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PBI MEXICO

New accompaniment in Oaxaca

“Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño” Regional Human Rights Centre (Barca-DH)

Since October 2010, PBI has provided accompaniment to the “Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño” Regional Human Rights Centre (Barca-DH) in the state of Oaxaca. Barca-DH’s members have been victims of smear campaigns and serious attacks because of their work in defence of human rights. PBI focuses its accompaniment on Minerva Martínez Lázaro, Barca-DH’s coordinator, Padre Wilfrido Mayrén Peláez (better known as Padre Uvi) and Padre Martín Octavio García Ortiz.

The “Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño” Regional Human Rights Centre (Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos “Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño”, A.C., Barca-DH) is a non-governmental human rights organisation. It was formed in 1992 by Catholic grassroots communities in Oaxaca. Barca-DH was established in response to the murders and other violent acts suffered by the state’s population, which were never brought to trial and remain in impunity. Since the very beginning, Barca-DH’s members have experienced harassment, surveillance, smear campaigns, direct attacks and the fabrication of crimes, as they work to promote, defend and give training on human rights.

Barca-DH leads an international campaign for the freedom of Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez, a prisoner from Oaxaca’s Loxicha region, and encourages human rights projects in the state’s Southern Sierra and Central Highlands. In addition, Barca-DH and the Centre for Human Rights and Supervision of Indigenous Peoples (Centro de Derechos Humanos y Asesoría a los Pueblos Indígenas, CEDHAPI) – also accompanied by PBI – requested precautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) given the multiple human rights abuses committed against the population of the Autonomous Municipality of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca. The measures were granted to the municipality’s 135 internally displaced people on 7 October 2010.

Through its projects, Barca-DH seeks “to contribute to the validity of human rights in Oaxacan communities, so that they may live in justice and with dignity”. Barca advises on community proposals and carries out advocacy work, legal defence and information distribution. Barca-DH’s work is based on a respect for the many identities of the Oaxacan peoples and a strong gender perspective.



Padre Uvi in the Xochimilco church, accompanied by PBI volunteers in Oaxaca. © PBI

Barca-DH’s coordinator, **Minerva Martínez Lázaro**, faces numerous risks because of her responsibilities within the organisation, her work on paradigmatic cases together with Padre Martín and Padre Uvi, and her involvement in the Oaxacan Collective in Defence of Territories¹.

¹ The Oaxacan Collective in Defence of Territories ([Colectivo Oaxaqueño en Defensa de los Territorios](#)) was formed in 2009 as a pluralist space for civil, social and community organisations which conduct activities to strengthen the resistance of, and aid with the development of proposals by, communities and

Through its accompaniment, PBI aims to provide international support to Ms Martínez Lázaro's activities in promotion and defence of basic human rights.

Padre Uvi: a thorn in the side of human rights violators

Padre Uvi was one of Barca-DH's founders in 1992, when he was the parish priest of Santo Domingo Teojomulco. He is now also the coordinator of the Peace and Justice Committee (Comisión de Justicia y Paz), legal representative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Antequera-Oaxaca, and – together with Padre Martín – parish priest in the church of Santo Tomás Xochimilco. Padre Uvi's work as a human rights defender and peace-builder in various conflict situations has been recognised in Oaxaca, in Mexico, and internationally. Because of these activities, he has been a victim of harassment, defamation and attacks² over the last 12 years.

In 1998, following his role as mediator in an agrarian conflict between the communities of Teojomulco and San Lorenzo Texmelucán, he was shot at but escaped unharmed. In 2006, a year of great social conflict in Oaxaca, Padre Uvi participated in the Mediation Committee (Comisión de Intermediación) between the Oaxaca Government and the Section XXII teachers' union. As a result, many media outlets linked him to the militant Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, APPO) and even to guerrilla groups. He also received death threats towards the end of that year.³ In 2009 he reported receiving threats by phone, subsequent to his intervention in the Marcelino Coache case⁴. Mr Coache, a trade-union leader, reported that he had been apprehended by unknown individuals in 2009 and tortured for more than 10 hours⁵. Mr Coache had also been detained by police in December 2006 during the social conflict in Oaxaca. Months later, in May 2007, he was released due to the lack of evidence against him.

