Corporation and other local NGOs. The State Attorney decided to impede their entrance, explaining that it was not a hearing, but rather a statement as part of an investigation, thus not public in nature. The MdV released a public statement that same day, noting that "once again it is evident that the victims and society as a whole are denied even the possibility of hearing the statement of the perpetrators in a hearing that should be totally public and open to the entire country". Demobilized AUC members and their families also demonstrated that day, carrying banners of support for Mancuso.

## Medellín

### Strengthening the organizational capacity of rural farmers in eastern Antioquia

**S**ince April of 2001, the Medellín team has regularly accompanied the Judicial Liberty Corporation (CJL) in its visits to Eastern Antioquia (EA). The population in this region, east of Medellín, has suffered and continues to suffer from serious human rights violations and international humanitarian law, including threats, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions and forced displacement, responsibility for which is attributed to illegal armed groups and to the Colombian public security forces, according to CJL. This NGO accompanies the victims, offering legal advice and defense in both Colombian and international contexts for cases of human rights violations. CJL 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 Medellín team accompanied a

member of CJL to the villages of El Molino and El Jordán, in the Cocorná 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 by the public security forces of this principle of international humanitarian law, exemplified in the guerrilla attacks with explosives after the Army placed a troop encampment within Pedro Nel Jiménez School in Panamá de Arauca in 2005<sup>1</sup>.



*Accompaniment in El Molino, Cocorná*

<sup>1</sup> Report by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005

## Urabá

### A day in the Humanitarian Zone at El Tesoro

*Urabá team members Moritz Tenthoff, from Holland, and Laia Bertrán, from Spain, accompanied Sister Cecilia of the Inter-ecclesiastical Justice and Peace Commission and Father Javier Giraldo to a remote zone in Chocho to celebrate the holidays with the communities. This is their report:*

**W**ith the construction of the humanitarian zone on Don Petro's land in April of 2006, many other communities have also begun to organize return to their lands and communities in the Curbaradó river region. In October 2006, 35 families returned to El Tesoro. The residents came from the region of Jiguamiandó where, following their displacement, they lived in the Bella Flor Remacho humanitarian zone.

Walking along the route from Don Petro's land to El Tesoro is like living through the last ten years that the Afro-

Colombian and indigenous communities have experienced in these territories. We leave surrounded by African palm while, in the distance, high on Cerro Carreperro, 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 Andalucía, 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 Peasant Farmer Self-Defense Groups of Urabá and Córdoba (ACCU) and BEC (Elmer Cardenas Bloque) 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 hamlets, 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 40,000 hectares of oil palm were planted in their collective territory.

After two hours in the jungle, we finally see signs 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, lots of children looking at us, smiling at us, everyone working on something; cleaning rice, cutting wood, preparing lunch. They hug us, greet us and inform us that two 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 Roberto, one of the jewels from El Tesoro.



*Brigadistas entering El Tesoro Humanitarian Zone*

## Celebration of PBI's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Spain

**A** day of celebration unfolded in Santander, Spain, for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PBI, with collaboration of International Cooperation Group and the

Directorate General of European Affairs

and Development Cooperation from the Government of Cantabria. During the event, a seminar about protection for defenders entitled "Processes of resistance and international accompaniment" was carried out and Liam Mahoney and Luis Enrique Eguren presented their new book, "In good company: International accompaniment for the protection of human rights". Rainer Huhle, member of the Nuremberg Human Rights Center (NMRZ), also participated in the event, as well as Martha Ascuntar, coordinator from the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP) in Valle del Cauca, Roly Escobar Ochoa, General Coordinator of Populations and Marginalized Areas of Guatemala (CONAPAMG) and Obtilia Eugenio Manuel, Executive Secretary for the Organization of Indigenous Me'Phaa People (OPIM), among others.



