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# PBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a pink top and a white shawl with blue and yellow patterns, holding a baby. The baby is wearing a pink hoodie and light blue pants. They are outdoors in a grassy field with a thatched roof structure in the background.

Social Corporation for Community  
Advisory and Training Services

The Social Corporation for Community Advisory and Training Services (Corporación Social para la Asesoría y Capacitación Comunitaria — COS-PACC) was established in Bogotá in 2002 and it's accompanied by PBI since 2009.



Fabian Laverde, member of COS-PACC.

The Social Corporation for Community Advisory and Training Services (Corporación Social para la Asesoría y Capacitación Comunitaria — COS-PACC) was established in Bogotá in 2002. The organisation primarily dedicates its efforts to assisting victims of human rights violations occurring in the departments of Casanare, Boyacá, Tolima, Arauca, and Cundinamarca. Its principal objective is reconstructing the fabric of society and an ongoing human rights school.

### Four areas of work

- Denunciation, legal advice, and organising and accompanying victims
- Food sovereignty through the promotion of agro-ecological production
- Organisational strengthening and rebuilding

the fabric of society in coordination with social organisations

- Raising international awareness on the reality of the communities accompanied by COS-PACC

Due to the grave humanitarian crisis presently affecting these communities, COS-PACC places greater emphasis in developing the first area of work. The organisation also carries out organising work with internally displaced people, political prisoners, family members of the disappeared, family members of victims of extrajudicial executions, marginalised sectors, youth, traditional small farmers, women, and in general with victims of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

# IT HAS NOT BEEN EASY FOR COS-PACC TO CARRY OUT ITS ACTIVITIES BECAUSE SINCE THE ORGANISATION BEGAN ITS WORK, MEMBERS HAVE BEEN THE VICTIMS OF STATE AND PARA-STATE PERSECUTION

## History

At the end of the 1990's, the peasant farmer movement —represented by the Departmental Peasant Association of Casanare— was exterminated by Colombian military forces, State security agencies, and paramilitary groups<sup>1</sup>. In 2002, some of the surviving members established the Social Corporation for Community Advisory and Training Services (COS-PACC).

The organisation arose from several discussions about the need to reconstruct regional social organisations and on the issue of systematic human rights violations in the region of the foothill plains—the foothills of the Eastern Andean Range and the Eastern Plains of Colombia, within the departments of Boyacá and Casanare.

According to COS-PACC, it has not been easy to carry out its activities. Since the organisation began its work, COS-PACC members have been the victims of State and para-State persecution. The first director of COS-PACC, Francisco Cortes Aguilar, was detained and charged with rebellion in Bolivia in April 2003. Two years later, he was released from prison after an intense campaign on his behalf. (For instance, the United Nations classified his detention as arbitrary)<sup>2</sup>. On 12 May 2005, troops belonging to the 16th Army Brigade, arbitrarily detained two COS-PACC members in the El Morro rural district, municipality of Yopal, according to a report published by CINEP and COS-PACC<sup>3</sup>.

## International accompaniment

In 2007, PBI began to accompany COS-PACC, principally in the departments of Casanare and Boyacá. PBI Colombia signed an accompaniment agreement with the organisation in 2009.

The armed conflict and economic interests in Casanare

Casanare is one of the largest departments in Colombia (44,490 square kilometres). The department is mostly populated by immigrants from Boyacá and indigenous communities, such as the Salivas and U'wa.



Children from the indigenous community of Chaparral Barronegro.



**Yvonne Berner and Sylvain Lefebvre (PBI) accompanying members of COS-PACC in Casanare.**

Until the 1980's, Casanare was characterised by an economy based on agriculture, livestock and lumber exploitation. At the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's, oil deposits were discovered in the region. Since 1986, British Petroleum (BP) established a significant presence through the acquisition of land along the foothills to the Eastern Andean Range. According to the previously cited report<sup>4</sup>, BP provided for and sponsored the presence of foreign mercenaries that supported —and continue to support— extractive operations. This same report also asserts that BP contracted Colombian State security forces to protect its enterprise. The Colombian army, through the 16th Brigade, continues to receive aid from British Petroleum. In addition to these formal contracts, the company gives monthly bonuses from between 700,000 and 800,000 Colombian pesos to the brigade's commissioned and non-commissioned officers for their role in the protection of oil infrastructure<sup>5</sup>.

