

# Peace Brigades International

# in Mexico

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## Political Disappearances in Mexico

In the past months, several events have once again pointed the Mexican public's opinion attention to one of the darkest episodes in the country's history. In June of this year, the *National Human Rights Commission* (CNDH) was accused of having concealed important information about political disappearances in Mexico. This information could be decisive in explaining the disappearances, as well as discovering the whereabouts of these people.<sup>1</sup> Almost at the same time it was made public that the *National Security and Investigation Centre* (CISEN) possesses an archive that had belonged to the now defunct *Federal Security Department* (DFS) and that contains between 60 and 80 million records with information on between 3 and 4 million people, among them a large number of disappeared people.<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico* (AFADEM), there are more than 1 300 disappeared in Mexico,<sup>3</sup> a number that contradicts information offered by the CNDH, which states that there are only 700 cases of disappearances.<sup>4</sup> As academic Armando Bartra points out in his book *Guerrero Bronco*,<sup>5</sup> in just the town of Atoyac de Álvarez, Guerrero, there were more than 300 disappearances as a result of the counter insurgency campaign in the seventies.

The CNDH denied that it has concealed information about political disappearances and emphasizes the fact that in 1992 it wrote a preliminary report about disappearances in Guerrero.<sup>6</sup> However, the CNDH also mentions that the lack of information as well as differing opinions limited the possibilities of effectively clarifying the events. The report had been criticized because it only listed the disappearances chronologically without explaining the circumstances.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the CNDH has announced that it will publish a report in November of this year,<sup>8</sup> about the 482 cases of disappearances —result of the counter insurgency campaign in the seventies— that it is currently investigating. The report will include several recommendations, such as compensation for the victims' families and that the government request forgiveness.<sup>9</sup>

This whole process has been criticized by some sectors of civil society, such as Rosario Ibarra, leader of the *Eureka Committee*, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that champions the cause of 502 cases of the disappeared. The *Eureka Committee* does not accept any kind of compensation nor forgiveness as valid solutions—the reappearance of their family members alive is the only acceptable option.<sup>10</sup>

Another element to consider in this debate are the different

parties —such as AFADEM— asking for the creation of a truth commission that would shed light onto the dark side of past regimes.<sup>11</sup> When president Vicente Fox took office last December, he promised to investigate past cases of corruption and human rights violations. However, in past weeks, several government officials, such as Santiago Creel, have stated that a truth commission would not be necessary to clarify Mexico's past—this can be done with the pre-existing institutions in the country.<sup>12</sup> In the first week of October, Creel announced that he had instructed CISEN's General Director to open their archives pertaining to the Tlatelolco massacre of October 2, 1968. However, Creel specified that access would be limited to the CNDH and the *Attorney General's Office of the Republic* (PGR).<sup>13</sup> For its part, the PGR has announced that it will investigate the 300 cases it has received about presumed forced disappearances between 1968 and March of this year. A third of these complaints come from Guerrero and involve the Generals Francisco Quirós Hermosillo and Arturo Acosta Chaparro, both of whom are currently imprisoned due to drug trafficking connections.<sup>14</sup>

With all these recent events, the investigation and clearing up of political disappearances in Mexico continues to be a pending issue for the Mexican government.



**Photographs of disappeared relatives of AFADEM members during the International Day of the Forcibly Disappeared in Acapulco. Photo PBI.**

<sup>1</sup> *Reforma*, June 25, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *El Sur*, July 25, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *El Universal*, May 12, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Guerrero Bronco*, Armando Bartra, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> *El Universal*, August 1, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *La Jornada*, August 1, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *Reforma*, August 2, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> *Reforma*, July 19, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> *Reforma*, July 20, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *El Sur*, July 25, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> *El Universal*, June 25, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> *La Jornada*, October 3, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

**Cover photo: Monument in remembrance of the victims of the Aguas Blancas Massacre. Photo PBI.**

## Interview with Ranferi Hernández Acevedo

Since the end of August, the PBI team in Mexico has been accompanying Mr. Ranferi Hernández Acevedo during his travels in his home state of Guerrero. Mr. Hernández has gained prominence as a social activist and politician (he was a representative to the state congress for the *Democratic Revolution Party* (PRD). PBI received a request to accompany Mr. Hernandez from the *Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico* (AFADEM) a few weeks before his return from France, where he had lived in exile for the last 4 years.

