



BRIEF SUMMARY OF ORGANISATIONS **CONTEXT OF CURRENT THREATS** **AND PBI'S CONCERNS¹**

The National Coordinator of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA)

CONAVIGUA was founded in 1988 by indigenous women from different Mayan communities. Its objective was to denounce the murders, massacres and other kinds of violence committed by the state against them and their relatives. Since 1997, CONAVIGUA's work has focussed on compliance with the recently signed Peace Accords, and in this context the organisation organises and participates in processes relating to recuperation of historical memory, and compensation for victims of the internal armed conflict, especially in El Quiché, Chimaltenango and the Verapaces. Currently, CONAVIGUA is implementing a 'Justice and Dignification' programme, carrying out exhumations and reburials of victims of the war buried in clandestine graves. In recent years, its work has expanded into areas of legal and organisational advice to indigenous communities involved in self-managing and defence of natural resources. In this context it has been involved in the organisation of community 'good faith' consultations around the country, including in Uspantán (in Quiché), and Lanquín (in Alta Verapaz).

On 2 September, the Guatemalan government authorised the construction of the Entre Ríos hydroelectric project on the rivers of Lanquín and Chianay, by the company Corrientes del Río S.A. The communities that stand to be affected by the project were not widely informed or consulted, as is required in the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169, which has been ratified by Guatemala. The communities organised their own consultation in Lanquín on 28 September. CONAVIGUA participated in the preparation and delivery of the consultation, and in another one planned for 29 October 2010, on mining and hydroelectric projects in Uspantán.

PBI has accompanied CONAVIGUA since 2003. PBI international observers were present in the Lanquín community consultation, and have accompanied the organisation in various activities in Uspantán relating to the preparation of its community consultation. We are especially concerned about **death threats** received by coordinator Magdalena Sarat, and lawyer and member of CONAVIGUA, Jorge Morales Toj, which come in the context of their work on these consultations. We are also worried by the high number and seriousness of other threats and aggressions against members of the organisation and against the communities participating in the Lanquín consultation. On 23 September, PBI accompanied Mrs Sarat to the Prosecutor General's Human Rights Office, which is following up on the complaint she lodged with the Prosecutor's General's Office (Ministerio Público - MP).

Comoteca Campesino Association (ACC) and 'New Day' Chortí Central Campesino Coordinator

These are two *campesino* organisations in the east of the country, which work together in the Maya Chortí region (Chiquimula) to support community processes to defend and protect their land and natural resources. They carry out community training, information and political advocacy relating to the *campesino* economy, the environment, rights and land issues. It was in this context that they informed communities about plans to construct three hydroelectric projects in the region as part of the wider Central American Electrical Interconnection System (SIEPAC for its initials in Spanish), and evaluated its potential effect on the environment and local economies. They carried out the same work on another project planned for the region, the "Technological Corridor", which aims to join the Atlantic Coast of El Salvador with the Pacific Ocean in Guatemala by 2015. It also forms part of the broader plans contained in Project Mesoamerica (successor of Plan Puebla Panama, or PPP). In general terms, the Technological Corridor includes the construction of a four-lane motorway, a railway for freight trains, and a gas pipeline. The main demand of the communities is based on their right to be duly informed and consulted about these projects planned for the

¹ For more detailed information see the accompanying document on "Summary of security incidents, violent situations and threats against defenders of social, economic and cultural rights accompanied by PBI, September and October 2010".

land they inhabit, as recognised in national and international law. They say that the lack of information and consultation is a source of conflict in the region.

