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Newsletter Spring 2005

APPEAL FOR PROTECTION - PLEASE HELP US TO RETURN TO ACEH TODAY

A PBI team is currently in Aceh assessing to what extent local organisations are able to carry out their work in safety following the earthquake and tsunami last December. The team will identify who is most at risk and in need of protection. PBI is working to raise an extra £50,000 to re-launch its work in the province.

At the time of writing, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies say that over 290,000 people are dead or missing. More than 500,000 have been displaced and thousands continue searching for family and friends.

Despite current peace talks there is still concern that warring parties will take advantage of the disaster, placing human rights defenders under increased threat. Disappearances could occur under the guise of 'missing from the tsunami'.

Fear and death were constant companions even before the latest disaster. Since 1976, 12,000 people have been killed in Aceh, and from July 2003, killings have gone virtually un-reported as the Indonesian government sealed off the province in its drive to suppress the separatist 'Free Aceh Movement'.

The current situation has allowed PBI to go back. Our local partners are returning to work even though many of them have lost colleagues,



RPUK delivering aid in West Aceh 2001

offices, homes and family members. PBI wants to ensure that they are not sidelined by relief efforts or targeted by the conflict.

'The offices of the organisations we worked with and where we spent so much time are destroyed and Syarifah Murflina, a courageous lawyer who I accompanied on many occasions, is still missing. I would like to see PBI being able to go back to Aceh to support the organisations we accompanied so that they can play a full part in the reconstruction of the province.' Stewart - former PBI volunteer.

PBI partner RPUK is bringing aid to people's homes and Flower Aceh is assisting women and children in camps. Flower Aceh office is still standing, although the water

reached 2 metres high, destroying a medicinal herb garden, equipment and documents dating back to the early 1990's. Worker Ephie was in the office when the first earthquake hit. At the second earthquake she ran to the second floor of a nearby house. Ephie says that "helping the helpers" is important in the current situation. 'Most people are working non-stop and are both traumatized and not taking time off.'

PBI has vibrant relationships with many of Aceh's humanitarian, women's and human rights groups as well as the local authorities. Our field workers are fluent in Bahasa Indonesian, some are experts in trauma counselling, and all are determined to assist where we are confident we can protect lives.

PBI News in Brief

In Memory of Munir -- Seeking justice in Indonesia

Last September, one of Indonesia's leading human rights activist - Munir Said Thalib -died tragically of arsenic poisoning. Colleagues believe Munir's death could be linked to his recent corruption investigation into senior government officials, and Munir's widow has received death threats warning her not to link his death to the Indonesian military. After a stalled police investigation and much public criticism Indonesia's government has agreed to fund an independent investigation into his death. His friends and countrymen are demanding justice, just as Munir did.

Early Day Motion in the UK Parliament on PBI

WORK OF PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL IN COLOMBIA 31:1:05

Mr Richard Allan, MP

* 1 That this House notes the work of Peace Brigades International (PBI)in providing observer and accompaniment teams for human rights organisations in Colombia; applauds its efforts to protect the political space of non-violent human rights defenders and to support Colombian initiatives which promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law; expresses its support for the continuation of this valuable work; congratulates PBI on 10 years of work in Colombia; and urges the Government to assist the project politically and financially so that it can continue to do its life-saving and vital work in the search for peace in Colombia.

PBI starts work on establishing a project in Nepal

Following requests made by Amnesty International and Nepalese human rights groups a PBI team has visited Nepal for two assessment missions since August 2004. The people of Nepal are trapped in a situation of grave human rights violations by the security forces and the Maoist rebels. Fears for Nepal's future are increasing as the country's King, backed by the army, took over absolute power on 1 February 2005. Protective accompaniment by PBI observers in Nepal would be groundbreaking and would likely make it easier for national organisations to carry out peaceful human rights work in future years. Depending on the result of a third assessment mission to the country this spring, we will hopefully begin to establish a long-term PBI field team in Nepal later in 2005.

Concerns for Emiliana and Francisco in Mexico

PBI is concerned for the security of Emiliana and Francisco Cerezo Contreras, members of the Cerezo Committee, following a series of allegations over their and their family's supposed links with insurgency movements, and the reported surveillance of them by the security forces. There are also concerns for Emiliana's safety as a result of the long journeys she now has to undertake for prison visits.

