

## PBI MEXICO – August 2016

## Accompaniment in Chihuahua

### Alianza Sierra Madre

*Alianza Sierra Madre has been working with the communities of Choreachi and Coloradas de la Virgen situated in the Sierra Tarahumara of Chihuahua since the nineties. The organisation accompanies the communities in demanding their rights and helps to empower them in land defence processes. Various national and international NGOs have recognised the violent situation which is destroying the Sierra Madre and causing a high level of risk for HRDs. In effect, community leaders and members of ASMAC have suffered reprisals due to their human rights work. PBI works with ASMAC by accompanying them in their activities on an occasional basis by running workshops and supporting their demands through political advocacy processes involving authorities at different levels and the diplomatic body.*

### The Work of ASMAC

Alianza Sierra Madre A.C. (ASMAC), an organisation created in the nineties and registered as a civil association since 2007, works with villages and communities of the Sierra Tarahumara by promoting their right to defend the land and territory, their right to preferential access to natural resources, as well as to food and education, and to fully practise their culture.

To meet these objectives, the organisation structures its work into three main areas: defending indigenous human rights; biocultural conservation and promotion of the sustainable communities, which includes issues such as access to water, food security and fighting to combat soil impoverishment. In addition to accompanying and empowering indigenous communities to be more aware of and able to demand their rights, ASMAC also enters into dialogue with authorities and other actors of civil society in order to sensitise them to the rights of the communities.

The organisation, which has offices in Chihuahua City, accompanies the communities of Choreachi and Coloradas de la Virgen (both of which are situated in the municipality of Guadalupe and Calvo). The community of Choreachi, has been defending its territory for decades (against illegal logging, amongst other things) through legal action. Members of the community have been intimidated, threatened and even [assassinated](#) - such as Jaime Zubias Ceballo and Socorro Ayala Ramos in 2013. Other members of the community, such as

Prudencio Ramos Ramos and Angela Ayala Ramos (Jaime's wife), have had to [abandon the area](#) due to the threats. In 2014, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights granted collective [precautionary measures](#) to various community leaders, including Prudencio Ramos and Angela Ayala.

The community of Coloradas de la Virgen has also been defending its territory and its forest for decades, reaping legal victories such as a [ruling](#) of the Agrarian Court in December 2015, which overturned the permissions previously granted for illegal forest exploitation. Due to their struggle, many members have been threatened. In February 2014, the Federal Protection Mechanism for defenders granted protection measure to various members of Coloradas de la Virgen. However, on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2016, the son of Julián Carrillo – one of the beneficiaries of such measures – was assassinated at his home in the community.



Members of ASMAC and other NGOs during a Press Conference of the Sierra Tarahumara Caravan

### Support Networks

Alianza Sierra Madre operates as part of a network made up of several other national and international

organisations; of particular importance is its sister civil association in the USA: Sierra Madre Alliance. What's more, together with Tierra Nativa and CONTEC, they make up one of the three member organisations of the Network in Defence of the Indigenous Territories of the Sierra Tarahumara, which was created in 2012 to pool efforts in terms of legal strategies for defending the territory of the people and preferential use of their natural resources. Likewise, ASMAC is also a member of Red TdT, which consists of 80 organisations.

At international level, ASMAC was able to present the risks suffered by the communities, as well as by members of the organisation itself, before the European diplomatic body during a visit to Chihuahua, and before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in Washington in 2013, as well as in Monterrey in 2015.



Meeting of the Caravan of the Tarahumara at the Senate

### Violence in the Sierra Tarahumara

The Sierra Tarahumara, which is located in the State of Chihuahua and is home to 90% of the state's indigenous population, is marked by a situation of extreme violence according to several reports by journalists and activists. Many communities feel that they have no choice but to move away due to fear of the presence of organised crime and executions, threats and forced recruitment into opiate plantations. In 2014, ASMAC joined up with other SCOs to launch the Caravan for Justice in the Sierra Tarahumara, an initiative which was repeated in 2016, with the aim of making the violence that the communities are faced with visible to members of the Home Office and the Senate of the Republic.

The violent situation in the Sierra results in elevated levels of risk for HRDs working in the region. For this very reason, PBI has expressed concern by the security of HRDs working in the Tarahumara during various meetings with the authorities. This situation has also been explained in detail by the IACHR in its report on the Human Rights Situation in Mexico (2016), where it confirms that it "received information on the violence suffered by HRDs and indigenous leaders, including

those who are under precautionary measures issued by the Commission in the state of Chihuahua".

### ASMAC at Risk

Working in human rights in the state of Chihuahua implies a high-risk situation for many of the defenders. This aspect was emphasised by Chihuahuan civil society at the beginning of April 2016 when a request was made to Roberto Campa Cifrián, Subsecretary for Human Rights of the Home Office for "an early alert to prevent future aggressions against HRDs in Chihuahua" to be issued.

As a matter of fact, members ASMAC have been harassed and threatened for carrying out their legitimate work in defending human rights. As a result, both the director Isela González and the lawyer Ernesto Palencia are beneficiaries of the protective measures of the mechanism. Nevertheless, due to the continuous risk that their work entails, several members of the organisation have not been able to return to the Sierra since 2014.

### Relationship with PBI

Since the Northern Team was opened in September 2013, PBI has worked continuously with ASMAC through accompaniment on occasion at reviews of the protection measures of the federal mechanism, or other key events such as hearings of the Agrarian Court of Chihuahua, or the second Caravan for Justice in the Sierra Tarahumara at the Senate of the Republic in April 2016. PBI has also provided security and advocacy workshops to members of Alianza Sierra Madre. PBI frequently communicates the international concern to federal authorities for the security of HRDs that accompany communities in the Sierra Tarahumara. It also makes the situation visible to international actors, for example, by organising the visit of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the situation of HRDs to Chihuahua City in May 2016.



Special Rapporteur on HRDs met with NGOs from Chihuahua

**For more information on Alianza Sierra Madre, go to:**

- [Their website](#)
- [Their Facebook page](#)

- [Their Twitter account](#)
- [Tarahumara Defence Network](#)