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Newsletter
Autumn 2003

PBI UK Activities Update

2003 has been a year full of busy and varied work by PBI UK. As ever, volunteers have shown dedication and enthusiasm in carrying out a wide range of activities.

Field volunteers Nick Rounce and Rebecca Prestwood have recently departed for Indonesia to commence language training while Ann Wright and Jo Hutchinson have been settling into their new life in Colombia.

In May, a very successful Orientation Weekend was held. At least 11 of the 15 candidates who gathered at Telscombe, near Brighton, are taking forward applications to one of the four projects. Chizom Ekeh, who is planning to apply to the Colombia project, writes elsewhere in this newsletter about her motivations for volunteering with PBI. The next Orientation Weekend will run from 25-28 September.

Other exciting developments have taken place in the area of outreach and publicity. Returned field volunteers have given talks at human rights conferences and universities, with more planned for the rest of the year. A team of volunteers also designed and planned a photo exhibition.

It had a high-profile launch at the House of Commons on June 3, and has been touring the UK over the summer, starting off at the Friends' Meeting House in Central London, moving on to Brighton and finally to Edinburgh to coincide with the festival. The Edinburgh leg was accompanied by a talk from returned volunteer Eleanor Openshaw. The Peace Studies Department at Bradford University will be one of the venues for the autumn.

Media highlights have included our participation in the BBC Radio 4 programme *Excess Baggage*, in which Colombia returnee James Savage talked about his experiences volunteering abroad. PBI's work in Colombia was



PBI UK's photo exhibition was launched at the House of Commons. Richard Allan MP hosted the event

also featured in *The Cambridge Student*.

2003 has seen the continued growth of PBI UK's political support network and its activation a number of times. Some of these are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter. In addition, the grassroots network has been activated on two occasions, in response to the situation in Aceh.

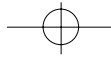
A lawyer from the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee, one of the organisations PBI accompanies in Colombia, was over in the UK at the beginning of the year as part of a European speaking tour. Another Colombian lawyer we accompany is arriving in September, invited by the Law Society to speak at the opening of the legal year. She will speak on the theme of access to justice.

Money has been raised by dedicated volunteers who have worked at festivals and other events around the country, serving beer in conjunction with the Workers Beer Company. There is also a fundraising auction planned for Human Rights Day on December 10th, to be held at the Red Rose Club, Islington.

Come along, and bid for alternative therapies, top cuisine cooked for you in your own home or any other of the imaginative and outlandish items we have to tempt you! Any donations of goods or services will be much appreciated.

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Why I want to volunteer for PBI

By Chizom Ekeh

As a British woman of African descent, with a strong interest in social justice and human rights issues, I feel that PBI is an organisation with extremely important aims and objectives. My interest stems from my experience as a minority in this country and the experiences of my parents as Igbos in Nigeria.

I feel I have reached a stage in my development where I want to come down from the ivory tower and struggle much closer to the ground with the people because only through this kind of immediacy can one have a sense of whether anything is actually changing.

I have spent a great deal of time researching and writing theoretically on issues related to conflict, peace, and social and environmental justice. I have attended teach-ins, public lectures and demonstrations to voice what I believe in, but still continue to have a profound sense of futility as people suffer.

I believe that in order to act out my solidarity in a manner that is more earnest and true with people whose nations are inflicted with turmoil and political injustice, I need to be on the ground with them.

I have thought long and hard about making this kind of step and am as aware as I can be of the kind of challenges, both physical and emotional, that come with this kind of work.

However in this developed, rich society that we live in I am never really at peace and always emotionally challenged at the severity of injustices that are occurring in many parts of the world, at the lack of ability to do anything about it, and at the lack of courage to really go and help.

I feel that after years of preparing academically, professionally and through life experiences I am now ready and willing to make this step. I do not want to live as the privileged conscientious



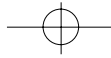
Chizom is preparing to attend a Colombia training

westerner, with time to study and debate, but with no real will to go and act. I do not believe in gaining knowledge for its own sake.

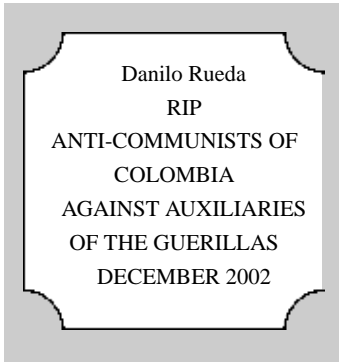
I believe that with knowledge comes responsibility and I feel I have a responsibility in this context that I need to carry out. This is my primary reason for wanting to work for PBI, to exercise my global citizenship, express my

solidarity and use the personal qualities and experiences I possess as a person to lend strength and hope so that those fighting for human rights around the world will maintain their courage and conviction.

