

pbi uk newsletter summer 2002

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Paramilitary presence looms on a street in Turbo, Colombia ©Julien Menghini

PBI UK UPDATE

There are times in life when a lot happens in such a short space of time; there are other times when so little seems to go on with so much time. Why this is remains a mystery but the first statement still doesn't come close to summing up the last 6 months at PBI UK. An incredible amount of hard work has gone into making PBI UK a self-sufficient, organic and effective organisation. There have been quite a few significant changes over the last six months and the next six months will also prove a challenging time for PBI UK as even more changes are to take place, including the one-year sabbatical of PBI UK's co-ordinator Susi Bascon.

Fundraising

At the beginning of this year, things weren't particularly good for PBI UK financially. There were numerous reasons for this including economic slowdown and PBI's unique difficulties of having a specific human rights focus and still not gaining charitable status. Nevertheless, PBI has managed to overcome its problems. Thanks to the amazing hard work and effort by the volunteers and Susi, the ship is a little more stable for the time being. Funds have been raised for PBI UK

through wonderful and exciting events such as skydiving, pub quizzes and serving drinks at musical festivals over the summer. PBI UK is still trying to find new funding sources and any assistance is more than appreciated.

Publicity

There have been numerous goings on with the media. A new volunteer media strategy has been put in place. This entails getting volunteers that are going to join a project or coming back from a project into the media. This has brought amazing success including front page of one of the largest papers in Shropshire, a full page in one of the London papers and another article on Laura Clarke at the Yorkshire Post. Tony Corballis has been a great addition to the team, pro-actively looking to get PBI in new places. Among handful of small successes, was his comprehensive article published in Bradford University's Peace, Development and Conflict Magazine. PBI UK publicity has also managed to produce a new info-pack, membership leaflet and the annual report. Quite a bit of time is being invested in research – to find freelance writers, to build contacts with other NGO's, to look at using the

web and for the placing of future articles. Despite these successes the team is never complacent and is on the lookout for new members with new ideas and skills.

Support Network

This essential area of the charity's work continues to expand. Each volunteer going on a project contacts their local MP, gets their family to join the network and arranges meetings with the Foreign Office. A lot of work is going into developing contacts with the Parliamentary Human Rights Group and the All Party Group on Colombia and PBI continues to regularly attend ABC groups. Research is going into MP's, MEP's and academics. PBI UK also attended an NGO meeting with the Colombian President Uribe Velez.

Outreach

An orientation weekend for potential volunteers successfully took place in May this year. Meetings, talks by returned volunteers and fairs were undertaken with the Latin American Bureau, the Anglican Pacifists Fellowship, Amnesty International's local groups, and the Voluntary Service Overseas Fair among others to raise awareness of PBI's work.

ORIENTATION WEEKEND



Team work in action at the Orientation weekend

I will happily admit that I knew little or nothing about PBI when I signed up for the Orientation weekend. In fact my reasons for doing so seem a bit hazy, even now. I can vaguely remember reading somewhere about non-violence, self-evaluation and stress management and it has to be said, being unaware of PBI's international the expectations for tree-hugging type activities appeared to be quite high. As I trekked through the Buckinghamshire countryside, greeted by only the occasional speeding BMW, towards a log cabin in the middle of apparently nowhere, the cynic in me was starting to have serious doubts about the whole idea. I was proved wrong.

It is impossible to tell whether it was the design and structure of the activities, the personal strengths of the facilitators or simply the enthusiasm of everyone who attended that made the weekend such a success, but I for one was left amazed by a number of things.

Firstly, the principle of team spirit inadvertently established itself from the word go. The daily logistics surrounding cooking, cleaning and making fires seemed to be managed with a minimum of fuss and organisation and without any one person being obviously in charge. No mean feat considering there were 20 people involved and a definite thumbs-up to the consensus decision-making approach advocated by PBI as a horizontal organisation.

Secondly, everyone became an active participant. It must have been something to do with the beginning when we huddled around a wood fire with hot drinks on a dark Thursday night, and even I managed to blurt out a mini life story complete with picture references. On the tougher exercises such as the role plays, where the facilitators managed to terrify everyone with frighteningly convincing impersonations of military commanders and town mayors, there

was a keen sense of nervous energy and excitement as everyone geared up to make themselves heard. But a shared sense of fun during the physical activities did not overshadow the desperately serious reasons for PBI's existence. Watching a brilliantly honest video on the Colombia project saw to that.

Thirdly, each part of the weekend was 100% relevant to life on a project. There was equal time for learning, absorbing and questioning information, alone and with others. Even the 'jumping around in a field' bit (hardly anyone's idea of fun first thing in the morning) was exactly what was needed to wake everyone up after breakfast. Having learned so much about life as a volunteer, the sessions given over to stress management now seem essential rather than a waste of time. It was also encouraging for future volunteers to know that they will be mentally prepared to face life in the field.