**—What were the circumstances that forced you and your family to leave Mexico and apply for refugee status in France?—**

I took on the case of the Aguas Blancas massacre, in which 17 *campesinos* (peasants) died in the municipality of Coyuca de Benitez on June 28, 1995. I was actively working to defend the families of the victims and organizations such as the *Southern Sierra Peasant Organisation* (OCSS), to which the *campesinos* who were killed belonged. The government of the state of Guerrero, and more specifically Ruben Figueroa Alcocer, who was then the governor and responsible for the massacre, created an environment of persecution and harassment. This continued under his successor Angel Aguirre Rivero.

I was accused of many things that were not true, such as destabilizing the state of law or being directly responsible, along with the OCSS, of giving money to *campesinos* so that they would join armed groups such as the *Revolutionary Popular Army* (EPR). We rejected the accusations and demanded an impartial investigation. Since they were unable to provide proof to substantiate their accusations they tried to stop us through other means. That's when the persecution and violent actions by the state security forces began. Finally an assault against my wife and daughter, that fortunately did not have serious consequences, led me to the decision to leave. July 25, 1996 was my last day in Guerrero.

I went to Mexico City, but even there the persecution continued. Two of the leaders of the OCSS, Hilario Mesino and Benigno Guzmán, were arrested in Mexico City during this time. In the end, in September of 1997 we realized that we had to leave for France. Our intention had been to continue in Mexico's capital, but the space for legal and democratic participation had been closed despite the efforts of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There was no way to stop the repressive acts that were being carried out against us and most of our colleagues were in jail. Therefore, with the agreement of the organisations that supported, and continue to support us, we left Mexico

to seek refuge in France. In November of that same year France accepted us as political refugees. We received support from organisations such as Amnesty International and the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, which demonstrated the severe persecution that we had been subjected to.

From France I continued to denounce the repression that was taking place in my country, and made contacts with various associations, NGOs and parliamentarians from several countries.

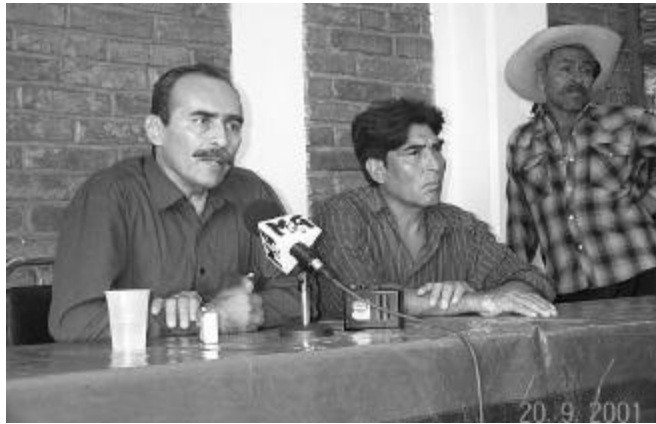
**—After spending four years in France you decided to return. What changes have occurred that led you to make this decision?—**

During President Zedillo's government there was unconditional support for Figueroa Alcocer, including *carte blanche* with the army. However, the political discourse of the winning candidate in the

last elections, Vicente Fox, gave us grounds to demand guarantees for our return. He talked about a political change, an end to repression, that he would allow for the returned of those in exile and that he would set up a truth commission to deal with all the massacres, from the one in 1968 to the El Charco massacre, including reopening the Aguas Blancas case. Based on this, several national and international NGOs asked us to return.

In addition, the *Department of External Affairs* (SRE) and the Special Ambassador for Human Rights at the time showed great interest in learning about our case and after some time they committed themselves to providing guarantees for my return to Mexico. Consequently, I asked that the investigations and arrest warrants against me be revoked, as well as requesting guarantees for my physical safety and respect for my constitutional and human rights. I have copies of documents that show that there are no longer any arrest warrants against me, however the state of Guerrero has apparently declared that it would be difficult for them to take responsibility for my physical safety. At the same time, on September 13 of this year, the current governor of the state of Guerrero, Rene Juárez Cisneros, publicly stated in Chilpancingo that all of my rights would be respected, rights which in any case I am determined to exercise.