*José Félix G. Calleja (Director of Cantabrian Government Cooperation), Eduardo Casas (Vice-rector, University of Cantabria), Luis Enrique Eguren (book co-author) and Susan Fernández (PBI)*

## EU missions called on to consult with human rights community

*PBI's European Office at the 8<sup>th</sup> European Union Human Rights Forum*

**B**russels – Women human rights defenders were one of the focuses of interest in the 8<sup>th</sup> European Union (EU) Human Rights Forum, organized by the Finnish Presidency in Helsinki the 7 and 8 of December, 2006. For the third consecutive year, PBI's European Office (PBI-BEO) was invited to participate in this annual human rights forum organized by the European Presidency.

This time, the Forum was divided into three work groups: one dealt with human rights defenders, another worked on human rights and the fight against terrorism, while the final group studied questions relating to the promotion of human rights and democracy. PBI representatives actively participated in the group on human rights defenders, where there were also representatives from the Finnish Presidency, members of parliament, members of

international organizations and human rights defenders from many countries like, for example, Kopila Adhikari, accompanied by PBI in Nepal.

Some of the most noteworthy conclusions from the first group refer to the implementation of EU policies regarding defenders. Concretely, the workgroup deemed very important that EU diplomatic missions in the field organize consultative meetings with the local human rights community in order to agree upon strategies for effective policy implementation, placing special focus on gender. PBI considers that the 64 recommendations rising from the evaluation conducted by the Austrian Presidency in June of 2006 constitute an excellent starting point for these consultations. For more information about the conclusions, see: [www.protectiononline.org/spip.php?article1717](http://www.protectiononline.org/spip.php?article1717)

## From San José de Apartadó to Holland

**W**ilson David Higueta, representative of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, relived the history of the Peace Community for some 400 people in Amsterdam, Holland, recounting how displacements caused by combat between guerrilla, paramilitaries and the Army, along with constant violations of human rights, led the population to create a peace community. Similarly, Wilson remembered the death of leader Luis Eduardo Guerra and his loved ones, the most recent loss suffered by San José, and reminded those present that, up until now, this case remains in impunity. During his tour through Holland, Wilson was interviewed by Radio Wereldroep, met with Amnesty International of Holland and spoke with Janine de Vries, Parliamentary Advisor to Bert Koenders.



*Wilson David*

## PBI INTERNATIONAL

- Independent film director Rasmus Gerlach accompanied PBI volunteers for a year in Colombia and Mexico, where he visited conflict zones with lawyers, observed demonstrations, visited political prisoners and the homes of threatened defenders. His documentary, "The Peace Brigade – with unarmed bodyguards in Colombia and Mexico" (Ale/Col/Mex 2006, 81 min) shows the daily life and work of volunteers in the field and explains, with clear examples, how an emergency activation of the support network functions, as well as the work of activists in the national groups. The documentary may be purchased through PBI Germany: [info@pbi-deutschland.de](mailto:info@pbi-deutschland.de)



- PBI is in the exploratory phase of the transversalization of gender and diversity in all of its projects, taking into account internal operations, as well as its work in the field, and, relationships with local counterparts.

## EUROPEAN OFFICE (BEO)

- In December, PBI-BEO and PBI Spanish State met with a delegate of the Popular Party in Spain to present a parliamentary resolution regarding human rights defenders.
- A new documentary, "The Democratic Republic of Congo: The arms of impunity" was presented in Brussels and in Paris. The video shows how human rights defenders and journalists in the DR Congo, putting their own lives at risk, document human rights violations in a conflict with 3.8 million displaced persons. Their objective is the fight for truth, justice, reparation and against impunity and, for this, they are terrorized and murdered. For example, Pascal Kabungulu Kibembi, who worked with the League of Human Rights in the Great Lakes Region, was assassinated on July 31, 2005. (See the video online at: [www.protectiononline.org/spip/php?article1349](http://www.protectiononline.org/spip/php?article1349))

## The San José de Apartadó Peace Community speaks out in Washington

**S**an José de Apartadó Peace Community leader Renato Areiza traveled to Washington, D.C. as part of his United States tour last November. His sister, Deyanira Areiza, 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 actors continue to commit aggressions against community members. Amnesty International reports that, since the community's creation in 1997, more than 160 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 Representative 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,



*Renato Areiza's visit to Washington*

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 showed 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 Farrar, 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 Berger government has been characterized by heavy militarization of the country and, within the context of PBI's work, a hostile environment for accompanied organizations. The struggle continues against impunity, and in November 2006, Spain issued arrest warrants for ex-General and dictator Ríos Montt. Work is being carried out in the fight against impunity, for example: Roly Escobar, coordinator for the organization of Populations and Marginalized Areas of Guatemala CONAPAMG, denounced the assassination of a colleague from the same organization. Shortly thereafter, he received death threats and was closely monitored. PBI activated its International Support Network and continues to watch the situation with concern.