Everyone seemed to leave the weekend with a lot to think about and a lot of questions to ask themselves. The commitment to volunteer is a huge step and clearly not for the faint hearted. Fortunately I can say that the weekend inspired confidence in the achievements of the organisation if nothing else, and cynicism was quickly left behind.

Cat Jones

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

During the weekend of 26th – 29th September PBI UK will be holding its Orientation Weekend at Youth Hostel in Telscombe, a Sussex village in the South Downs – (near Brighton - nearest train station, Southease). The Weekend is run by return volunteers, enabling participants to speak directly with the very people who have been in similar situations that the participants may find themselves in. The weekend serves several functions. The first is to give prospective volunteers a chance to see what the organisation does, how it operates and what its principles are. The second aim of the weekend is to start the process of developing people's skills within the context of group decision-making and non-violence. The third objective of the weekend is to create a group dynamic whereby participants feel they are able to express themselves in a friendly, fun and non-threatening environment. We hope that all participants will enter into the activities of the weekend as fully as they feel comfortable and that everyone who takes part - **and that includes the facilitators!** - is open to new ideas and respects the integrity of everyone else.

Comings and Goings

- Two volunteers have attended regional training for Indonesia and are looking to join soon.
- Four people are attending the Mexico training in December including Susi Bascon.
- On person is due to go to Colombia shortly and Libby will be coming back to the UK at the beginning of October.
- Human Rights Day – PBI hopes to be involved with events that are taking place at the Foreign Office that day.

PBI UK is looking for a new co-ordinator by the end of September. Over the last 4/5 years PBI has developed new areas of work with co-ordination, consistency, advancement and development and now has over 20 volunteers working in outreach, support network, publicity, fundraising and management committee

PBI IN COLOMBIA – FROM THE FIELD

At 7:30 am, on Sunday February 10th 2002, Danilo Rueda received a telephone call. It was a threat, "...we will not forget... we already told you...". It is not something new for Danilo to receive such a call in his Bogotá home. The threats now span three years.

Three days later, near the corner of 76th and Caracas streets, Danilo noticed he was followed for eight blocks by a blue van, and a motorbike. He managed to speed up and slip down a side street. He hid in a shop. Moments later, his pursuers pulled up in front of the shop. The motorcyclist pulled out a mini Uzi. The aggressors looked at one another and then continued on their way.

On Monday, February 18th at 5:30 pm, a call was made to the head office of the Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace in, to which Danilo belongs. More threats were made, "Do not forget, we will not forget, we already told you". The Commission reported these threats in a letter (Letter to President Pastrana, Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, March 7, 2002.) to the Colombian president in the hope that pressure can be applied to the authorities responsible for the harassment.

The Colombian-based non-profit Christian organisation *Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace* works in human rights promotion and protection. Its members are deeply concerned for their lives. The group provides human rights education, and gives assistance to displaced people.

PBI's support

PBI has teams working in Bogotá and in Urabá to provide international 'unarmed bodyguards' to the Commission when its members' lives are in danger.

In addition to accompanying these people working for peace and justice in the hope that it might ensure their safety, PBI's Bogotá team

also tries to communicate with the Presidential Advisor's Office for Human Rights and the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Foreign Affairs, with the Armed Forces General Command, intelligence bodies, and the Police Department for Administrative Security. They also liaise with the embassies of European countries, Canada, USA and Mexico, and the headquarters of the UN High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights.



MEXICO PROJECT

The work of PBI Mexico has changed substantially since January. The teams have further consolidated their work, strengthening their relationships with non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and extending their contacts with the authorities.

In the capital, the team continues to accompany Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Centre (Centro Prodh). In Guerrero the accompaniment of Centro Prodh is ongoing, as is the dissident residents of the Rodriguez Alcaine Colonia in Acapulco.

New Accompaniments

PBI Mexico has received new requests for accompaniment from threatened human rights defenders, causing great concern of how the political situation in the country is evolving. It has been extremely difficult to respond to the growing demand. However, in January the Guerrero team decided to offer protective accompaniment to Jose

Maria Morelos and Pavon Human Rights Defence Centre and Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT). In February, the Mexico City team accepted a request from the Mexican Human Rights Defence League (Limedd) and the National Human Rights Network "All Rights for All" (RED).

National Human Rights Network "All Rights for All" (RED)

RED was formally created in 1991 by the initiative of many groups, with the objective of promoting and defending human rights. The RED represents a space for meeting and co-ordinating between more than 50 human rights organisations in 17 states, which, from their own identity and autonomy, combine efforts, capacities and resources to offer a more effective service to civil society in the dissemination of the exercise, legitimisation and respect of the human rights of all citizens.