Emiliana and Francisco founded the Cerezo Committee (CC) in 2001, in response to the sentencing of their three younger brothers - Alejandro, Hector and Antonio - for allegedly setting off explosives in banks in Mexico City. The CC campaigns for the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Through its work it has gained great respect within the NGO sector in Mexico.

PBI has been accompanying Emiliana and Francisco since February 2002, after their work made them the subject of death threats and surveillance. This accompaniment is generously supported by the Prisoner of Conscience Appeal Fund, a UK-based charitable

trust dedicated to relieving the hardship of prisoners of conscience and their families.

Recently there have been a series of incidents which have raised concerns for the safety of Emiliana and Francisco. In November 2004, two plain-clothes anti narcotics policemen were killed by a mob in a town near Mexico City, who believed them to be child kidnappers. However, in newspaper reports, police sources stated that the men were actually investigating a teacher 'possibly linked to the three Cerezo Contreras brothers (Hector, Alejandro and Antonio)...who themselves allegedly belong to the FARP' (The People's Armed Revolutionary Forces). Other newspaper reports have indicated that this teacher is their father, and portray him as the leader of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR).

Shortly afterwards, Emiliana and a colleague were reportedly followed and kept under constant surveillance while returning to Mexico City after visiting the PBI team in Chilpancingo, Guerrero. According to a December 2004 magazine article, for the last five years an agent has (cont. next page)

PBI UK Activities

The work of PBI's four field projects in Colombia, Indonesia, Guatemala and Mexico depends on global support. PBI UK, based in north London, is one of seventeen national offices. Like our sister offices across the world, we recruit volunteers, maintain a political support network, and help raise the money on which field and country group operations depend. And, to keep it all going, we spread information about the work.

Orientation weekend

Over the last year PBI UK ran two Orientation weekends, attended by twenty eight potential volunteers for the field projects. In addition, to attract recruits for both the field and home operations, we gave talks in ten universities. Video

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specifically been assigned to keep members of the Cerezo Committee under surveillance, as well as to investigate any possible links between them and the EPR.

Until recently, all three brothers were held in La Palma maximum security prison. However, on 17 January 2005, two of them were suddenly transferred to other maximum security prisons, in the states of Jalisco and Tamaulipas, respectively. Mexican NGOs consider this is as yet another tactic to discredit the case and the legitimacy of the Cerezo Committee. A more direct and practical consequence is that Emiliana is now forced to make very long journeys to visit these two brothers, with implications for her physical safety, and for PBI resources. In response, PBI is currently looking for donations to meet the cost of a new volunteer for the Mexico Project.

presentations of our fieldwork and a photographic exhibition also did the rounds, and we actively researched potential departments and contacts for a more extensive programme in 2005. Anyone interested in helping out with these efforts should contact the Archway office.

Information

We also ran information and recruitment stalls at a dozen university employment fairs and Latin American cultural festivals, and met with many other like-minded organisations. At London's huge European Social Forum meeting in October 2004 we were next to Peace Direct and met volunteers old and new, and one human rights worker from Sri Lanka who came to say that he owed his life to PBI accompaniment.

Publicity

In addition to attending conferences to exchange experiences with sympathetic organisations, we have spread the word about PBI's work through specialist and local press and by radio interviews, and there are moves for a 3-part BBC4 TV documentary to reach a national audience.

Festivals

Our funding comes from individual subscribing members, from a number of trusts and corporate benefactors, as well as from cultural events. The latter have ranged from classical concerts, Latin American music festivals which we have jointly sponsored, to serving beer for the Workers' Beer Company at the summer music festivals!

PBI Support Network

Perhaps the most important work, after attracting and orienting the

fieldwork volunteers, is maintaining and activating the PBI support network. It is both the most focussed and the least visible of our activities. PBI UK sends information twice weekly to both the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) Indonesia desk and the dedicated Support Network members, and has had five meetings with the head of the Desk and other officers. We have been in contact with MPs, MEPs, members of the House of Lords and of legal associations and the parliamentary human rights group, while on PBI's behalf, Lucy Carver attended the Human Rights Commission at Geneva earlier this year. All this is to get government-level support for PBI and other NGOs to be allowed by the Indonesian government back into the province of Aceh, and for PBI fieldworkers to have letters of support to use when meeting local authorities there.

