



# Peace in Action

A publication of Peace Brigades International-USA (PBI-USA)  
Website: [www.pbiusa.org](http://www.pbiusa.org)

Summer 2009 Bulletin

## Defending human rights in the U.S.

◆ PBI-USA continues advocacy, education and outreach work in defense of human rights across the country.

For the first half of the year, PBI-USA has continued its effort to support the work of the five PBI field projects—in Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Indonesia and Nepal—by educating the American public and advocating for and with the courageous human rights defenders we accompany. These efforts have included two successful advocacy and educational speaking tours.

In January 2009, PBI Nepal field volunteer, Krystal Mason, originally from Pennsylvania, joined PBI-USA Executive Director, Katherine Hughes-Fraitekh, on a two-week speaking tour across the northeastern, mid-western and eastern U.S., which included presentations and meetings with a variety of schools and universities, peace and justice groups, faith-based groups, partner organizations, and long-term PBI-USA supporters and former field volunteers. It also included extensive meetings and briefings with the US Department of State, United Nations staff and Congressional members and staff.

In March 2009, human rights defenders and a PBI field volunteer from the three Latin American PBI projects went on a month-long coordinated speaking tour hosted by PBI-Canada and PBI-USA. The US cities visited included Washington, D.C. and New York City. Tita Radilla, Vice-President of the Association of the Family Members of the Detained, Disappeared, and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico (AFADEM), Gloria Gómez, National President of the Association of the Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES) in Colombia, and Wiebke Schramm, German PBI field volunteer, representing the Organization to Support an Integrated Sexuality to Confront AIDS (OASIS) (which PBI-Guatemala accompanies) traveled and spoke alongside PBI-USA, PBI Mexico and PBI Colombia staff. The speaking tour entitled, *“Institutionalized Injustice and the Struggle*

*against Impunity: The Dangerous Work of Human Rights Defenders”* focused on the overarching theme of impunity—with a call from the victims and their families for truth, justice, reparation, leading to non-repetition. The issue of impunity affects human rights defenders’ worldwide.

*“Thanks to PBI’s accompaniment, we have been able to continue our activities; international accompaniment has given us more confidence and strength.”*  
~ Tita Radilla, AFADEM (Mexico)

PBI is in the final stages of producing a special publication on the theme of impunity and its effects in the five PBI field projects. The special publication is expected to be released in the fall of 2009. In addition to a variety of speaking engagements, the speaking tour focused on high level political advocacy in the US and Canada with a focus on building support for improvement in human rights policies in the new Obama Administration.

### Speaking Tour in North Carolina

If you are interested in hosting PBI speakers in your community and/or have contacts interested in arranging possible speaking events in North Carolina between September 14-25, 2009, please e-mail [speakers@pbiusa.org](mailto:speakers@pbiusa.org) for more information. Thanks for your help!

In September 2009, PBI-USA is planning a speaking tour in North Carolina and will hold its next Field Volunteer Orientation Weekend on September 19-20 in Durham, NC (see page 2).

In November 2009, in collaboration with PBI Colombia and surrounding the School of Americas Vigil, PBI-USA is planning a speaking tour featuring Colombian human rights defenders which will travel across the Southeastern U.S.

*To become involved with PBI-USA’s domestic work please visit our website.*



### About PBI-USA

#### Peace in Action

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Executive Director:  
Katherine Hughes-Fraitekh

Bulletin Design & Editor:  
Theresa Mutter, Program Coordinator

National Coordinating Committee (NCC)  
Members: Tahani Afaneh, Robin Fazio, Alex Hildebrand, Katherine Hughes-Fraitekh (PBI-USA staff), Angie McCarthy, Matt Messier, Steve Molnar, Amelia Parker, and Sarah Simonson.

**Peace Brigades International (PBI)**  
is a non-governmental organization which protects human rights and promotes the nonviolent transformation of conflicts. When invited, we send teams of volunteers into areas of conflict.

Field volunteers accompany human rights defenders, their organizations and others threatened by political violence. Perpetrators of human rights abuses usually do not want the world to witness their actions. The presence of volunteers backed by a political support network helps to deter violence.

We make space for local activists working for social justice and human rights. PBI is currently working in Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia, Nepal, and Indonesia.

#### Donations

All donations made to PBI-USA are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Make a donation today by mailing a check or donating quick and easy online through our website at: [www.pbiusa.org](http://www.pbiusa.org).

To learn more about how to support PBI-USA, please visit our website.

Peace Brigades International-USA  
1326 9th St, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 232-0142  
Fax: (202) 232-0143  
Email: [info@pbiusa.org](mailto:info@pbiusa.org)

# Updates from the Field



## Colombia

PBI Colombia currently deploys 35 field volunteers who protect 11 NGOs, individuals and two peace communities in Barrancabermeja, Bogotá, Urabá, and Medellín. Major issues include oppression against Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups, as well as ongoing threats and criminalization of human rights defenders. Colombia now has the largest number of Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, in the world. In a recent publication, PBI Colombia cites that: "between January 2002 and December 2008, 1,244 indigenous people were murdered, which means that, on average, every 55 hours an indigenous person is killed" in Colombia.

