

# 25 years of safeguarding the right to defend human rights

Peace Brigades International welcomes you to their 25th Anniversary and invites you to join us in celebrating the courage of the human rights defenders working for justice and peace around the world.

We are paying tribute to the commitment of the men and women struggling on the frontline for social justice, non-violence and respect for human rights. In particular we recognise the bravery and remarkable work of women human rights defenders and the role they play in the struggle for change.



Suraya Kamaruddin from Flower Aceh is accompanied to the airport. Suraya was one of the most visible activists in Asia confronting violence against women. She was extremely threatened in Aceh, Indonesia, and asked for PBI accompaniment whenever she travelled anywhere in the country.

I get the opportunity to meet and work with a wide range of interesting and inspiring people, and to see the world from a completely different angle.

Helen Woodcock,  
ex-volunteer, Guatemala

I've never before done a job that was as intense, challenging, absorbing and ultimately satisfying as working with the PBI team in Colombia. It brought me into contact with Colombia's bloodstained reality where life and death are everyday issues. But I was constantly inspired by the commitment and bravery of the Colombian human rights activists that I was accompanying – people who are putting their lives on the line to make changes.

Tessa Mackenzie, ex-volunteer, Colombia

PBI wishes to honour the many people whom we have accompanied in El Salvador, Haiti, East Timor, Native American communities in North America, the Balkans and Sri Lanka. At the same time PBI also celebrates the indigenous organisations, human rights defenders, lawyers, trade union leaders, women's organisations, peasant groups and other popular organisations which currently work under threat of violence and death in Colombia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

PBI recognise their exceptional courage and dedication and thank them for 25 years of inspiration.

# Global pressure Local impact

Peace Brigades International was formed 25 years ago at Grindstone Island in Canada by a small group of people who believed that the course of history could be changed and had the determination to do something about it.

In the spirit of Quaker non-violence and Mahatma Ghandi's Shanti Sena (Peace Brigades), PBI's work involves peace education and security workshops, observation and analysis of the conflict and protective accompaniment of individuals, organisations and communities working under threat of violence.

*PBI's volunteers literally embody in themselves the expression of international concern and support for human rights defenders on the front line. Their courage and selflessness express the highest ideals in the defence of human rights... Those who calmly and knowingly put their lives at risk to protect others should be recognised more than ever.*

**Hans Thoolen,**

**Chair of the Martin Ennals Foundation**

In 2001 Peace Brigades International was a recipient of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

PBI is non-partisan and does not interfere in the work or lives of the local people they protect. Crucially, PBI only becomes involved upon request from individuals and organisations working for the development of human rights and social justice in a non-violent way.

Solidarity and support for grassroots groups is provided by the physical presence of our volunteers backed up by a broad international emergency network. Members from 16 countries in Europe, North America and the Pacific play a vital part in PBI's strategy to deter violence and to promote active non-violence.

International support reinforces the work done by human rights defenders while exposing the dangers and risks which they face. This creates a safety net enabling them to carry out their work.

The willingness of PBI volunteers to risk their own safety by shadowing human rights defenders whose lives are in danger has won them a place in the hearts of the people they accompany. Accompaniment missions often involve volunteers travelling, eating, and breathing with their accompanied companions.

This gives them a rare insight into the daily lives of communities and cultures and a good look at the world from a very different angle. It can be an inspiring, humbling, enlightening, and very intense experience for the PBI volunteer.

A quarter century is a bittersweet anniversary for PBI. This is a propitious opportunity to celebrate the people who have worked with and supported PBI in the past. But it is with mixed emotions that we recognise the fact that after 25 years, we are receiving more requests for accompaniment than ever before.

# Strengthening the international human rights movement

That is why the work that Peace Brigades International is doing is so important. It is a very concrete initiative by individuals from all over the world, regardless of their way of thinking or their political or cultural affiliation, to promote human rights in a concrete situation, by working for the people where accompaniment and solidarity are most needed.

Anders Kompas, Director of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for human rights

By accompanying the human rights defender, a PBI volunteer is able to help in three mutually supporting ways.

First of all the physical presence of an international witness protects threatened activists by creating awareness of them and of any potential threat they face.

PBI offices around the world can generate a rapid international response by contacting key government and military officials, allies in the diplomatic community and members of our international support network.

Aggression, violence and terror hinder the voices of civil society by making people fear that their actions will meet severe consequences.

Protective accompaniment opens a space for human rights defenders to work in by pushing back the boundary where threats of violence, both real and perceived are encountered.

It also provides these individuals and organisations with moral support and the reassurance of international solidarity. This is the second element which leads directly to the third; the confidence to continue their work of growing and supporting a non-violent civil society.

