



PBI HONDURAS

2019

NEWS

2019 NEWS PBI HONDURAS

DECEMBER 2019

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This publication has been elaborated with the financial support of the Civil Service of Peace.

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LEADER

It is difficult to sum up everything that happened in Honduras and in Peace Brigades International (PBI) in 2019. However, the selection of articles published online, and now gathered in this document, gives an accurate idea of the priorities of our work and the philosophy of the PBI Honduras project throughout the year.

Throughout this selection, we remember that in 2019 we celebrated 6 years of permanent presence in the country. During this time we have tried to bring visibility to the work of human rights defenders and dissuade possible attacks through accompaniments, observations and office visits. Similarly, we commemorate the 38th anniversary of PBI, founded in 1981 with the mission to mobilise and provide trained volunteers in locations with great social tension in order to avoid outbreaks of violence.

We have highlighted the important work of defenders of freedom of expression. We echo the United Nations' Seventh International Forum on Business and Human Rights, an opportunity for civil society, community groups and organisations to put their difficulties in the context in which they work on the agenda, especially cases of individuals with arrest warrants, in prison, or under threat. According to the National Centre for Field Workers (CNTC), 6,000 of their members have been criminalised for their work in defence of land and territory.

Another example of the defence of the natural world is Kevin Ramírez, founder of the Association to Defend the Common Goods of Quimistán (ASODEBICOQ). Quimistán, with its rich hydroelectric potential, has seen various extractive projects in its mountains and valleys, which according to local communities, have led to the contamination and privatisation of rivers.

This selection of news also has a space dedicated to women land and territory defenders. PBI Honduras has developed a report for the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which Honduras will undergo in May 2020, in order to bring greater attention to the specific violence and risks facing these women, and the need for a differentiated response from the Honduran state to protect them. PBI Honduras is particularly concerned by the situation of vulnerability that these women experience, and the existing inequality between men and women due to the patriarchal system that generates gender-based discrimination, violence, and oppression.

Another priority focus for the work of PBI Ireland is the accompaniment of LGBTQI+ rights defenders. On the 6th of December, we premiered the documentary "We Are. Voices of Diversity", which brought to light the situation of vulnerability that transects the entire LGBTQI+ collective and especially affects trans women. "We are not asking for new or special rights for LGTB people. We only want the rights that all people have to be respected", says Esdra Sosa, the sub-coordinator of Arcoiris LGTB Association, to summarise the fight for LGBTQI+ recognition.

APRIL 2019

BUSSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: FROM CONVENTIONS TO REALITY

“They want to take the forest away from us, and they want to ask us the best way to do it. What they don’t understand is that we simply don’t want them to take the forest away from us”.

(CEHPRODEC)

“They want to take the forest away from us, and they want to ask us the best way to do it. What they don’t understand is that we simply don’t want them to take the forest away from us”. This phrase, from a member of the Honduran Centre for the Promotion of Community Development (Centro Hondureño para la Promoción de un Desarrollo Comunitario - CEHPRODEC), an organisation accompanied by PBI Honduras, is symbolic of what is usually expressed by one part of Honduran civil society with respect to extractive projects in the territories of indigenous and tribal peoples: non-compliance with free, prior and informed consultation¹.

In 1995, Honduras ratified Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) according to which indigenous and tribal peoples have the right to free, prior and informed consultation before any project that may have an impact on them. This right, like all internationally-recognised human rights, must be included as a point of reference for the due diligence that corresponds to companies according to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Human Rights due diligence *“concerns the responsibility and activities by which business enterprises should identify, prevent, mitigate and account for the harms they cause, contribute to, or to which they are linked”*².

Due diligence was also the main focus of the seventh United Nations (UN) international forum on Business and Human Rights, which took place from November 26 to 28, 2018 and in which CEHPRODEC participated. Participating in this forum are bodies such as the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights, which was created in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council. The Forum usually receives more than 2,000 participants, including representatives from governments, businesses, community groups and civil society, and it provides participants with a space for debate on the Guiding Principles³, conventions, treaties and laws.