PBI has accompanied ACC and New Day since 2009. Our current concern is the intensification of attacks against their members: intimidation, surveillance, defamations, accusations made publicly by local authorities, and **even death threats**. These attacks are connected with their work informing communities about mega-projects and their work defending economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). PBI is especially concerned about **public accusations made by local authorities** against Omar Jerónimo, coordinator of New Day, and Carlos Hernández, leader of ACC, blaming them for a violent confrontation between the community members and police on 12 October in Jocotán. The confrontation happened during a protest in which indigenous Chortí community members demonstrating in front of council buildings demanded that the mayor discuss the Technological Corridor with them, and expressed their opposition to the project.² The Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit (UDEFEQUA) has identified the accusations on the part of public authorities as part of a process of criminalisation that often culminates in legal accusations against human rights defenders.³ The fact that there are rumours that warrants have been issued for the arrest of Jerónimo and Hernández, and that the Chiquimula office of the Prosecutor General (MP) will not release any information about any investigation or arrest warrant means that the men have little certainty about their legal situation. Added to this, the threats against their lives and physical integrity make them afraid to keep working in the region. On 19 October, PBI accompanied them to lodge complaints before the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office at the national level. They also intend to lodge a complaint with the MP.

The Association of Indigenous Women of Santa María Xalapán (AMISMAXAJ)

AMISMAXAJ was formed in February 2004, and is made up of 75 women leaders, representing 15 Xinca communities of Santa María Xalapán Mountain (Jalapa). They work at the local, departmental and national levels, actively promoting women's rights in Jalapa, the revitalisation of their Xinca ethnic identity, and the defence of land, territory and natural resources. In their political declarations and pronouncements, as well as in public activities, they express their opposition to mining and oil industry activities and plans in the region, demanding the recognition and respect of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and women's rights. On 27 May 2010, the Ministry of Energy and Mines authorised the Canadian company *Goldcorp* to hand over the rights of the silver mine Escobal to Minera San Rafael, a subsidiary of the transnational company *Tahoe Resources Inc. Goldcorp*. AMISMAXAJ has positioned itself against this move, given that the communities had not been informed or consulted, and because it believes the mine threatens the area's natural resources.

PBI has accompanied AMISMAXAJ since August 2009, after several of its members had been threatened because of their work. More than a year later, their security situation remains very worrying: **Death threats** against Lorena Cabnal, a member of the Association, intimidation and surveillance of several members, and the burglary of the construction site of their new headquarters. PBI was present during a march in Jalapa on 12 October, in which a stranger issued a death threat to Lorena Cabnal. At the same time **two PBI volunteers were subject to acts of intimidation** while they carried out their work of accompaniment and international observation.

Association for the Protection of Las Granadillas Mountain (APMG)

The Association was established in the department of Zacapa in 2003. Its principal aim is to avoid logging, monocrops and large expanses of livestock grazing land on Las Granadillas Mountain because of

² The violence resulted in several deaths, as well as other injuries and arrests. Public buildings were burnt during the conflict (the council headquarters, the community association office and a library). The exits from Jocotán were also blocked.

³ Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit (UDEFEQUA), 'Criminalización en contra de defensores y defensoras de derechos humanos', Guatemala, December 2009.

their negative impact on water sources and reserves. Its work includes informing about and auditing logging and deforestation on the mountain, and it also supports the communities of La Trementina to promote and defend their economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Although the Association has been participating for several years in talks to try and find solutions to the conflicts between the demands of the communities and APMG and the interests of the owners of private estates on the mountain, to date no lasting solutions have been found. A proposed law is currently being debated, to declare the mountain *Chortí-Ladina Las Granadillas Mountain Spring Reserve*, an initiative of the Association.

PBI has accompanied APMG since August 2008. At the beginning of 2009, three of its members faced legal accusations, linked to their work with the Association, but these were overturned in the first hearing before a judge. PBI's current concerns are centred in the intensifying attacks against APMG human rights defenders, which include surveillance, intimidating rumours and warnings against its leaders, and **death threats** against Reverend José Pilar, Álvarez Cabrera of the Lutheran Church of Guatemala. PBI is also deeply concerned by the violence affected the communities of La Trementina, generated by the permanent conflicts with the mountain's landowners. On 30 September, PBI accompanied members of the Association to lodge a formal complaint with the Prosecutor General's Office (MP).

Guatemala Project
Peace Brigades International (PBI)
Guatemala, October 2010