

What are the emergency support networks?

The effectiveness of PBI's teams of volunteers depends on an international network of support. In situations where there are human rights crises, PBI draws on this network to assist it in urgently applying different forms of pressure on the local authorities to prevent them.

The goal is to multiply the protective power of PBI's international presence, while giving thousands of citizens around the world a way to learn about the conflicts and to take effective action.

PBI seeks varying kinds of assistance from individuals, academic and religious organisations, government representatives, the UN and non-governmental bodies such as Amnesty International. In life-threatening situations PBI will activate the most appropriate alert system at its disposal. This may be done whenever one of our teams or someone they accompany is threatened by:

- Death threats or abductions
- Arrests or assaults
- Expulsion of team members from the country

The grass roots support of thousands of concerned individuals based in countries across the world is accessed through PBI's **Emergency Response Network (ERN)**. The ERN is activated when the need for pressure is as broad as possible. Participants in the ERN are asked to send faxes, telexes, emails or letters to government and military authorities in the country in which the crisis is occurring.

The Project concerned puts together a case sheet with details of the violation(s) and those involved, any background information, suggested wording of an appeal, and appropriate contacts for the intended recipients. The ERN is then alerted and each PBI country group section sends out the case sheet to the ERN members in its country who respond as rapidly as possible.

Within hours of the initial incident, hundreds of faxes, telexes and emails can be sent protesting the violation. The weight of this mass appeal to respect human rights in a particular case has a significant impact on the recipients, making them aware that such violations are not occurring in isolation as the eyes of the international community are upon them.

This international concern can help dissuade the perpetrators of violations from carrying out further actions and provide reassurance to those PBI accompanies.

This impact is particularly strong when those protests are coming from representatives of other governments or, for example, intergovernmental organisations such as the European Union (EU). When PBI wishes to apply this selective and potent form of pressure it activates a different alert network, the **PBI Support Network**.



Kerrie Howard of Amnesty International. Photo: PBI

The use of this high-level network of influential political and diplomatic authorities was first developed through PBI's work in Colombia. It has since been employed in other PBI projects. It uses the alert more selectively, limiting its participants to individual ambassadors and politicians who have especially strong influence on the governmental authorities in the country concerned.

Support this vital work, by becoming a PBI member or a volunteer.
Visit the UK page under Country Groups at www.peacebrigades.org

What are the emergency support networks?

The effect of this selective high-level protest can sometimes be more significant than that achieved through the ERN because of the influence of international governmental representatives on a particular country's aid, trade and political relations. There is more at stake than public condemnation.

During an interview with PBI researchers, one former Guatemalan Defence Minister explained how such high-level protests are perceived:

"You have to watch for when it reaches the level of an intergovernmental problem...because we're

signers of all these covenants and treaties. So, when we get a letter from Congressman X or Senator Y, or a letter from Mr. Z of the European Parliament, something's happening because these folks are not just protesting for their own sake. They represent a lot of people."

Every individual's participation in the ERN is vital to the PBI teams' overall effectiveness. To join and add your voice to the international community's concern for human rights please send your name and contact details to the PBI UK office.

Emergency Support Network Activation Case Study



Colombian human rights defender Pablo Arenales, with PBI volunteer. Photo: PBI

In March 1999 there was an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Pablo Arenales, a human rights defender with the regional Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) in Barrancabermeja, Colombia.

Pablo was threatened by two men, one with a gun. He hid inside a restaurant from where he called the PBI office. PBI volunteers accompanied him home, and at his request continued providing round the clock accompaniment.

Hundreds of messages from influential state, inter-governmental and church representatives were sent to highly placed officials in the Barrancabermeja security forces. This activation generated an immediate response from the Colombian authorities at the highest levels. Finally General Fernando Tapias, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, rang the PBI office in Bogotá to express concern about the situation and offer to take protection and security measures.

The PBI team held a series of meetings with these officials a month later to evaluate the response and resulting action. The security force commanders commented on the many messages they had received. Despite receiving further threats on his life during the following years Pablo Arenales, with PBI's support, has been able to continue his human rights work with CREDHOS.

Support this vital work, by becoming a PBI member or a volunteer.
Visit the UK page under Country Groups at www.peacebrigades.org