However, a series of worrisome events has taken place since my return. These events make it clear that there is still great insecurity and that monitoring and harassment by security forces continues. This type of harassment is also taking place against the OCSS, and is perpetrated by the *Attorney General's Office of the Republic* (PGR) in particular. Another event that worries me is a television interview that was aired a few days ago on a local channel in Guerrero in



Ranferi Hernández (left) in press conference. Photo PBI.

which I was presented as an ex-guerrilla. This makes me mad and I think that it is a criminal accusation by the television channel.

**—What are your projects in Guerrero?—**

Guerrero is one of the poorest regions in the country and has a 21% illiteracy rate. Out of a population of three million, one third emigrates in order to survive. This situation is painful for me. Moreover, the Puebla-Panama Plan that the federal government is pushing will not benefit the indigenous and *campesino* communities. On the contrary, it will only generate economic development for the same families that always benefit as well as foreign investors.

As a result of this, I have become involved in a project that I had been invited to join while I was still in France. It is called the *Social Movement for Democracy* (MSD). It is a humanitarian project, in which the concept of democracy involves respect for the constitution, the law and human rights. Although we know that traditionally any attempt to organise in Guerrero is repressed by the government and the *caciques* (local political bosses), we are still willing to push the enve-

lope and denounce what is happening to the international community.

**—And finally, why did you request PBI's accompaniment?—**

Despite everything that has been offered and the attempts to create an image of respect for human rights, the true rule of law still does not exist in Mexico and the repression continues. Consequently we know there is always the possibility of an attack against me or my family by *caciques* and paramilitaries in the region, under government control. In fact, two sides continue to exist: on one side you have those responsible for the Aguas Blancas massacre and on the other side you have us, those who demand justice. This inescapably leads us to a confrontation with a dynasty, the Figueras, that has been characterized by repression, murders, disappearances and the torture of hundreds of social activists, cases that have never been resolved nor investigated. They have been filed away, waiting for justice. For all of these reasons we believe that an international presence is extremely necessary.

## **Author of Aguas Blancas Massacre Freed from Prison**

On August 23, one of the men responsible for the Aguas Blancas massacre—in which 17 peasants were killed on June 28, 1995—was released from prison.<sup>1</sup> Despite criticisms from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Manuel Moreno González—ex-State Motorized Police coordinator and considered the “material author” of the massacre—was released after spending 6 years in prison. He had been accused of murder, assault and professional irresponsibility in a public post. He was originally sentenced to 24 years in prison, subsequently reduced to 22 years, until this past August when Federal Justice declared him innocent of all charges and he was freed after only 6 years in prison.<sup>2</sup>

With Manuel Moreno, the number of those responsible for the massacre freed from prison since July 1995 sits at 12. Remaining in prison are 8 police officers and the ex-director for state internal affairs, Esteban Mendoza, who also participated in the massacre.<sup>3</sup> Members of the *Southern Sierra Peasant Organisation* (OCSS), of which the murdered peasants were members, accused the state government of freeing the few ex-functionaries imprisoned for the massacre. They declared that Moreno González was one of the many material authors responsible for crimes against humanity. He prepared the operation and was the commanding officer of the police officers involved in the ambush.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to this case, Hilda Navarrete Gorjón, president of the “Voice of the Voiceless” Human Rights Commission, declared that the current governor of Guerrero, René Juárez Cisneros, would not have won the past elections if Rubén Figueroa<sup>5</sup> had not intervened in his campaign, right when

his chances of winning were most threatened. “Because of the way in which those implicated in the massacre have been freed, and for their privileges in prison, it is obvious that this is one of the agreements that the current government made with Figueroa.”<sup>6</sup> Ex-police officers jailed for the massacre have commented that their prison stays were “arranged” and that they continued to receive their normal salaries while in prison.<sup>7</sup>

A few weeks ago, the Special Human Rights Ambassador, Mariclaire Acosta, accepted the creation of a special commission to review the Aguas Blancas case. The commission will be formed by government functionaries, the OCSS, the *Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre* (PRODH), the *Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations in Mexico* (AFADEM), the *Committee for the National Network of Human Rights Civil Organisations*, “All Rights for All,” as well as functionaries from the *Democratic Revolution Party* (PRD).<sup>8</sup> To date, there have been no signs that this commission has started its work.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Aguas Blancas, see *PBI Mexico Project Information Bulletin*, number VI, July 2001. PBI.