Chizom took part in PBI UK's May orientation weekend and hopes to attend a Colombia Project training early next year.



Activating our Support Network for Colombia



This was the text of a letter received at the headquarters of the Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (CIJP) in Bogotá. Danilo Rueda, human rights defender and member of the above organisation, however, was still alive. It was one of a series of death threats sent to the CIJP on a regular basis in 2002. Danilo Rueda has been harassed in

other ways, including being followed.

Earlier this year PBI was so concerned for his safety, and for that of the other members of CIJP, the organisation which PBI accompanies in its human rights work with the Afro-Colombian communities of the Cacarica river basin, that we activated our international support network.

The work of PBI and CIJP in protecting and promoting human rights in CAVIDA (Communities of Self-determination, Life and Dignity of the Cacarica river basin) came under increased threat in June 2003 when indications of a possible armed incursion into the communities forced another activation of our support network.

This population was displaced in February 1997 in a joint operation by armed forces and paramilitaries.

Paramilitary threats and human rights violations against these communities have continued since that date, and during the process of their return to

the Cacarica river basin.

Sadly, these two examples of threats to human rights in Colombia are symptomatic of a climate of worsening political violence in which kidnapping, 'disappearances' and the targeting of civilians in conflict zones continue to abound, and many seem able to act with impunity. Since 1985, over 60,000 people have been killed, 80 per cent of whom were civilians.

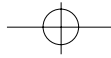
After the breakdown, in February 2002, of talks between the government and the main armed rebel group, FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the human rights and humanitarian crisis has escalated, resulting in the estimated loss of 4,000 civilian lives in politically-motivated violence.

Human rights groups fear that increased security measures introduced by the new Colombian president in the past year may worsen the human rights situation and curtail the working space of international NGOs like PBI.



A volunteer reports back to the team's Turbo office from the remote Cacarica settlement, Urabá, Colombia

Photo: J. Miller / PBI/PHI



Deteriorating human rights situation in Indonesia

Since May 16, 2003 the Indonesia Project (IP) has been extremely busy!

On that day the IP asked all PBI country groups to activate their support networks because of the deteriorating political situation in the province of Aceh.

In particular, the project was concerned about the murder of Raja Ismail, a volunteer for PB HAM, an Achenese organisation that PBI provided accompaniment for, who was kidnapped on May 11 while carrying out human rights work.

His body was discovered in a river two days later, having been beaten, stabbed and strangled. The whereabouts of another PB HAM worker, Abdussalam Muhamad Deli, is still unknown after he was kidnapped the same day in a separate incident.

During the weekend following the activation, peace negotiations between the Government of Indonesia and the rebel separatist movement (GAM) broke down. On May 19, the Indonesian President declared martial law in Aceh and the Indonesian armed forces launched a massive military operation against GAM.

As was feared, the introduction of martial law seriously impeded the work of all local human rights and peace organisations, as well as the work of PBI and all other international organisations and foreign journalists in Aceh.

The local groups that PBI has accompanied all had to limit their activities because of safety concerns, and many of them have had their offices and/or members' homes visited by local police looking for members of GAM or evidence that could link them with the rebels.

On June 16, 2003, the work situation for PBI and others deteriorated further when the Government introduced Presidential Decree No.43/2003, which requires all foreigners to report their presence and activities to the military administration in the provincial capital Banda Aceh. Foreign workers and foreign journalists were also forbidden under this decree from entering Aceh without special permits issued



'Give Peace A Chance' reads the banner in a small village in Aceh, Indonesia

by authorities in Jakarta.

Subsequently, military Decrees No.5 and No.6 VI/PDMD NAD/2003, announced on June 26, 2003, forbade local and international NGOs from holding large gatherings of people, issuing press releases or making public statements without specific permission from the military authorities. International NGOs with official authorisation to work in Aceh are no longer allowed to travel outside the district capitals without permission from the military authorities. They are also forbidden from representing or implementing activities on behalf of local NGOs.

As a result of all these events, groups that PBI works with in Aceh have reported an increased feeling of isolation and fear for their personal safety.

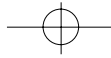
On July 17, due to the major problems it was having in obtaining the new work permits for Aceh, the IP asked all PBI country groups to activate their support networks again in the hope that

the issue of access to the province could be resolved.

Unfortunately, on July 22, 2003, the IP was forced to temporarily close its office in Banda Aceh due to its inability to obtain the special permits required to allow its volunteers to remain in Aceh. This followed the closure of PBI's office in Lhokseumawe on July 7, 2003. An application for the appropriate authorisation is in process in Jakarta.

All at PBI are highly concerned about the slowness of the process to obtain permits to enter Aceh and hope that they will be speedily delivered. The working restrictions imposed on international NGOs and journalists will seriously limit the IP's ability to carry out future work in Aceh.

