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PBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS



Regional Corporation for the
Defence of Human Rights
(CREDHOS)

Peace Brigades International (PBI) has accompanied the Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) since 1994.



Wilfran Cárdenas, member of CREDHOS.

The Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) is an autonomous non-governmental organisation comprised of citizens of the Magdalena Medio region who represent distinct sectors of civil society. CREDHOS was founded in 1987 to promote, defend, and protect human rights, democracy, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The organisation has several objectives, among them to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and a peaceful coexistence dedicated to supporting the civilian population and vulnerable sectors of society¹.

The Work of CREDHOS

CREDHOS is based in Barrancabermeja (Santander) and works in the region of the Magdalena Medio. The organisation provides assistance to the local population and other social organisations in the following areas:

- **Training** teams of people dedicated to promoting human rights and economic, social and cultural rights, IHL, peaceful conflict resolution, democracy, and mechanisms for civilian participation.
- **Researching** human rights violations and IHL

CREDHOS WAS FOUNDED IN 1987 TO PROMOTE, DEFEND, AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL).

“There have been many deaths and forced disappearances in Barrancabermeja and the Magdalena Medio region. CREDHOS accompanies the families of victims in order to seek compensation for damages, continue in their search for the truth, and see that justice is done”.

David Ravelo Crespo²

infractions by armed actors in the conflict.

- **Encouraging** the lodging of public complaints with relevant authorities at the local, national, and international levels to report human rights violations and IHL infractions. This in addition to monitoring these complaints and ensuring they are processed correctly.
- **Documenting cases** of human rights violations to be presented before public opinion at the national and international level.
- Providing **legal and technical assistance** to victims of human rights violations.

- **Publishing reports** on the human rights situation in the region. The magazine Enfoque Humanitario is published twice a year and the bulletin CREDHOS Opina is published monthly. CREDHOS also has a television program that airs every Saturday and a weekly radio show.
- **Participating in coordination roundtables** at the local, national, and international level such as the Alliance post London³ or the Colombia Europe United States Coordination (CCEEU).
- **Touring** in Colombia and abroad to highlight the human rights and IHL situation and to form alliances.
- **Constructing solidarity networks** at the regional, national, and international level with organisations of human rights defenders, governments, and the international community. CREDHOS believes that these relationships will aid in the creation of a new social order based on a peaceful, egalitarian, and just society.



Small-scale farmers of the Magdalena Medio at the Bicentennial Celebration in Barrancabermeja.



Pablo Arenales, former president of CREDHOS.

The History of CREDHOS

CREDHOS was founded in Barrancabermeja in 1987. According to CREDHOS, the organisation arose as a civilian alternative based on the principles of right to life and dignity. Its goal is to act as an antithesis to the systematic violation of human rights, the dissolution and conditioning of institutional democratic spaces for citizens, and constant IHL infractions committed by armed groups participating in the conflict. CREDHOS has publicly denounced harassment and threats against them since their organisation began.

The paramilitary takeover of Barrancabermeja began between December 2000 and January 2001 and caused an exodus of CREDHOS members that continued until March 2005, culminating with the exile of former president of CREDHOS Pablo Arenales and several other members of the organisation. As a result of these displacements, CREDHOS had to form a new board of directors in order to maintain organisational stability.

«The decade from 1986 to 1996 was extremely hard in the Magdalena Medio, in particular between 1987 and 1992, when the Navy unit 007 began an intelligence network that acted in coordination with civilian assassins and the Nueva Granada battalion. They were known as the 'death squads'. This 'dark period' began with the assassination of Leonardo Posada Pedraza in 1986. He represented the Patriotic Union party in the Lower House of Congress. CREDHOS formed in this context in 1987. The organisation's goal was to uncover the parties implicated in this criminal network, and this work carried with it a terrible price. CREDHOS lost seven of its members between 1991 and 1992 and almost all of its directors had to flee the city and sometimes even the country».

Francisco Campo, former member of CREDHOS⁴



David Ravelo, member of CREDHOS.

Threats against CREDHOS

David Ravelo, a member of CREDHOS, received several threats between May and July 2010. These threats were made through his family. One of his children received several calls from people who claimed they were going to kill David Ravelo, and that his family should begin to prepare for his funeral. In another threat, the caller told his child that they had already killed Ravelo⁵. Ravelo's mother-in-law also received a threatening phone call advising her of a plan to have him killed⁶. "They are targeting my family,

my most vulnerable point, with the purpose of keeping me in a constant state of uncertainty", is David Ravelo's take on the situation⁷. Over the course of his career, Ravelo has lodged numerous public complaints regarding extrajudicial executions, assassinations, displacements, and forced disappearances in the Magdalena Medio. In the last five years, he and other members of CREDHOS have received various threats in the form of telephone calls, flyers, and emails⁸.