<sup>2</sup> *El Universal*, August 26, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *La Jornada*, August 26, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> See article *Interview with Ranferi Hernández Acevedo*, in this bulletin.

<sup>6</sup> *Proceso SUR*, Number 40, September 1, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *La Jornada*, July 5, 2001.

## Murders and Tension in Ayutla

In the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, state of Guerrero, the murder of indigenous leaders seems to be a common occurrence. On August 26, Andrés Marcelino Petrona, a community leader from El Charco, was murdered while going to a town meeting.<sup>1</sup> According to the mayor of Ayutla, Fortino Caballero Villalobos, this murder constitutes "one of the many politically motivated crimes that have taken place this year."<sup>2</sup>

According to information published by the media, at least seven activists or indigenous leaders from the Mixtec and Tlapanec regions of Ayutla have been murdered since last year.<sup>3</sup> On November 19, 2000, Severiano Lucas Petra was murdered. He was president of a committee representing indigenous women and men who had been demanding compensation for being sterilized without consent by Department of Health employees in 1998. Zarco Eugenio Aurelio and Silverio Eugenio Aurelio met the same fate; both had participated in protests denouncing aggressions by the Mexican military. This year has seen the murders of Mixtec leader Donaciano González Lorenzo on January 8; indigenous professor Miguel Miranda Macario on May 20; and, most recently, Andrés Marcelino Petrona, leader of the *Independent Organisation of the Mixtec-Tlapanec Peoples* (OIPMT), was murdered on August 9.

Shortly after this most recent slaying, Arturo Campos Herrera, OIPMT coordinator, declared that none of these crimes had been investigated and demanded that the government investigate and punish those who are responsible.

In his opinion, they were politically motivated murders and it is likely that the army is involved in the repression against indigenous leaders.<sup>4</sup> In a press conference held in September, Campos Herrera, speaking on behalf of the OIPMT, condemned the climate of violence and harassment that the Mixtec and Tlapanec populations of Ayutla suffer. He pointed to the army, as well as other unidentified groups, as those responsible.<sup>5</sup> In particular, he highlighted the ambush of a group of indigenous individuals on September 18 which left Lorenzo Acevedo Soledad, one of the Mixtecs sterilized against his will, severely injured. In his opinion, the attacks are meant to intimidate the Mixtecs who are demanding compensation for the sterilizations. Of the 18 people sterilized, two have now been murdered.<sup>6</sup>

Also, on September 18, army troops looking for alleged members of the *Revolutionary Popular Army* (EPR), beat three Mixtec men in Roca Colorada, Ayutla.<sup>7</sup> The beatings were denounced by Bertoldo Martínez Cruz, leader of the *Guerrero Democratic Organisations Front* (FODEG), who said the beatings were nothing new and that he would file a complaint with the *National Human Rights Commission* (CNDH) against the army.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *La Jornada*, September 22, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> *El Sur*, September 21, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *El Sur*, September 24, 2001.

## Guerreran Council "500 Years" Celebrates 10th Anniversary

On September 13 and 14, the *Guerreran Council "500 Years of Indigenous Resistance"* (CG500ARI) celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their founding, commemorated during their Fourth Congress in the city of Chilpancingo, state capital of Guerrero.

Some 300 representatives from Tlapanec, Nahuatl, Mixtec and Amuzgan communities attended the Congress.<sup>1</sup> The Congress focussed on two themes: the designing of the Mexican and Guerreran Indigenous Peoples Autonomous Development Plan and the elaboration of a strategy to allow indigenous peoples to obtain recognition of their rights.<sup>2</sup> In the Congress, all agreed that these two areas, in both their economic and political spheres, would constitute CG500ARI's main work areas in the coming months. Through the implementation of the Indigenous People Autonomous Development Plan—which implies demanding resources from both state and federal governments—CG500ARI will attempt to provide an alternative to president

Vicente Fox's Puebla-Panama Plan.<sup>3</sup> The Autonomous Development Plan will be developed with proposals from the indigenous communities in Guerrero. The political focus of the Plan will attempt to win the recognition of indigenous peoples rights in the eyes of both state and federal governments.



CG500ARI's Anniversary banner. Photo PBI.

<sup>1</sup> *El Sur*, September 14, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *El Sur*, September 15, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> See *PBI Mexico Project Information Bulletin*, number VI, July 2001. PBI.