## **The impact of oil exploitation**

In the 1990's, BP's exploitation quickly turned the foothill plains, which had been a remote agrarian expanse, into the principal area of oil production in Colombia. Foreigners and citizens from other regions of Colombia came to benefit from the oil wealth, which radically transformed the region's social and cultural conditions. The small-scale farmer was turned into a labourer for the oil industry, making it very difficult for workers and their families to create conditions to guarantee food security and sovereignty<sup>6</sup>.

According to this same report, the appropriation of natural resources has also generated diverse negative environmental impacts, including the destruction of water resources, changes to the ecosystem from the burning of gas, soil damage caused by exploration and



Members of the indigenous community of Chaparral Barronegro.

the construction of unplanned roads. The report also claims many cruel methods were used to persecute persons representing social movements in the region. One of the most significant negative impacts in the department has been the persecution and extermination of social movements. The report provides a timeline of this aggression and includes cases of forced disappearances, forced displacement, acts of physical and psychological torture, kidnapping, arbitrary detention and selective murders committed since 1987.

## The U'wa Indigenous Reservation

The Chaparral Barronegro Indigenous Reservation was established in northern Casanare in 1986. It has a population of approximately 410 inhabitants and covers 16,824 hectares. The French oil company HOCOL —recently purchased by ECOPEPETROL— seeks to reach an agreement with the indigenous community to advance

oil exploration activities in the area. The traditional leaders of the community have spoken out against business with the multinational. COS-PACC accompanies the community in its demands.

## Forced disappearances in Casanare

A total of 2,553 people were forcibly disappeared in the department of Casanare from 1986 to 2007, according to the previously cited report by CINEP and COS-PACC<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, this report claims that the authorities only recognise 1,524 of these cases, since the victims have stopped reporting forced disappearances directly or indirectly caused by State security forces. According to CINEP and COS-PACC, the dramatic increase of forced disappearances —in addition to other types of human rights violations— has been accompanied by greater presence of State security forces in the region, principally the army. According to these

**ON 20 DECEMBER 2008, THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICES HELD 848 CASES OF SO-CALLED «FALSE POSITIVES», WHICH WERE ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF 1,375 PEOPLE. OF THESE 848 CASES, 768 HAD BEEN COMMITTED SINCE 2004 AND MOST WERE FIRST REPORTED IN 2007.**

NGOs, since the army's arrival in 1992, there have also been increased attacks against the civilian population and harassment by armed groups (principally paramilitaries).

The Eastern Plains —especially Casanare— have been a strategic corridor used by all of the armed groups. According to COS-PACC, the Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Casanare (ACC) were the first to arrive, followed by the Centauros Bloc, along with other paramilitary

groups that maintained control over this territory and spread terror through many of the municipalities. For instance, these groups are responsible for the forced disappearance of 50 people in the communities of Retedor and Chámeza in the span of only three months (from December 2002 to February 2003).



José Hernán Paredes Cáceres, director of the educational center in the Uwa legally-recognised territory.

# Extrajudicial Executions in Casanare

On 20 December 2008, the Prosecutor General's Office<sup>8</sup> held 848 cases of so-called «false positives», which were allegedly responsible for the deaths of 1,375 people. Of these 848 cases, 768 had been committed since 2004 and most were first reported in 2007<sup>9</sup>.

## Contact

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COS-PACC video web page: <http://www.youtube.com/user/garabombo09#p/u/0/eg8BIYFrJxA>

1. «Colombia: Persecución a la ACNUR-UR», Coordinator of Latin-American Field Organisations, 10 July 1995
2. «Opinion No. 12/2005 (Bolivia)», Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, United Nations, Communication addressed to the Bolivian Government on 2 February 2005
3. «Casanare: exhumando el genocidio». Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP), Noche y Niebla, and COS-PACC, 31 October 2009
4. *Ibíd.* COS-PACC gathered the cases in collaboration with CINEP. The publication is part of the campaign «Victims and Rights», which was proposed by diverse social and human rights organisations.
5. *Ibíd.*
6. *Ibíd.*
7. *Ibíd.*
8. «Nuevas capturas por falsos positivos», El Colombiano newspaper, 27 January 2009
9. «Más de mil militares involucrados en falsos positivos», AFP/Terra Colombia, 28 January 2009



Consuelo Navarro (COS-PACC) and Andreas Riemann (PBI).