¹ <https://honduras.oxfam.org/blog/deber-consulta-previa-en-Honduras>

² https://www.escr-net.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_due_diligence_briefing_paper_first_draft_sept_2015_-_span.pdf

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/Issues/Business/Forum/Pages/ForumonBusinessandHumanRights.aspx>

When we talk about human rights, we are dealing with the lives of men and women, girls and boys. We are talking about their human dignity. This event is also an opportunity for civil society, organisations and community groups to talk about the difficulties they encounter as a result of their work, as highlighted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its 2018 report on the situation of human rights in Honduras, which states that “*conflict over land and the frequent undue use of the criminal justice system against individuals advocating against large-scale projects affecting land remain a concern*”⁴.

For civil society, this event is also an opportunity to represent those people who organise and mobilise to raise their voices, as in the case of El Triunfo, in early December, where “*some 8,606 people [...] voted in 60 polling stations that were located in the 11 sectors that make up the second most important municipality in the department of Choluteca*”⁵.

The event is also an opportunity to remember that people who organise do so at personal cost. For example, in the citizens’ consultation in El Triunfo, Choluteca, held on December 2, 2018, where PBI Honduras was present, several people opposed to the consultation threw stones at one of the 60 polling stations. Moreover, people who participate in this type of initiative often receive arrest warrants, are arrested and/or receive threats. According to the National Trade Union of Rural Workers (Central Nacional de los Trabajadores del Campo - CNTC), 6,000 people from this organisation were criminalised in 2018 for their work in defence of the right to land and territory.

If Honduran civil society had to share each attack suffered by those who defend their rights to land and territory, as reported by the organisations accompanied by PBI Honduras, they would have to mention every person who has been prosecuted, detained, wounded with machetes, murdered, women beaten even while pregnant, families evicted by state security forces, by the State, torn from their lands where they live and from which they receive sustenance. When civil society and indigenous communities organise, it is these women and men, girls and boys who raise their voices demanding a dignified life.

“In a world of great wealth and technological advances, no person anywhere should be left behind. No person should go hungry, lack shelter or clean water and sanitation, face social and economic exclusion or live without access to basic health services and education. These are human rights, and form the foundations for a decent life”.

(Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 2007 to December 2016)

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k_VKjWDTpgmlQzGEfeLkVTcxQYPK3bz0/view

⁵ <https://movimientom4.org/2018/12/en-consulta-ciudadana-el-triunfo-choluteca-dice-no-a-la-mineria>

MAY 2019

“IT IS SAFER TO BE A WAR JOURNALIST THAN WRITING ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES IN HONDURAS”

Between 2001 and April 2019, 77 people working in the communications media were killed by violent means, according to data from the Honduran National Human Rights Commission. (CONADEH).

“Today, as we celebrate World Press Freedom Day, it is important to consider what is happening in Honduras. A country where there is no war but it seems as though there is. It is safer to be a war journalist than a journalist writing about social issues in Honduras, where around every corner we sense danger waiting for us”. With these words, Dina Meza, executive director of the Association for Democracy and Human Rights (Asociación por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos- ASOPODEHU), began her speech in the event on 3 May entitled ‘Celebrating the World Press Freedom Day with journalists in Honduras’.

PBI Honduras and the British Embassy for Honduras and Guatemala invited the diplomatic corps, journalists and social communicators to this event, with the aim of contributing to a joint reflection on freedom of expression and working together to build a positive narrative for this journalistic work, to mitigate the effects of criminalisation. With this in mind the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) spoke about the need to develop participative public policies and to include a differential focus in any measures adopted.

British Ambassador Thomas Carter also spoke about this, referring to the tendency to criminalise the work of professionals, who in the majority of cases are fulfilling a social role. He also reminded the room that *“press freedom is an essential part of democracy”* and emphasised that, from the perspective of an international observer, there are many barriers for the free exercise of journalism in the country.

To be more precise, it is the reforms of the Criminal Code, together with the Official Secrets Act and the Cyber Security Bill, that have raised alarm bells. Journalists consider that these norms lead to wide-ranging violations of freedom of press and expression, for example by including crimes such as libel and slander. *“Crimes against honour are included but some different forms of libel are added, such as libel against the financial system”* explains Edy Táborá, executive director of the Committee for Freedom of Expression (Comité para la Libre Expresión- C-Libre).