## Electoral Accompaniment en Loxichas

On August 5<sup>th</sup> of this year, elections were held for congressional representatives in the state of Oaxaca. Despite the transition to democracy many forms of electoral irregularities are still common in this state, as is the case other southeastern states of Mexico.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, several member organisations of the *Oaxacan Human Rights Network* (RODH) together with the *Civil Movement for Democracy* (MCD) sent observers to several municipalities in the state of Oaxaca, mainly to distant communities with complex problems that could jeopardize the electoral process.

According to the RODH, the electoral process in the state of Oaxaca is corrupted by “buying and pressuring voters or by not recognizing electoral results in a community when they go against the interests of those who hold the political and economic power”.<sup>2</sup> In municipal elections in Oaxaca the option exists of choosing between elections at the ballot box or elections carried out through indigenous customs and traditions. However, at the national and state level elections are always done through a secret and free vote, in other words at the ballot box.<sup>3</sup> According to the RODH, local elections, both municipal and for members of congress, have become an important arena to defend self-determination and for demands from the community and civil society for a true break from the local power structures. In some polarized areas the electoral period brings with it increased harassment. Especially vulnerable during this time are those municipalities which have defended their right to self-determination.

As a result of this situation, the RODH requested support from national and international observers for the elections, as well as making a request to PBI to accompany these observers, since they would be traveling to specific areas considered “red zones” due to the high level of violence or the presence of *caciques* (local political bosses) that pressure the community. Though the *State Electoral Institute* (IEE) did not agree to the presence of foreign observers, it did accept PBI’s accompaniment since its volunteers would not be observing the elections, but rather accompanying the observers. Moreover, PBI volunteers already had the proper migratory status.

The RODH decided to send PBI volunteers to Loxichas, accompanying observers from the *Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture* (ACAT Oaxaca), *Tequio Jurídico*, RODH and MCD.

Loxichas is an area of intense conflict, and, since 1996, when the *Revolutionary Popular Army* (EPR) guerrilla group appeared in the area, the region’s communities have suf-

fered “institutionalized violence on a permanent basis”, according to the *National Network of Human Rights Civil Organizations*, “*All Rights for All*” (TdT).<sup>4</sup> Municipal authorities were replaced and various military and police forces, both local and federal, carried out operations to fight the EPR. The TdT points out that these operations have resulted in several deaths, more than a hundred individuals arbitrarily detained and other forms of harassment against the local population. The region continues to be militarized.<sup>5</sup> The *municipal president* (public post equivalent to mayor), Lucio Vásquez Ramírez, who was imposed in 1996, has been accused of having links with informers and paramilitary groups.<sup>6</sup>

The observers and their PBI accompaniers went to San Agustín Loxicha, the administrative centre of the municipality and from there to the smaller communities Sirena and Quelové. During those 3 days they accompanied the observers while they met with local authorities — including the above mentioned municipal president—, interviewed the population to determine whether or not they were aware of their electoral rights and what other information they had. In addition, the observers informed people directly and through posters of their rights and the possibility and moral obligation to denounce any irregularities related to the elections that they witnessed. During the day of the elections, the volunteers placed themselves along with the observers next to the ballot



**PBI volunteer accompanying election observers in Oaxaca. Photo PBI.**

boxes. The observers who had been in the same district during last year’s federal election expressed that they felt more secure with the presence of PBI and knowing that this year the authorities at the state level were informed about the presence and activities of both the observers and the PBI accompaniers.

The elections went forward without any major problems in most of the municipalities. However, observers were able to inform of irregularities in some parts of the state. In the district of Nochixtlán, there was a report of the disappearance of two observers from political parties, the *Democratic*

*Revolution Party* (PRD) and the *Workers Party* (PT) carried out by four armed men.<sup>7</sup> Another important problem was abstentionism which reached 69%. This means that there was less participation in this election than in the previous years. The results of the election were as expected: the *Institutional Revolutionary Party* (PRI) obtained 49.6% of the votes, winning 24 of the 25 electoral districts where the winner is determined by the majority vote. The *National Action Party* (PAN) and the PRD both finished with 19% each.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Urgent Call: Threats, Harassment and Mistreatment of Residents of Loxichas, Oaxaca, after visit by Human Rights Observers, National Network of Human Rights Civil Organizations, July 5, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> El Universal, August 29, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> El Imparcial, August 7, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> Elections 2001 Human Rights Protection Project, Oaxacan Human Rights Network.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Municipal elections took place on August 25<sup>th</sup> in San Agustín Loxicha. This election was carried out through the use of indigenous traditions and customs, that is to say by a show of hands during an assembly where all inhabitants are present. A new municipal president was elected for the term