Padre Uvi is currently one of the intermediaries at the round table in San Juan Copala, whose work was initiated in

peoples who defend their lands, territories and natural resources.

- 2 [BARCA-DH Urgent Action](#) (in Spanish), 5 August 2010.
- 3 ["Denuncian amenazas de muerte contra el párroco oaxaqueño Wilfredo Mayrén"](#) [Death threats reported against Oaxacan parish priest Wilfredo Mayrén], *La Jornada*, 10 December 2006
- 4 [Urgent Action: Amenazas contra el Padre Uvi por su defensa en el caso de Marcelino Coache](#), OMCT, Limesdh, May 2009.
- 5 Urgent Action: [México: Alegaciones de tortura y malos tratos. Temor por seguridad e integridad personal](#) [Mexico: Allegation of torture and mistreatment / Fear for safety and personal integrity], OMCT, 11 March 2009.

September 2010 in order to establish dialogue between MULT and MULTI – the Movement for Triqui Unity and Struggle (Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui), and the Independent Movement for Triqui Unity and Struggle (Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui Independiente) respectively – and to bring a peaceful resolution to the violent conflicts affecting the region. Authorities have publicly discredited this work⁶, and he has also been victim of a widespread media smear campaign. This has included serious accusations of fomenting violence in the Triqui conflict⁷.

Padre Martín: attacked and unjustly imprisoned

Padre Martín Octavio is a human rights defender who has promoted the rights of Oaxaca's poorest communities. He has supported those who protest in defence of their territories, natural resources and the environment. Likewise, Padre Martín has stood against the imposition of "development projects" that violate a community's right to prior consultation.

Since arriving in San José del Progreso, the father has focused his support on the community which is fighting against the gold and silver-mining concessions granted to the Cuzcatlán company. As a consequence, Padre Martín's work and name have been defamed and attacked by certain media outlets in an attempt to undermine his credibility as a human rights defender. Padre Martín reports that this fostered a climate of hostility, which in turn led to acts of aggression against him on 19 June 2010. A few days later, he was detained under *arraigo* (pre-trial detention without charges) and accused of a double homicide during confrontations in San José del Progreso. On 30 June, the *arraigo* was lifted and Padre Martín was released⁸. No charges have been laid against him, but no steps have been taken to compensate for the harm done to him and he cannot yet return to San José del Progreso.

All of these incidents exemplify the continual criminalisation of human rights defenders and their work in the state of Oaxaca.

- 6 ["Probable encubrimiento del 'Padre Uvi' en delitos de los triquis"](#) [Probable cover-up by 'Padre Uvi' for Triqui crimes], Triquis de Oaxaca, 22 October 2010.
- 7 ["Milicianos y activistas subversivos rechazan al Ejército en los triquis"](#) [Militias and subversive activists reject the Army in Triqui zones], *Diario Despertar*, 2 August 2010.
- 8 Amnesty International publications, both in English with Spanish titles: the Urgent Action [Detenidos en peligro de tortura y juicio injusto](#) [Detained at risk of torture and unfair trial], 25 June 2010; and update [Sacerdote mexicano en libertad bajo fianza](#) [Mexican priest released on bail], 20 July 2010.

For further information on BARCA-DH, Padre Uvi and Padre Martín, see:

- * [BARCA-DH's web page](#) (in Spanish); www.barcadh.org
- * [Oaxaca: update on the case of Padre Martín](#), Sipaz, 19 July 2010; <http://sipazen.wordpress.com/2010/07/19/oaxaca-update-on-the-case-of-padre-martin/>
- * Call to action: [Alto a los ataques en contra del Padre Uvi](#) [Stop the attacks on Padre Uvi], Coreco, July 2010; <http://coreco.org.mx/wordpress/?p=1083>
- * [Condena Red Nacional agresiones al Padre Uvi](#) [National network condemns acts of aggression against Padre Uvi], *Noticias*, 15 August 2010; www.noticiasnet.mx/portal/principal/condena-red-nacional-agresiones-al-padre-uvi
- * [Exigen alto a agresiones al Padre UVI](#) [Demands to end acts of aggression against Padre Uvi], *El Blog de Frida*, 17 December 2010; <http://fridaguerrera.blogspot.com/2010/12/exigen-alto-agresiones-al-padre-uvi.html>