Similar work was also done in respect to our Latin American field projects: meetings with MPs (Richard Allan) and the Bar Human Rights Committee, and parliamentary questions tabled by MPs and MEPs. There have been fortnightly meetings with the FCO's Colombia desk, two meetings with the Head of the Latin American section there, and a round table meeting with Minister Bill Rammell and representatives from the EU and the UN. There has been one meeting about the Mexican situation, with the Amnesty International Mexico Research Team and another meeting was carried out at the end of February with the new All Party Parliamentary Group for Mexico. As for Guatemala, we had two UK volunteers who went out to the project at the end of 2004.

The latest news from the International Council and beyond

As you will know, PBI UK is represented on the International Council in a grouping with PBI Sweden and PBI Norway. The International Council plays a role of representation and governance for the whole organisation, and is about to have its annual face to face meeting in the Netherlands. Projects will be attending the meeting for a couple of days (as well as being represented on the

council for the whole meeting) as will the Brussels European Office. Much of the focus of this meeting will be the build up to the General Assembly that will be taking place in London mid-June next year.

The General Assembly happens every 3 to 4 years, and is the opportunity we all have to feed in to key issues of mandate, policy and direction for the following term which the International Council along with the International Office and committees work to implement. As you may have heard, the aim for this General Assembly is to carry out a strategic planning process to decide the direction the organisation wishes to move in for the next 6 years. It's an exciting time!

The strategic planning process is already in full swing, with a round of feedback from people within PBI already having been given. The strategic planning group is currently drawing up proposals coming from ideas that have been given about how PBI needs to develop and the directions we should be taken. These will be sent round for



(Clockwise) Louise Winstanley; Hina Jilani, UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders; the UK Ambassador to Colombia; and Laura Clarke, Colombia Project Coordinator, at the the 10th Anniversary Ceremony for PBI's work in Colombia

feedback from anyone who wishes to contribute ideas, in the early New Year. We would really like to encourage participation from as many people as possible - even if it's only on one or two proposals that are of particular interest to you. For the previous round of feedback we held meetings at the PBI office in London, taking into account of the views sent in by people who were unable to attend. We are likely to continue to hold a few sessions for face to face meetings, but would also like to consider having a couple of conference calls for anyone based outside London but would be up for some robust discussions!

I will be coming to the end of my time on the IC after the General Assembly and so now's your chance for the incomparable experience of representing PBI UK, PBI Sweden and PBI Norway! I have found the role to be very challenging, interesting and undoubtedly worthwhile. I would be very happy to talk to anyone informally about what the role entails, at any time.

If you feel that the representative role is more than you wish to take

on, you might be interested in joining one of the international committees namely the, International Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, Executive Committee, Country Group Development Committee, Project Desk Committee and the General Assembly Committee.

Participation in one of these committees offers a great means to discuss issues of interest to the whole organisation, as well as give follow through to

decisions made by the whole organisation at the General Assembly. If you're interested I'd be happy to send you any further details of the mandate and function of the committee as well as a list of criteria for committee members.

Finally, to return to the General Assembly! As this year this event will be held in London, this is a unique opportunity for UK based people to get involved in a forum that will bring together people from all parts of PBI. There is scope for involvement in preparation of the event, or during the Assembly week itself. Find out more about what's going on in other country groups. Talk over the achievements of the projects in the last years and the challenges we are facing. Gain a greater understanding of how the different parts of PBI work together! It's all go. If you would like any further information on anything mentioned above or if you have any other queries or comments, please just drop me an email at sera133@hotmail.com I look forward to hearing from you!