These combined factors strengthen the international movement for peace and human rights.

PBI represents a unique model for demonstrating international solidarity in Colombia.

Mr Gilbert Boss,  
Dutch ambassador to Colombia

# Empowering female human rights defenders

Women human rights defenders (WHRD) work to promote and protect everyone's human rights as well as women's rights.

However they face gender related risks of harassment, abuse and marginalisation by both state and non-state oppressors. This could include threats against their families and communities.

Because of the barriers facing women they require the greatest support so that their voices can be heard and recognised.

The UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders has designated the support and protection of women HRDs as one of her four priority areas.

In the city of Barrancabermeja, the Colombian Popular



Popular Women's Organisation (OFP) in Barrancabermeja, Colombia.

President of OFP Yolanda Becerra has recently received death threats allegedly from army-backed paramilitaries operating in the city of Barrancabermeja.

Women's Organization (Organización Femenina Popular, OFP) actively works to protect the rights of women in an area traditionally controlled by paramilitary groups.

OFP members carry out essential work raising awareness of the impact of militarisation on society and empower poor women to denounce any violations of their human rights.

*We've cried many times but we've also laughed many times when we managed to escape death's clutches. We've been capable of escaping the grasps of a totalitarian model that threatens individual and collective rights every day.*

Yolanda Becerra, Popular Women's Organisation, Barrancabermeja (Colombia)



Obtilia Eugenio Manuel, Mexico from the Organisation of the Me'Phaa Indigenous People (OPIM) accompanied by PBI volunteer.

Their work investigating the alleged raping of women by the military in 1997 triggered death threats, surveillance, harassment and intimidation.

An anonymous death threat was sent to Mrs Manuel's home, saying: "you've got it coming, and we're going to give it to you; did you forget what you said. You keep hitting us hard with your lies about the rape of Valentina and Ines. We are going to give it to you hard. You will rest in peace very soon. Your house is being watched night and day."

*I have decided to do this for the organisations and for my family. I want justice to be done. I want accompaniment from PBI because it helps me a lot to know that I am not alone, that there are people in other countries that are interested in my situation, in the problems that indigenous peoples face.*

Obtilia Eugenio Manuel  
Organisation of the Indigenous Me'phaa People

# Supporting grassroots organisations

In all the countries where PBI has a presence, grassroots organisations have formed to seek truth and justice. PBI accompanies many of these including prisoners of conscience, families of the disappeared and victims' movements.



PBI volunteer accompanying Panchita in Bogotá, Colombia from the Association of the Families of the Detained and the Disappeared (ASFADDES).

Members of the National Coordination of Guatemalan widows (CONAVIGUA) have been involved since the 1980s in the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries from the "dirty war" period. This dangerous and difficult work is an essential phase in the process of recovering historical memory and working for justice in Guatemala.



An exhumation of the disappeared in Guatemala: Indigenous woman mourning over the grave of her loved one

There are always people on the street corners spying on us to watch our movements. So when they see that internationals are physically entering our offices, this helps us tremendously.

Aura Elena Farfari, Guatemalan Families of the Disappeared (FAMDEGUA)

# Resisting displacement

More than 3 million people have been internally displaced in Colombia over the last 10 years. Families who have been displaced from their lands are resisting the violent conflict by purposefully not taking sides and refusing to have dealings with any armed groups. They want to build a peaceful future for the children.



PBI volunteer with sister Cecilia Naranjo from Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission) in the Cacarica, river, Chocó, Colombia.



PBI volunteer with the children of the Cacarica (Cavida) community, Colombia.

To speak of the importance of Peace Brigades International's presence [in Colombia] over the last five years is to speak of the possibility of life. Attacks and threats have come up against the solid wall which Peace Brigades International has become in the region. The death sentences against each and every one of us have not been carried out, only because we are not alone, because we have Peace Brigades International's accompaniment and unconditional defence.

Danilo Rueda, Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, Colombia

[In Colombia] the presence of international personnel, such as... Peace Brigades International, has served to provide protection to civilians at risk in outlying areas.

Dr. Francis Deng, Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons

Cacarica communities were forcibly displaced in 1997 after paramilitary troops allegedly operating together with government forces entered the region. In a merciless incursion they killed dozens of inhabitants and forcibly displaced 3,800 people. In 2000 the communities returned to their land and in 2001 there was a second incursion. After this attack the Cacarica Community of Life and Dignity (CAVIDA) created humanitarian zones to prevent further attacks against them based on the principle of distinction between combatants and noncombatants.

Since their displacement in 1997 more than 80 members of the Cacarica community have been assassinated or disappeared. PBI volunteers maintain a protective presence in the community along with Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission) who provides them with vital humanitarian, legal and psychological support.

