

31 March 2016

**PBI expresses profound concern for the security situation of human rights defender Cristina Auerbach of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation due to recent acts of intimidation and defamation**

*Due to recent acts of intimidation and defamation against human rights defender Cristina Auerbach, Peace Brigades International (PBI) urges the Mexican Government to take immediate action to guarantee her security and that of other members of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation. PBI also asks that the Mexican Authorities publicly recognise the legitimate work of Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation.*

### Events

On 14 March, 2016, according to members of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation (OFPC), alleged soldiers arrived at the offices of the organisation in Cloete, in the Coal Mining Region of the State of Coahuila.

Shortly thereafter, on 25 March, 2016, local newspaper La Voz [published](#) an interview with a local Sabinas council member and businessman involved in mining, who accused Cristina Auerbach of attempting to extort him.

Then, on March 28, 2016, a group of people entered the land where OFPC's office is located in Cloete and [tore down banners and signs](#) belonging to the organisation. The Organisation mentions that this group was accompanied by municipal and state police. The assailants also took down crosses that members of the organisation had placed nearby during a [Via Crucis procession](#) organised to mark the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary since Grupo Mexico decided to suspend the rescue mission to recover the 63 miners trapped inside Mine 8 of Pasta de Conchos.

On 29 March, 2016, HRD Cristina Auerbach was unable to access the OFPC office in Cloete, due to the fact that a crowd surrounded her car, at the same time [threatening her and striking the vehicle](#). As a result of this [aggression](#) perpetrated against Cristina due to her legitimate work in defence of human rights – which culminates a period of intimidation, defamation and harassment – the defender faces a worrying risk situation and is in need of protection. These events were denounced by the Human Rights Defender before the Coahuila State Attorney General's office. On the same day, local press again [published](#) a news items [discrediting](#) Cristina's work.

On 30 March, 2016, local newspaper La Voz again published an article about Cristina Auerbach in which the author [accuses her](#) of running away from local reporters, confirming a [pattern of defamation](#) against her,

## History

Since 2014, PBI accompanies the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation, especially the organisation's Director, Cristina Auerbach, due to the risk they face for their legitimate work in the defence and promotion of economic and social rights in the Coal Mining Region of Coahuila. For the work they carry out, members of the organisation have received threats and suffered harassment. Cristina Auerbach has been the victim of constant [harassment](#), physical aggressions, [threats](#), and defamation. Due to this risk situation, she was granted protection measures by the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Journalists.

The OFPC was created in 2006, as a response to the [disaster](#) in the Mine number 8 of the Pasta de Conchos Unit, located in the municipality of San Juan Sabinas, Coahuila, with the objective of demanding the rescue of the bodies of 63 miners who were trapped inside. Since then, the organisation and its members have integrated other mining disasters into their work, and more recently have focused on preventing work related accidents. They have developed their work around the auditing of security conditions in mines, which has resulted in a significant reduction in accidents in the area<sup>1</sup>.

The organisation has taken the case of Pasta de Conchos to the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) (IACHR) and the [International Labor Organisation](#) (ILO). Cristina Auerbach has also participated in international hearings on human rights, for example a [hearing](#) on the situation of the defenders of women's human rights and the environment in Mexico before the IACHR.

## The conflict in Cloete

In April 2015, the OFPC opened an office and library in Cloete, in the municipality of Sabinas, with the goal of providing support to those in the zone who had seen their [health and land affected](#) by coal exploitation. According to the testimony of the local population, several mining companies had began working on open pit mines in the area, [damaging the land and environment](#) of hundreds of families that live in the village of Cloete. According to OFPC, these activities do not respect agreements reached in 1996 that determined that "coal exploitation or extraction activities (could not be carried out) within urban properties within 350 meters of the last houses in the villages of Sabinas, Aguijita and Cloete, Coahuila<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the struggle over the coal extraction, inhabitants of Cloete have been threatened, harassed and defamed. In this context, the OFPC has presented [complaints](#) before the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) on violations of their human rights related to mining activities in Coahuila. Nearby communities have also joined the struggle for resistance in Cloete, since

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1 Thanks to the auditing work taken on by the organization, no disasters have been registered during 13 consecutive months, the first time that a whole year has passed without deaths due to the lack of security measures since 2006 when the work of OFPC began.

2 Environmental Impact study available here:  
<http://sinat.semarnat.gob.mx/dgiraDocs/documentos/coah/estudios/2004/05CO2004M0014.pdf>

they allegedly face similar experiences in the nearby towns of Nueva Rosita, Palaú, Esperanzas and La Florida.

### **Petitions**

The increase in aggressions in Cloete has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation of Cristina Auerbach and other members of the organisation. It is alarming that these reprisals against the defender are resulting in the closure of political space for her work. PBI observes with concern the pattern of defamation that tends to criminalise the legitimate work of the Human Rights Defender Cristina Auerbach and increase the risk of more serious aggressions, such as those that occurred at OFPC's office in Cloete on March 29.

Due to this situation, Peace Brigades International urges Mexican authorities at the three levels of government – municipal, state, and federal – to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security of Cristina Auerbach and other members of the Pasta de Conchos Family Organisation.
2. Effectively implement the protection measures authorised by the Federal Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and guarantee that these be adjusted to the context of the Coal Mining Region.
3. Publicly recognise the legitimate work of the Human Rights Defender Cristina Auerbach in defence of economic and social rights.