Eleanor

Ten years on in Colombia



Photos from the 10th anniversary publication by PBI Colombia

As harassment continues for the peace communities, PBI's political support network is again activated

The Colombia Project began in October 1994 and to this day continues its vital role in providing the protective service of protective accompaniment. During this 10-year period PBI volunteers in Bogota, Medellin, Barrancabermeja, Magdalena Medio, Uraba and elsewhere have provided accompaniment to 13 NGO's composed of 90 human right defenders and 4 peace communities that have regularly been displaced by the combatants in the country's decades long civil war. PBI's political support network has on many occasions been an important factor in helping to facilitate the end of conflicts afflicting those individuals, groups and communities. The support network is made up of church leaders, foreign embassies, the United Nations, the European Union, parliamentary offices, grass roots organisations, international organisations and NGO's worldwide.

Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights Defenders spoke highly of

the importance of the work of PBI in Colombia and the power of the paramilitaries when she recently stated that "the presence of PBI in the city of Barrancabermeja is extremely important. The local paramilitaries have made it clear that the international support provided to human rights defenders is the only reason why they have not assassinated more of them".

The nature of the project is indeed complex. On 27 May 2004 President Alvaro Uribe accused international organisations, including PBI, of encouraging the obstruction of justice because, he claimed, the peace community of San Jose De Apartado was supportive of anti-government guerillas. During a public announcement he empowered the security forces by stating that "if these people [foreign human rights observers] obstruct justice again they should be put in jail. And if it's necessary to deport them, they should be deported." In response PBI activated its political support network on an international level, to try and help

ensure the prevention of possible hostile acts against the people of San Jose De Apartado, as well as local and international organisations working in the area. Moreover, since the work of PBI also comes under threat when a declaration such as President Uribe's is made, it was imperative to clarify that PBI complied with the laws of Colombia; that the legal system has never been obstructed by the actions of PBI; and for PBI to try and obtain a public declaration from the government confirming the support for PBI, particularly in San Jose De Apartado.

Once the support network was activated a series of meetings were held across the globe. The end result being a letter from the country's vice president to PBI, copied to foreign embassies and the UN office in Colombia, requesting that PBI attend a meeting with regional civil and military authorities on 6 August 2004 and declaring that the work of international organisations will be allowed to continue.

Louise's Letter from Colombia

I was a volunteer with PBI in the UK for two years, during which time I learned a lot about the organisations that we accompany here in Colombia. Sometimes one builds up expectations that leave one disappointed on encountering the reality. This, however, has not been the case for me. I have met people who are courageously doing incredibly important work, at great risk, but are exceptionally humble about what they are doing.

I have been accompanying people from ASFADDES, an organisation of family members of the disappeared, and have listened to their stories of a sister or brother who has disappeared and seen the pain they still feel years later not knowing what happened to them - were they tortured before they were killed, where is their body? I talked with one lovely person about her brother. She was telling me that really it is only now, six years later, that she has begun to talk about the disappearance of her brother. She could not speak about it before because she did not have the words, and because of the pain it caused.

You might ask why ASFADDES needs accompaniment. It is because the cases they are bringing before the courts at times implicate the army, and at other times the paramilitaries, and so many witnesses receive threats or themselves disappear. International observation of the situation keeps the space open for their work, and protects their lives.



Louise (on the right) with Gloria at the offices of ASFADDES Cundinamarca

We were lucky enough to have some of the community leaders that we accompany here in Bogota when I arrived. One of them was explaining to us what had happened when they were originally displaced. He had seen his friend killed and dismembered and the army playing football with his head. He had tried to say something but they threatened to kill him too. The fear that this kind of action engenders in a community, when they kill and dismember people, is incredible. What happened was the whole community moved to the town closest to where they lived.

It says something for the strength of the community that, despite what had happened, with the help of an organisation called Justice and Peace they negotiated with the government to return their lands, and set up a

community called CAVIDA. This community refuses to engage with any of the armed actors, trying to live outside the civil conflict. It is not easy, and people have continued to disappear or be killed although CAVIDA had returned to their lands with agreement from the government to protect them. This is where the role we have in Peace Brigades is so important. We are able to accompany the lawyers who work with these communities and to observe what is happening. Our presence means that information gets out to the rest of the world and prevents violations taking place.

There are so many more stories that I could tell you but I think I had better stop here or my letter will be too long ... well I guess it is already.