◆ **NEPAL:** The Seven Party Alliance Government and the Maoists managed to sign a peace treaty, agree upon an interim constitution and the terms of Maoist participation in government. However, lack of certainty about the future role of the Palace and the National Army means the process remains in a fragile state. The lawyer's organization, the "Advocacy Forum", member of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), works against impunity for human rights violations and has requested accompaniment from PBI in order to document and investigate 12 cases of disappearance in Katmandu and in the east of the country.

◆ **INDONESIA:** While the peace process in Aceh advances and local elections took place without any security incidents, the team in Wamena, Papua, reports an increase in tension after the December murder of two members of the national army TNL. In Jayapura, Papua, the team has accompanied Yan Christian Warinussy, director of the organization LP3BH (Institute of Investigation, Analysis and Development of Legal Aid), since he realized that he was being observed and monitored by members of the military intelligence services. Meanwhile, the team is evaluating new petitions from Papua and Yakarta.

◆ **MEXICO:** Worries have been confirmed over the low priority that is to be given to human rights issues within the new Calderón government's agenda, just as in the Fox era. What began as a teacher's strike in Oaxaca in May of 2006 became a broader social movement of protest against corruption and human rights violations. While internationally these actions provoked numerous reactions of protest, PBI Mexico in the field responded to various petitions from the Oaxacan Human Rights Network (RODH) to accompany its coordinators. Coordinators were accompanied, initially, in their efforts to halt the escalating violence by national security forces against protesters and, later on, in their missions to observe and investigate aggressions and intimidations received by participants in peaceful protests.

## 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 Urabá sub-teams, while Bettina shared her wisdom with the volunteers in Barranca 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 those 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. "No" 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 moments 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 real fear of the accompanied person, or of the people in the communities, catches ahold 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 just as strongly how quickly I was able to lower the adrenalin 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 progress of the Humanitarian Zone in Curbaradó 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 Curbaradó river region. I feel fortunate because few people in the world have the opportunity to get 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 Curbaradó they so yearned for 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 Curbaradó, I cannot be silent.



Bettina Priotti

### 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 stimulates you to want to understand more directly how disuasion functions 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 make the same choices in the next life, although I'd beg for a little more breeze in Barranca.

*After working with Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, how would you describe your experience of accompanying a similar 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 70's, then as a militant in the human rights movement forming part of the Relatives and other organizations like Mothers, Grandmothers and, more recently, accompanying the formation of HIJOS (Children for Identity 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 these experiences with others. I arrived with my soul wide open, knowing that there continue to be victims of such deviant practices as these. I have been very moved by the families of May 16 in Barrancabermeja as well as by acts of the Victims Movement, ASFADDES, the birth of Daughters and Sons, crossing a Bolívar Plaza filled with large and small photos, always in the search for faces and memories. I must confess that it has been hard to just "accompany", but I have achieved it because I believe that the efficiency of our 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 an unforgettable and extraordinary two and a half years. I return to my country with the conviction that there is still much left to do in Colombia and in Latin America, and that one of the most important initiatives that makes a difference is 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 souvenir of your two years in Colombia?*

It was very important to reaffirm my conviction that collective projects and solidarity are still possible, that the entire world is not about "money" and whilst the contribution of PBI may be small, it makes a difference in its way of helping to transform the Colombian conflict.



Rae Anne Lafrenz



[www.peacebrigades.org/colombia](http://www.peacebrigades.org/colombia)

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a Non Governmental Organization registered with the United Nations which since 1994 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 petition) 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 organisms, NGOs, the Church, diplomats and other organizations, promoting international action.

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

- support us financially, as an individual or through an organization.
- join 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.)

Visit our website or contact us:

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