2002-2004<sup>9</sup>, putting an end to the power of the municipal president Lucio Vásquez Ramírez. In addition, at the beginning of October, this same ex municipal president was detained by the Oaxaca state police and charged with first degree murder.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Reforma*, August 9, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Reforma*, October 4, 2001.

## PBI's Work in Mexico

Since the last bulletin, the PBI team in Mexico has gone through many changes. These include the arrival of three new volunteers from Belgium and Germany, which raises the number of team members to nine. We are also consolidating the PBI presence in Guerrero with more team members than we had before August. This has allowed us to take on two more accompaniments in addition to our presence in the *Colonia Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine*. We have increased our accompaniment for the dissident families in the colonia due to aggressions they have suffered in the past few weeks. The team continues to maintain regular contact with several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as federal and state authorities.

### New accompaniments

In August, at the request of the *Oaxacan Human Rights Network* (RODH) PBI accompanied members of the NGOs *Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture* (ACAT), the *Civil Movement for Democracy* (MCD) and *Tequio Jurídico* during their observation of the state legislator elections in the communities San Agustín Loxichas, Quelové and La Sirena, Oaxaca.

In September, the team twice accompanied Bernardo Ranferi Hernández Acevedo on his trips to Guerrero. Among other events, PBI accompanied him during the commemoration of the "International Day of the Forcibly Disappeared" in Acapulco, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Guerreran Council "500 Years of Indigenous Resistance"* (CG500ARI) in Chilpancingo, and during his reception in his home town, Ahuacuotzingo.

### Colonia Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine

On September 21, various members of the PBI Mexico team were the object of aggressions when they were accompanying dissident families of the Colonia Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine. About 50 colonia neighbors, presumably followers of the colonia's PRI leader, Antonio Valdez Andrade, gathered around the PBI companions and the dissident families in an attempt to intimidate them. At the same time one of them video taped all people present. After a while, various people threw eggs at the PBI companions and the dissident families.

According to the dissident families, the tension in the colonia has increased since September due to a series of threats and aggressions against them by Valdez Andrade's followers.

Due to this situation, the PBI Mexico team has intensified its presence at the entrance to the colonia and asserted its concern about this situation to the corresponding authori-

ties.

### Informative visits and consolidation of the team in Guerrero

The team has moved its Guerrero office to Chilpancingo, state capital of Guerrero, and has established a team of four members who, apart from continuing the accompaniments, will follow up on the current political situation and the events in the region.

As part of consolidating its work in the state, PBI accepted several invitations from Guerreran NGOs to visit different communities that are characterized by their complicated and problematic situations. One of these visits was to the community of Cucuyachi in the Costa Grande region on August 24, accompanying the *Campesino Women's Collective* (COMUCAM), an NGO which works on human rights education, among other activities. During the visit, we interviewed many community residents who told us about the local conflict and its roots in *caciquismo* (the control exercised by local political bosses) and abuses of local power. Other visits included going to Tlapa and Huamuxtitlan in the region of la Montaña together with the "*Tlachinollan*" Human Rights Centre. In Tlapa we attended, as observers, a forum on human rights violations against migrants.

### Interviews with authorities

The team continues to have regular contact with numerous state and federal authorities in order to inform them about the team's work:

In Guerrero we had meetings with the State Attorney General, Rigoberto Pano Arciniega; the Secretary General of the Acapulco city hall, Guillermo Ramírez Ramos; the Secretary for Protection and Traffic of Acapulco's Preventative Police, José Zermeño; and Acapulco city hall Trustee, Adela Román.

In Oaxaca we held meetings with representatives of the *National Migration Institute* (INM), the *State Electoral Institute* (IEE) and the *State Human Rights Commission* (CEDH) in preparation for the accompaniment during the state elections.