PBI hopes that the Indonesian government will ensure access to Aceh for all human rights and humanitarian workers and allow them greater latitude to continue their work in the province.



An accompaniment in Guerrero, Mexico

By Oyvind Hoyen

It is 9:15 in the morning and Maurizio, an Italian PBI volunteer, and I are getting ready to leave for Tierra Colorada to visit Enedina Cervantes Salgado. There is a smell of coffee in the house and a couple of bowls of cornflakes and yesterday's local papers are being consumed eagerly.

Time is ticking by and we had better head for the taxi terminal as the 9:30 bus has most likely left already. Like just about any other medium-sized city in Mexico, Chilpancingo offers various ways of getting from one place to another. The choice of the day, a *taxi colectivo*, ranks as the speediest and without doubt the most uncomfortable means of transport.

In 45 minutes we are there. It should normally take an hour by taxi. Two PBI volunteers squeezed in the front with the driver and four fellow passengers have just picked up a run-over iguana (deliciously similar to chicken, they say) on the way. A wall of damp air and a scorching sun meet you as soon as you set your foot on the street. Likewise, a wall of lush and green meet your eye if you glance above the roofs of the only real street of Tierra Colorada. We make our way through the centre observing the chatty *señoras* in the colourful fruit market. "Produce of the United States". There's no doubt where the apples come from. Hopefully local farmers have their produce on sale here as well.

We meet a busy Enedina in "Tendajón Ricky", a little neighbourhood shop that she runs on her own. She greets us with a smile, but behind the smile she hides a story only too well-known in the state of Guerrero. On June 17, 2001 her husband, Faustino Jiménez Álvarez, was taken away, or 'disappeared' as they say here, by various members of the *Policía Judicial* and, according to the press, by his cousin Raúl Valle Álvarez.

Our talk is interrupted by Ricardo's eager shouts of "¡ven aquí!". It is time to play with Ricardo, Enedina's son, his sister Julieta, and Oscar, the son of

Antonia, one of Faustino's sisters, who have just arrived as well. Work and play go hand in hand here for the *Brigadistas*. In some way or other we are a part of their lives. One of the volunteers joins the kids while the other remains with Enedina.

"I have passed the last two years thinking about where and how he is. If he is alive, how he must be suffering. It hurts me to see how my children suffer, because since that day my son cannot stand to see the police without crying and asking: "Mama, they are not coming here, are they?". With difficulty and tears in her eyes Enedina expressed these words at the press conference marking the 2nd anniversary of Faustino's disappearance on June 26 this year.

Since the beginning of our accompaniment in January 2002 we have become familiar with this setting. However, it is difficult not to be touched by the circumstances and Enedina's character. Despite all the difficulties, she manages to find the strength not only to pursue the case in search of her husband's whereabouts and bring to justice those who are responsible, but also to be a mother to her two children and to run her shop.

Assisted by the *Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez* Human Rights Centre (*Centro Prodh*) and the *José María Morelos y Pavón* Regional Centre for Defence of Human Rights (*MyP*), she has tried the case at every level in the Mexican judicial system and has appealed to the authorities at local and state level, as well as nationally and internationally.

It all looks quiet. I am having a game of football with the kids in the shade of a rusty old bus and a majestic tree. A police patrol passes by and the game comes to a stop. It is impossible not to take a glance at the heavily armed policemen in the pick-up truck. They continue on their way and we resume the game. It is PBI versus Tierra Colorada. Tierra Colorada wins 9 - 10 and six-year



Oyvind accompanying Enedina and her children

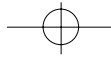
old Ricardito celebrates as only Latinos can. We take out a camera and take a couple of snapshots of the winning side. There is pride in the air and Enedina smiles as well. However, we still have an issue to confirm with her before we head for the bus taking us back to Chilpancingo.

She will be going to Chilpancingo next Tuesday to meet with the two organisations, *Centro Prodh* and *MyP*, and we ask when and where to meet her in Tierra Colorada in order to accompany her to the meeting. This is a routine, as she knows us well by now. There are no additional questions. It is all well known.

Still, it is a trip that has implications in her life because she will be away from her kids most of the day and yet again she will need to face the uncertainties and facts of her husband's disappearance. We say good-bye for now, not finding perhaps the right phrase. There is so much you could or would like to say, but it may not be the time or the place to do so.

Being a PBI volunteer brings you close to certain people, but at the same time there is a certain distance. It is sometimes a dilemma, but it is Enedina's life. I trust that our presence is meaningful. Actions can speak louder than words.