# Protecting lawyers working on key cases

The Human Rights lawyers that PBI accompanies play a vital role in the struggle for recognition of human rights around the world, bringing to court some of the most important cases of massacres, extra-judicial killings and disappearances. Women lawyers working on these cases receive gender related threats. Often their families become targets.



**Kopila Adhikari Human rights lawyer in Advocacy Forum working against illegal detentions and extra-judicial killings, in Kathmandu, Nepal.**

Human rights lawyer Kopila Adhikari works for Advocacy Forum against illegal detention and extra-judicial killings, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

PBI accompanies Advocacy Forum, an organisation that during a five-year period (July 2001 to April 2006) documented 5682 cases of human rights violations focusing on extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, rape of women; and illegal detention committed by the state security forces and the Maoists. The founder of the organisation, Mandira Sharma, received Human Rights Watch's highest honour in 2006.

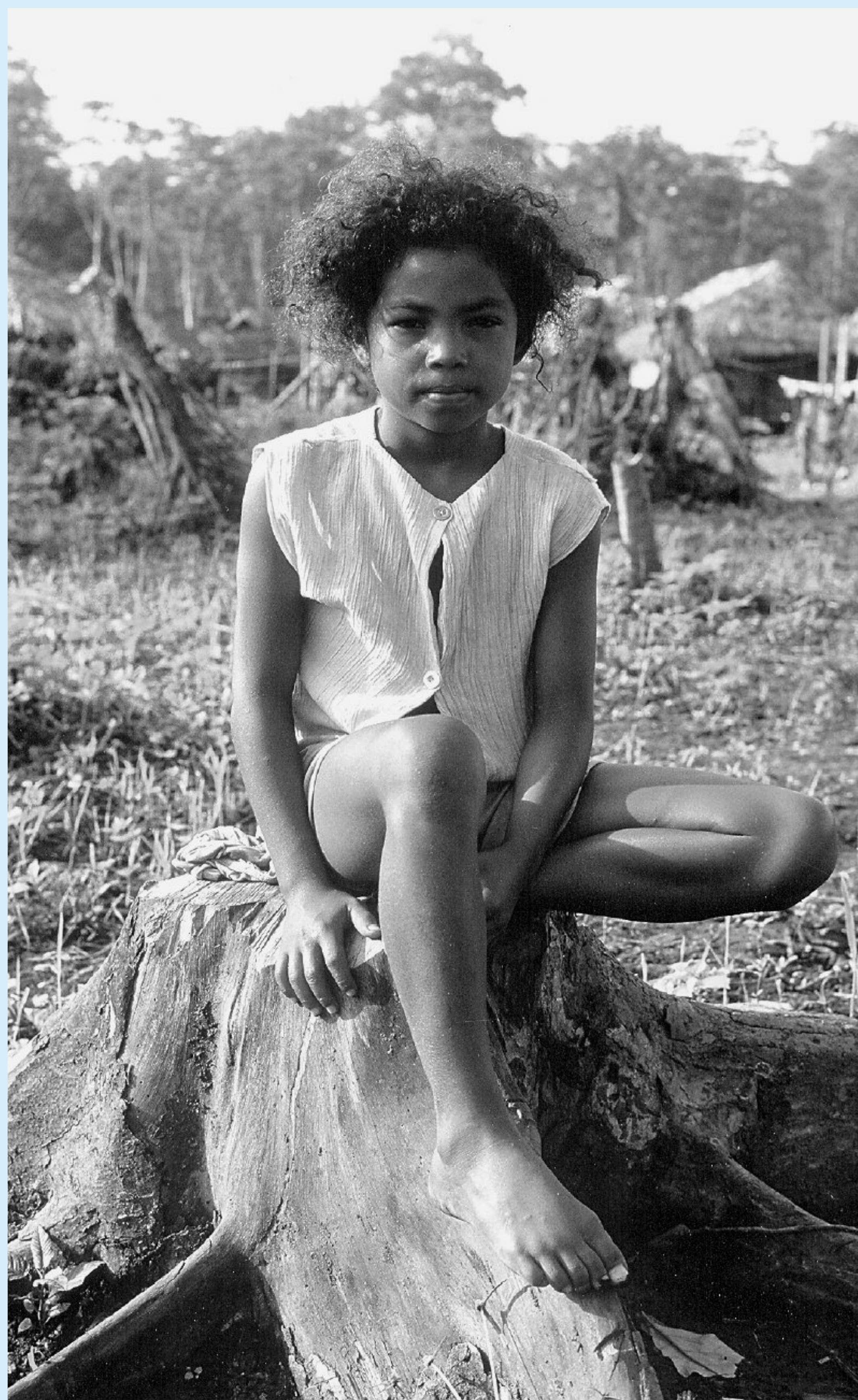


**Soraya Gutierrez, Lawyer and one of the founders of the Lawyers Collective of Jose Alvear Restrepo (Ccajar). Ccajar is seeking to bring to justice some of the worst massacres in Colombia.**