At the federal level we met with the INM on different occasions due to renewed problems obtaining FM3 visas for new volunteers. We also met with the General Director for International Issues of the *National Human Rights Commission* (CNDH), Ulises Canchola Gutiérrez; Federal Legislator, Rubén Aguirre Ponce; the General Director for Human Rights Protection of the *Attorney General's Office of the Republic* (PGR), Mario Álvarez Ledesma; the Social Organisations Liaison of the *Department of Internal Affairs* (SEGOB),

Alejandro Macedo García; the Special Human Rights Ambassador, Mariclaire Acosta; the Human Rights Delegate of the *Department of Public Security and Citizen Protection*, Antonio del Valle; and the Legal Affairs Delegate of the *National Indigenous Institute* (INI), Yuri Escalante.

We spoke with representatives of the Embassies of France, Great Britain, Portugal, USA, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, Canada and Austria and with the delegate for the United Nations' Development Program.

### Interviews with NGOs

The team in Mexico City met with: the *Mexican League for Human Rights Protection* (LIMEDDH), the *Mexican Human Rights Academy*, the *National Human Rights Network*, AFADEM, the *Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre* (PRODH), the *Eureka Committee*, the *Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights*, *Amnistía Internacional – Mexican Section*, the *German Coordination for Human Rights in Mexico* and *Global Exchange*.

In Guerrero the team held meetings with the "Voice of the Voiceless" Human Rights Commission, the PRODH in Guerrero, the *Petatlán and Coyuca de Catalán Sierra Ecologist Peasants Organisation*, the *Southern Sierra Peasant Organisation* (OCSS), the "Planter of Hope" Human Rights Centre, the "José María Morelos y Pavón" Regional Human Rights Defence Centre, the "Mahatma Gandhi" Human Rights Centre, the *Indigenous Peoples' Autonomous Development Organisation* (OPIDA), and the *Press Writers Union* in Chilpancingo.

In Oaxaca we met with the the following NGOs: *Social Pastoral Work*, the RODH, the "BARCA" Human Rights Centre and the "Flower and Song" Human Rights Centre.

### 20 Years of Accompaniment

PBI celebrates its 20th Anniversary on October 26 and 27 of this year in Konstanz, Germany and Romanshorn, Switzerland with an International Conference that will welcome participants from around the world in addition to the PBI General Assembly.

#### Human Rights Defender Murdered in Mexico City

At the closing of this edition, PBI received the sad news that human rights lawyer and defender Digna Ochoa y Plácido had been murdered in her Mexico City office on Friday, October 19, 2001.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, a note threatening several members of the PRODH Human Rights Centre with death was found at the scene of the crime.<sup>2</sup> Digna had, in the past, worked closely with the PRODH, an NGO internationally recognized for their work and commitment to human rights.

PBI expresses its deepest sympathies and solidarity with Digna's family and colleagues. As an international organisation working for peace and human rights in Mexico and other countries in Latin America and Asia through the accompaniment of threatened human rights defenders and organisations, we find it very worrying that this murder could take place despite the commitments made by the Mexican government to protect and recognize the work done by human rights workers.

<sup>1</sup> *Reforma*, October 20, 2001; *La Jornada*, October 20, 2001; *El Universal*, October 20, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## Peace Brigades International

## in Mexico

making space for peace



is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that, upon request, maintains teams of international accompaniers in areas of conflict. PBI seeks to protect the political space of individuals and organisations who promote human rights and who in turn suffer repression as a consequence of their work. International accompaniment is a conflict transformation tool through which third parties contribute to create the conditions necessary to resolve a conflict. At no time does PBI attempt to replace Mexican initiatives promoting human rights, but rather limits itself to supporting said initiatives with the presence of international accompaniers. To achieve this goal, PBI teams work in-country accompanying threatened individuals or organisations, periodically visiting conflict zones, dialoguing with both civil and military authorities and distributing information about the evolution of the conflict in an effort to raise international awareness.

PBI Mexico's Project Information Bulletin is a quarterly publication written and produced by the team in Mexico. PBI Mexico maintains the highest possible level of objectivity thanks to the use of a wide variety of public sources (newspapers, magazines, public reports from civil organisations, etc.) and the citation of all sources used in its articles. The bulletin is distributed both within Mexico and internationally. If you would like to receive the PBI Mexico Project Information Bulletin, please contact the Project Office in Brussels or the PBI Team in Mexico.

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