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OPEN LETTER
**CLARIFICATION OF THE WORK OF PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL AS AN INTERNATIONAL
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION WORKING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS**

Due to the various incidences that occurred in the Valle del Polochic region mid-March, where several communities were evicted, resulting in the injury of many and in the death of one person¹, among other consequences, some media outlets published articles and press releases that comment on the presence of Peace Brigades International (PBI) during the aforementioned events, where two PBI volunteers were accompanying the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEQUA) on its work of verifying threats and violations of human rights.

In relation to these media comments we would like to clarify the following:

PBI has accompanied human rights defenders who have been attacked or who are under threat over the last 30 years across a variety of countries. We respond to petitions for help made by people and civil society organisations who request international accompaniment whilst carrying out their non-violent work in promoting and defending human rights, particularly when those human rights have been violated or when they are under threat. In a context of increasing violence and aggression, protective accompaniment continues to be desired by human rights defenders, organisations, communities and individuals who struggle for the proper implementation of human rights and whom denounce the vulnerability of those same rights.

The accompaniment that PBI has developed in Guatemala is implemented in accordance with the principles of non-violence, non-interference and non-partisanship. We practice physical accompaniment, the lobbying of authorities and of the diplomatic community and publish information on the work undertaken by the PBI field team and on relevant aspects of Guatemalan news. Whilst respecting the principle of non-interference in the affairs of state, we voice our concerns about the correct application of human rights standards and on the right to defend the promotion of such standards.

Representatives of international and national institutions, and of civil society organisations from across the world have repeatedly expressed the value of PBI's work in protecting human rights defenders, and in creating spaces within which conflicts can be resolved peacefully².

PBI would also like to emphasise that we profoundly respect the right and the ability of Guatemalan communities, civil society and human rights organisations to promote, develop and practice the defence of human rights, as well as the right of the same actors to request accompaniment from other organisations when those rights have been violated or when they are under threat due to the work that the aforementioned organisations carry out.

We thank you for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely,

Peace Brigades International

¹ Multiple Guatemalan and international civil society organisations have questioned the proceedings that led to the eviction of various communities, as well as the violence used against those same communities during the process. According to these sources, the procedures did not conform to international human rights standards. Please see the press releases published on the website for the Copenhagen Initiative for Central America and the Caribbean (CIFCA): <http://www.cifca.org/CartaF%5B1%5D.pdf>

² Examples of the importance that international institutions such as the United Nations attribute to the work of PBI on human rights can be read in the following declaration from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya: "I take this opportunity to voice my full support to the valuable and legitimate work of PBI in several regions of the world, which is a source of inspiration to all of us." A declaration made in the Spanish Congress on the 4th of February 2010, and included in the report of the Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights defenders: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/16session/A-HRC-16-44-Add3_AEFS.pdf.