Louise

Engaging Person to Person in Guatemala

The human rights situation in Guatemala is better now than in the 1980s and early 1990s - but not much. After a UN-brokered Peace Accord of 1996 and governmental promises of choosing the long road to democracy, PBI decided its work was largely done and accordingly withdrew in 1999. Now we are back.

The situation started to deteriorate in the year 2000, and PBI once again received requests to return. Following an evaluation mission in 2001, and subsequent hard work to fundraise and rebuild old infrastructure and renew connections, we re-opened the Guatemala Project in April 2003.

Since January 2004 there has been a new coalition government in the country called GANA. President Berger proclaimed his goodwill and support for the

principles of the peace accords but, according to the UN's monitoring group MINUGUA, the agreed reforms are advancing slowly and the government's interest in reform is questionable.

What is the human rights situation on the ground? On 22 July 2004, the Observatory for Protection of Human Rights Defenders wrote an open letter to President Berger advising him that in their view the human rights situation continued to be one of the most disturbing in Latin America, because not only union members and campesino leaders, but human rights activists and public officials continued to be the target of threats, acts of harassment and arbitrary detention.

Throughout 2004 there have been six volunteers, men and women, in the PBI field team. In a typical month they accompanied two or three

different individual human rights defenders, both in their work or to court hearings, and maintained a presence in one or two threatened communities. On top of that they conducted two long range exploratory visits, one to the Ixcan, the other to San Marcos.

Formal links with the international community were assiduously maintained by the team. There were three visits to the Swiss embassy, two to the American and German embassies, and one each to the embassies of Canada, France, Italy, Norway, Spain and the UK, and one to the European Commission Delegation in Guatemala in 2004. Additionally, there was a visit to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and seven separate visits to MINUGUA.

As part of the ongoing work, and reflection on it, the PBI Guatemala team also met with Guatemalan authorities on eighteen occasions. Their interlocutors ranged from provincial mayors and commandants, to the Guatemalan Presidential Commission on Human Rights - and the Minister of Defence. Meetings took place both in the capital, and in El Quiche and Izabal.

Last, but not least, representatives of the bodies PBI is working with and for in the field continued to stress to PBI the need to maintain the closest possible engagement, person to person, to help embattled Guatemalans cope with the horrors of the past and the challenges of the present.



Aceh Appeal

The assessment is in process. As soon as the team report back we need to respond without delay. Donations are vital.

How you can help

We are grateful to our regular donors who provide the means for us to protect lives and to the many hundreds of PBI volunteers contributing to long-term peace and justice.

Give As You Earn

Give to PBI directly from your pay and we get more from your donation: www.allaboutgiving.org

Join our festivals team

PBI volunteers at Glastonbury and Reading have fun whilst raising funds. Call our office on 020 7281 5370 to join them.

Parachute for protection

Have the experience of a lifetime and create funds for PBI on a sponsored skydive. See our website for details: www.peacebrigades.org/britain.html
These are just a few ideas. If you would like to organise your own event please call us.

Donate Now

I would like to make a donation of £

I enclose a cheque/postal order/ Charities Aid Foundation voucher, payable to Peace Brigades International UK Section

Yes, I am a UK tax payer* and I want my gift to be worth one third more (For each pound you give, we get an extra 28p at no cost to you - all you have to do is tick this box.)

You may donate on-line at: www.givenow.org or www.allaboutgiving.org

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A legacy is a way to go on making a change after your own lifetime. Please tick for details.

Thank you for your support.

* To qualify for Gift Aid, what you pay in income tax or capital gains tax must at least equal the amount we will claim in the tax year.



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Aceh groups accompanied by PBI:

- RPUK (Women's Volunteer Team for Humanity, working with the displaced)
- Flower Aceh (Provides Empowerment)
- LBH Apik (Legal Aid Organisation for Women's rights and justice)
- RATA (Rehabilitation Action for Torture Victims in Aceh)
- Koalisi (Coalition of Human Rights Organisations providing advocacy)
- PB HAM (Human Rights and Legal Aid Posts across the province)
- Lembaga Bantuan (Legal Aid Foundation)

'It's better for PBI to go to Aceh now, because no one knows what will happen later...'

Acehnese activist.