DAVID RAVELO, A MEMBER OF CREDHOS, RECEIVED SEVERAL THREATS BETWEEN MAY AND JULY 2010. THESE THREATS WERE MADE THROUGH HIS FAMILY. RAVELO HAS LODGED NUMEROUS PUBLIC COMPLAINTS REGARDING EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS, ASSASSINATIONS, DISPLACEMENTS, AND FORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN THE MAGDALENA MEDIO.

Arrest and baseless prosecution against David Ravelo

On 14 September 2010, agents from the Technical Investigation Unit enforced a warrant issued by the National Antiterrorism Unit of the Public Prosecutor's Office and arrested David Ravelo⁹. He was charged with conspiracy to commit a crime and aggravated homicide¹⁰. These charges are based on the testimony of two demobilised paramilitaries who testified as part of Law 975¹¹. After these accusations were first made, Ravelo presented himself voluntarily to the Public Prosecutor no.3 in Barrancabermeja in February 2009 to contend his innocence with his own testimony¹².

The Human Rights Situation in Barrancabermeja

The human rights situation in the region continues to be unfavourable. The Human Rights Ombudsman noted that “the past few months have seen a marked intensification of threats and harassment against human rights defenders”¹³. He also affirmed that “the main source of risk [...] continues to be the presence of new illegal armed structures that emerged after the demobilisation of the self-defence forces”. He is referring to the groups “Los Rastrojos” and “Los Urabeños” that, according to this report, are in the midst of a territorial dispute “to gain control of the legal and illegal economies in the Magdalena Medio: drug trafficking routes (ports of call, transport of chemicals and coca derivatives), money laundering, extortion, and stealing fuel”¹⁴.



The rural territory of the Cimitarra River Valley. CREDHOS also works to promote human rights and economic, social, and cultural rights (DESC).

Protection measures

The CREDHOS Board of Directors was awarded precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in 2000.

Awards

In 2009, the Municipal Council of Barrancabermeja, the Mayor of Barrancabermeja¹⁵ and the Department Assembly of Santander publicly recognised CREDHOS for their work.

The Dioceses of Barrancabermeja presented the San Pedro Claver award to David Ravelo and CREDHOS in recognition of their work.

International accompaniment

PBI arrived in Barrancabermeja in 1994. CREDHOS was one of the original organisations that invited PBI to Colombia. Since then, PBI has provided international accompaniment to CREDHOS through an agreement signed between the organisations and renewed in 2006.

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1. <http://www.credhos.net>; «Hoy como ayer, persistiendo por la vida y la dignidad», CREDHOS, 2007; «Video institucional», CREDHOS, 2008
2. Interview with the Secretary General of CREDHOS, David Ravelo Crespo, 15 July 2010
3. This is an initiative that aims to cultivate and promote dialogue between civil society, the Colombian government, and the international community on the subjects of international aid, human rights, and peace in Colombia. The London Declaration of 10 July 2003 became a point of reference for relationships between government, civil society, and the international community. «De Londres a Cartagena a Bogotá – Estrategia de corporación internacional en Colombia», PNUD, November 2007
4. Francisco Campo is a political activist who worked from 1987 to 2004 in CREDHOS and currently is a member of the organisation Nation Corporation in Barrancabermeja. The full interview with Francisco Campo can be found in: «Looking for support», PBI Colombia, October 2009
5. «Complaint filed with the National Public Prosecutor's office—Barrancabermeja section, case number 680916000135201000595», CREDHOS, 4 June 2010
6. «Acción urgente: Grave situación de riesgo del defensor de derechos humanos David Ravelo Crespo y su familia», Corporación Reiniciar, 28 May 2010
7. Interview with David Ravelo, 15 July 2010
8. Ibid. 6
9. «Privado de la libertad el defensor de derechos humanos David Ravelo Crespo», Human Rights Defenders Working Group (EETDDHH) of Barrancabermeja, 14 September 2010
10. Ibid. 9
11. Law 975 awards reduced sentences to paramilitaries accused of crimes against humanity in exchange for their confessions and cooperation throughout the judicial process.
12. Ibid. 9
13. «Nota de Seguimiento», Human Rights Ombudsman in charge of evaluating risks to the civilian population as a result of the armed conflict, July 2010
14. Ibid. 7
15. The Mayor's office also recognised the organisation's work in 2008.



Barrancabermeja is an oil town. Photo: Sebastian Roetters