Soraya Gutierrez is a lawyer. She suffers threats and intimidation on a daily basis. Earlier this year she received a package containing a doll with its head torn off, covered with red nail polish resembling blood and a cross drawn on the torso. A handwritten note was sent with the doll, reading "You have a very beautiful family - take care of them, don't sacrifice them." Many other lawyers in Colombia have had attempts on their lives, been tortured, disappeared and murdered. Soraya Gutierrez, President of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective (Ccajar), faces a level of threat that requires daily accompaniment by PBI.

# Exposing environmental abuses

The violation of human rights, the destruction of the forests and the resulting likely extinction of many wild animals by the palm oil companies in South East Asia is well known and documented. Less well known is the deforestation and violent displacement of Afro-Colombian communities linked to illegal palm oil crops exploitation in Colombia.



**Girl amidst the environmental destruction in Chocó, Colombia. Destruction of the rain forest is being caused mainly by logging and palm oil companies.**



**PBI volunteers accompanying Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) and the communities from the "Humanitarian Zones" of the collectively owned territories of Jiguamiandó, Colombia.**

The industrial cultivation of palm oil cash crops has caused displacement for the largely Afro-Colombian communities and jeopardise environmental protection in the region, the second largest bio-diverse region in the world. Afro-Colombian communities originally based in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó river basins have been victims of 111 assassinations and forced disappearances. Orlando Valencia, a renowned community leader who had publicly denounced the plantations was allegedly assassinated by paramilitaries on 15 October 2005. PBI has been providing protection to leaders of the community and to Colombian NGOs playing a major advisory and advocacy role in denouncing the illegal cultivation of African palm in collective territories in the Chocó region (Medio Atrato River). They have suffered continuous intimidation and threats and attribute their current level of risk to the very public role they have taken in denouncing the situation.



# Upholding indigenous rights

Indigenous peoples the world over continue to be among the most marginalised and dispossessed sectors of society, the victims of perennial prejudice and discrimination.

Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.



Dominga Vazquez, The Maya Foundation (Fundamaya) Guatemala, winner of the International Service Human Rights Award 2006.

Land concentration and the lack of acknowledgment of ancestral land rights is one of the main problems affecting indigenous people. PBI accompanies indigenous peoples at risk as they fight for social, cultural and economic rights.

Dominga Vazquez is the first female indigenous mayor of Sololá, Guatemala. She is a prominent member of the indigenous rights group FUNDAMAYA (Maya Foundation), who was charged with acts of terrorism and anti-constitutional behaviour because she spoke out in opposition against the expansion of mining in the Sololá region. Mrs Vásquez has received anonymous threats by telephone. In one the caller stated Mrs Vasquez would “suffer the consequences for having led [this opposition]”. She was also warned to “be careful with what will happen to you”.

The work of PBI shows that the accompaniment of people who suffer from authoritarianism, intolerance and state violence is invaluable and necessary, making the struggle for human rights more effective and the dream of democracy a reality.

Rigoberta Menchú, Guatemalan human rights activist, Nobel Peace Laureate and Goodwill Peace Ambassador for UNESCO

# Building tools for peace and security

Increasingly civil society groups in addition to those directly accompanied by PBI are asking for assistance and training in techniques for building security, non-violence and peace.

In Aceh, Indonesia PBI continues to make a positive contribution to the end of 30 years of armed conflict.

PBI's work is focussed on meeting the increasing requests for peace education by delivering training programmes and participatory workshops aimed at strengthening and empowering civil society.

In partnership with Indonesian organisations and drawing on local wisdom, methods and tools of peace-building, PBI continues to develop flexible and creative peace education activities for people with limited resources.

PBI works together with local facilitators to develop strong networks and to build local capacity for conflict transformation in various segments of society, including religious and traditional leaders, youth, women's groups, human rights activists and authorities.



Participatory PBI Peace Education Workshop in Indonesia.



Participants in a PBI workshop on Security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In Nepal and the Democratic Republic of Congo, PBI is providing security training programmes to local activists. The aim is to help human rights defenders develop coherent and effective strategies in order to strengthen their ability to protect themselves and others.

Workshops on topics such as evaluating threats, dealing with fear and building security strategies have been attended by human rights defenders and journalists as well as other international NGOs working in areas of conflict.