## Guatemala

The political and social instability of Guatemala has grown significantly worse with the assassination of Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg on May 10<sup>th</sup>, and a subsequent video broadcast in which he accuses high-level government officials of plotting his assassination, including President Álvaro Colom. There is no agreement on the authenticity of the claim

and groups throughout the country have mobilized either in opposition or support of the President, making the situation highly unstable. The internationally supported truth and justice commission, CICIG, continues its work to bring perpetrators of political violence to justice, but faces major challenges in the corrupt system. The recent coup in Honduras and implications for the region is also a major concern.

## Mexico

Since 2005, PBI has accompanied Tita Radilla, AFADEM. The case of Tita's disappeared father, Rosendo Radilla, was heard July 8 at the Inter-American Court for Human Rights in Costa Rica. PBI was present and is awaiting a decision which could set an important precedent for hundreds of other cases from the 1970s "Dirty War". HRDs that PBI accompanies in the Guerrero region have been severely threatened in recent months after the torture and murder of two leaders of the indigenous group, the Organization for the Future of the Mixteco People (OFPM). The Tlachinollan Human Rights Center, a PBI-accompanied lawyer's collective that defended their members, has been targeted

and PBI is the only human rights NGO still functioning in the region.

## Indonesia

The terrorist bombings on July 17 dramatically increased political tension in Jakarta. Two weeks prior, the country held its second peaceful democratic presidential election, returning President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to a second term. PBI volunteers continue to accompany HRDs in Papua, one of whom, Theo Hese gem, made his first visit outside of Papua and traveled to the US as part of the International Visitor's Program in March 2009. He met with US government officials and PBI-USA voicing his concerns about the lack of implementation of special autonomy protections for the indigenous Papuans required by national law.

## Nepal

HRDs struggle to stabilize their new democratic republic created through a peace agreement between the armed resistance and the Nepal monarchy after 10+ years of civil war. The entire process is at risk of collapse, due to the PM's resignation. PBI recently opened an office in the Terai region, an area with high numbers of unresolved disappearances. PBI partners with the Conflict Victim's Committee, a women's organization seeking justice.

# Updates from PBI-USA



Serving as a PBI field volunteer makes a tremendous difference in the life of volunteers, as well as the human rights defenders who are being protected.

*"The experiences I had as a field volunteer are what keep me inspired in the work I do now. I don't think any of us walks away without being really impacted by the courage and dedication that we have the privilege to bear witness to. I hope I can keep what I have been taught present and keep doing work that honors the human rights defenders." ~ Lisa Kunkel, PBI*

Currently, there are eight US PBI field volunteers: Jacob Blickenov (Colombia), Dana Brown (Colombia), Gretchen Begley (Colombia), Jenna Manheimer (Mexico), Jessica Fujan (Guatemala), Tiffany Ornelas (Indonesia), Roggie Cale (Indonesia), and Frank Tool (Indonesia). Soon to join them are: Michael Mori (Indonesia), Michael Aaron (Indonesia), Katie Danko (Nepal), and

Vida James (Colombia). Volunteers who recently ended their service are: Krystal Mason (Nepal), Lisa Kunkel (Colombia), Emily Nelson (Colombia), and Amanda Hooker (Colombia).

**PBI-USA is proud to have tripled the number of US field volunteers in 2008-2009 so that for the first time in many years, US volunteers are represented in all five PBI field projects.**

PBI-USA continues to look for qualified individuals interested in becoming field volunteers. Some criteria that PBI looks for includes: foreign language skills, maturity, knowledge of the country of interest, political analysis skills, commitment to nonviolence, ability to manage stress, outstanding writing skills, language skills and cross-cultural skills.

*For more information, please visit the "Get Involved" section of the PBI-USA website at: [www.pbiusa.org](http://www.pbiusa.org).*

## Lawyer's Advisory Committee and the Human Rights Defenders at Risk Fund

PBI-USA is currently developing a new initiative, modeled on the successful PBI-UK's lawyer initiative. High-level international law and human rights lawyers are being recruited to serve on this new advisory committee which will organize delegations, provide legal assistance, and undertake advocacy and fundraising for lawyers that PBI accompanies. PBI-USA's executive director and NCC members are attending the American Bar Association's annual meeting in early August and a **gala event is scheduled for October 9, 2009, in Chicago.**

## **Upcoming Event: Orientation Weekend September 19-20, 2009 Durham, NC**

PBI-USA's orientation weekends are designed for individuals interested in volunteering with one of our five field projects or with a general interest in PBI. The program includes an introduction to PBI's work and philosophy, an overview of our field projects, and a sharing of experiences by field volunteers.

To register and for information, contact Christina Azimi at: [intern2@pbiusa.org](mailto:intern2@pbiusa.org) or call 202-323-0142.