Since the assassination of lawyer Digna Ochoa on the 19th October 2001, the situation confronted by RED worsened. A few days after the assassination, five of RED's human rights defenders including Juan Antonio Vega received anonymous death threats. Initially Juan accepted the police guard offered by the Mexican authorities. A month later he stated that there still hadn't been any results in the investigation regarding the source of the threats, despite the fact that the authorities had all the tools necessary to give information on the case. Vega also needed to know the level of risk to which activists were being exposed. As a result, Vega began to question the protection offered to him.

Given the situation, RED decided international protective accompaniment was urgent and necessary. In January 2002, they requested PBI accompany Juan Antonio Vega, which PBI has carried out since February.

PBI IN INDONESIA

Jailini bin Yahya, a cheerful 26-year-old, was taken from his village and shot to death in February 2002. Why?

He had sought support and solidarity from a group called SPKP-HAM, a network of torture victims, after his father was murdered. His father had been a political advisor to an independence movement and perhaps Jailini was simply punished for this too.

It was alleged that Jailini was murdered by the Indonesian National Army, the TNI. No known investigation has been carried out in relation to his death. Soldiers were said to have asked the young man to show them his father's grave. Jailini's body was later found near the gravesite.

It is not the first time members of SPKP-HAM Aceh (*Solidaritas Persaudaraan Korban Pelanggaran HAM Aceh, Association of Human Rights Abuse Victims*) have been under attack by police. For this reason PBI agreed to provide protective accompaniment SPKP-HAM from April 2001.

In the middle of March, three more SPKP-HAM members were detained and questioned for four days for being of 'looking like' members of a local political group. Among them was a school teacher, Dr Nasrullah Ibrahim, who had the SPKP-HAM records (on his computer) taken from him as he was blindfolded, taken away and beaten. Members of PBI found the three of them on the 16th March working as captive cleaners in the police station: they were released

without charge. A few days later, Nasrullah Ibrahim was hospitalised due to complications arising from his violent police detention.

SPKP-HAM is a province-wide network of Indonesian survivors of torture, founded in November 2000. With branches in seven districts, they carry out the work of aiding survivors of human rights violations. They assist with medical costs, transportation to the hospital or health centre, and accompaniment to legal aid foundations. SPKP-HAM also lobbies the Indonesian government for survivor rights, including compensation for loss of property and rehabilitation for physical loss.

TWO REALITIES IN BANDA ACEH

Loose lips might sink ships. I really like this saying. I decided to keep it in mind while working with PBI as a field volunteer in its Indonesia Project. It's one of the many things one has to learn when dealing with sensitive human rights issues in a conflict area – let alone the foreign culture. My name is Uli Krause. I'm German and a fairly new member to our team in Banda Aceh. I arrived a month ago with a French colleague, after our training in Luxembourg. The initial impact of our

"...it now feels like living in two different worlds, on one side: reality is a relaxed town, with seemingly normal life...But the disturbing truth on the other side, are PBI's local groups telling of torture, killings and other gross human rights violations"

new environment was tremendous: security issues, time-consuming registration, bureaucracy, lots and lots of routine tasks, new names and faces, language problems, long working hours and strategy meetings. Being gradually trained by more experienced team members, we managed to settle in, to start "functioning" and take on new responsibilities.

We have received lots of positive feedback by our local presence, which clearly shows me that we are in the right place and at the right time. A peace march organised by a broad civil movement truly demonstrated real commitment to the upcoming peace talks in Geneva. Local human rights groups courageously voiced their demands while tightly scanned by Indonesian security forces. I felt a great respect for these people taking direct action at considerable risk.

I'm conscious and accepting of the risk we take by voluntarily exposing ourselves to a conflict between armed groups. But for the locals, the danger is greater. We can resort to our strong support network, to our foreign passports and evacuation plans, whereas these people are likely to lose their jobs, their freedom, their health – everything.



On the road from Banda Aceh there are 53 checkpoints of the TNI (Indonesian Army) and mayburned houses. This one was burned by "unknown people". Kamoe Lakee Referendum di Atieh = We want Referendum in Aceh ©D. Sedoeboen

The current situation in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (as this Aceh province was renamed with a recent autonomy) is just as contradictory and bleak as in its provincial capital. While along the coastal roads things seem to be under control due to the increase of security forces, most rural areas, off the beaten track actually appear more violent and unstable than before the reestablishment of the Iskandar Muda Military Command earlier this year. There is a significant rise in numbers of internally displaced persons. Killings and casualties have reached an all-time high.

It is important for PBI to strengthen its commitment in Aceh, as well as in other places around Indonesia. There still is a shipload of work waiting for us – but we're getting there, and in another fortnight from now, "fresh-baked" volunteers are expected to arrive to our support.

Uli Krause