Oyvind Hoyen is a Norwegian volunteer who was recruited by PBI UK



Re-establishment of Guatemala Project

Following the signing of the peace agreement in Guatemala in 1996, there was a thorough evaluation by PBI of the need for international accompaniment in the country. In the period between 1996 and 1999, human rights abuses became rare and PBI received virtually no new requests for accompaniment. The project was therefore wound down in March 1999.

However, less than two years later, it became apparent that human rights violations were on the increase and that the space for human rights defenders had diminished. PBI once again started to receive regular requests for accompaniment.

Although this deterioration was not on the same scale as had been seen during the period prior to 1996, it was still evident that there had been a significant decrease in respect for human rights.

It was on this basis that PBI decided to re-establish a project in Guatemala. In April 2002 the first person was sent to begin preparatory work in the country. During this time many requests for accompaniment were received, which PBI was unfortunately unable to respond to.

Finally, in May 2003, an advance team was sent to complete the necessary preparatory work. Funding has been secured to PBI's minimum requirements and the team should shortly be able to commence accompaniment work.

The present situation in Guatemala is volatile. Amnesty International recently raised concerns about rising political violence related to the country's forthcoming legislative and presidential elections on November 9. Tensions rose in late July following the Supreme Court's July 22 suspension of former military dictator Ephraim Rios Montt as a presidential candidate for the ruling Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG).

On July 24 and 25, armed mobs allegedly organised and financed by the FRG ran riot in the capital beating many

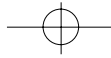


Leaders of the organisation Guatemalan Families of the Disappeared who are under constant threat



people and destroying property. Montt was then reinstated as an official candidate on July.30 Concerns were also raised about attacks and threats in late

July and early August against Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum and members of her organisation the Fundación Rigoberta Menchú Tum.



PBI decision-making across the world

By Eleanor Openshaw

It is some months now that I've been representing PBI UK, Norway and Sweden on the International Council (IC). The Council brings together representatives of PBI's country groups, one for the projects, as well as the members of the International Office and a treasurer with the aim of implementing decisions taken at the three-yearly General Assembly.

Once a year members of the council travel from different parts of the globe to meet face-to-face for robust discussion of proposals put forward by PBI constituencies, as well as other issues pertinent to the organisation as a whole.

The meeting held at the beginning of this year looked at budgets, procedures, and project and country group reports. Moving forward the process of strategic planning for the whole organisation is one of the priorities for the IC, in advance of next year's General Assembly. Strategic planning is one of those areas relating to policy and principles that requires a full two month consultation process involving all PBI constituencies and this the IC will be working to bring about in the next few months.

Whilst the IC has regular conference calls, much day to day work is delegated to several committees which are overseen by a smaller group called the Executive Council and greatly supported by the staff in the International Office. Members from all parts of PBI work in these committees looking at topics such as country group development, projects, fundraising and human resources.

The proposal put forward by PBI UK to the IC earlier this year, about the need to draft an organisational policy on the mental health of field volunteers, is currently in the hands of the human resources committee, of which Libby Kerr (a former Colombia volunteer) is an active member.



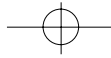
Caption

Eleanor was a PBI volunteer in Colombia for 20 months

For representation on the IC, country groups are linked together. PBI UK, PBI Norway and PBI Sweden are in the same unit and the hope is to work to make the grouping as positive as possible by pursuing ways that the country groups can offer support to

each other, and exchange ideas.

PBI UK has a space, the International Forum Committee, for discussing some of the issues PBI is facing as an organisation. We are always looking for new members to become involved, so please contact PBI UK if you are interested!



European Assembly of PBI Country Groups

For almost two decades, the European Assembly (EA) has been an annual opportunity for PBI's country groups in the region to share experiences and try to coordinate activities of mutual benefit. The 2003 PBI EA was held in Berlin over the weekend of April 4 to 6, and was attended on behalf of PBI UK by Management Committee member Andrew Kendle and Co-ordinator Laura Clarke.

Due to serious concerns that had been raised in recent years about the body's long-term purpose, this year's participants discussed its future. Should the EA continue as before, close itself down or attempt to renew its purpose?

After a strenuous round of discussion and debate about alternatives, the EA decided to continue with a European gathering for PBI. For the next three years the new forum will be called the European Regional Coordination (ERC), and will focus on what the delegates decided was the most pressing problem for the next three years: the development of country groups. It was also agreed that PBI Portugal would host the ERC in the spring of 2004, and that PBI UK, with the assistance of PBI Germany, would work on drafting the agenda and arranging the workshops for the meeting.



Travelling on the River Cacarica, Urabá, Colombia

If you have strategic planning skills, experience running workshops, or are simply full of ideas about how to help PBI's European country groups develop in a sustainable manner, PBI UK would like to hear from you! We will be having

a series of meetings in the coming months to work out the agenda and workshops for the 2004 ERC and would welcome all the help we can get. Please contact the PBI UK office for more information.



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