90% impunity rate

As well as criminalisation, Dina Meza also expressed concern in her speech about the figures related to violence against journalists. Between 2001 and April 2019, 77 people working in the communications media were killed by violent means, according to data from the Honduran National Human Rights Commission (Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras- CONADEH)¹. Moreover, almost 45% of these people were killed since 2014, which means that there has been a rise in the dangers of exercising this profession. Added to the increase in attacks and criminalisation are high impunity rates. Indeed, since January 2017, CONADEH has received around one hundred complaints of actions against freedom of expression, more than 90% of which remain unpunished.

To improve this situation, in 2015 the Honduran Congress approved the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Operators, which led to the implementation of the National Protection Mechanism. Nevertheless, those people who participated in the event noted that there is still much to be done. Included among the concrete measures proposed, were several points containing a message for the international community about the lack of financial support for emergencies and the relocation of professionals who are forced to leave their homes due to risk. The diplomatic corps also received a request to facilitate cases of political asylum.

¹ <http://www.rfi.fr/es/americas/20190901-honduras-otro-asesinato-de-un-periodista-el-79-desde-2001>



“Let’s act now, because otherwise tomorrow there will be many more gravestones containing the names of journalists in our cemeteries, journalists will continue to leave the country in exile, and those of us who stay to work on this situation will be waiting to die”.

(Dina Meza)

2018, SIXT YEAR OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN HONDURAS

We have accompanied human rights defenders on at least 335 occasions during activities related to the defence of the rights of women, sexual diversity, land and territory, and freedom of expression as well as activities related to criminalisation and impunity.

“We feel safer since we started being accompanied by PBI”. “Whenever I travel to certain places in the country I always ask for PBI accompaniment”. “The presence of PBI during hearings helps a lot. Our people feel supported and can identify as human rights defenders”.

This is what members of different organisations have said about PBI’s holistic accompaniment in Honduras, which has been offered to more than 10 at-risk organisations and individuals since 2013, when the first PBI field team was established in Honduras.

2018 marks the sixth year of the Peace Brigades International (PBI) project in Honduras, and we have accompanied human rights defenders (HRDs) on at least 335 occasions during activities related to the defence of the rights of women, sexual diversity, land and territory, and freedom of expression, as well as activities related to criminalisation and impunity. Through our accompaniments, observations and visits to the offices of HRDs, we have made visible defenders’ work and dissuaded possible attacks.

As part of our political accompaniment and advocacy work, throughout 2018 we have held a total of 58 meetings with national authorities and 53 with international authorities and the diplomatic corps, in which we have promoted the protection of defenders’ work and expressed our concerns about human rights violations. With the aim of contributing to capacity-building for national organisations, we have held 18 workshops and activities, including developing the Community for Psychological Learning (Comunidad de Aprendizaje Psicosocial - CAP) together with other organisations.

Hoduras abroad

As well as working within Honduras, we have raised awareness at the international level. With PBI’s support, 7 defenders have travelled to Europe and the United States to talk about the situation in their country and their organisation.

This work has been possible thanks to the commitment of our 14 volunteers from 8 different countries, who were part of the field team in 2018. It is also important to highlight the support of our donors who have funded our work both in Tegucigalpa and in 12 of the 18 departments where we have maintained a presence during these past 12 months.

However, without a doubt, the protagonists of our story continue to be those people who day by day work to defend human rights and land rights. It is these people who inspire us to continue opening up space for peace.

PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL
HONDURAS PROJECT 2018

WHERE WE WORK

OUR WORK

GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY:
93 activities

- Observation during a march on the International day against Homophobia.
- Accompaniment to Arcokris, members of the Sexual Diversity Committee, during a forum and march in Tegucigalpa to raise awareness on the situation of the LGBT community.
- Public campaign #StandWithHer (#QuedateConElla) to reflect on the work of women human rights defenders in Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya and Nepal.

LAND AND TERRITORY:
234 activities

- Observations of hearings on criminalised people as part of the struggle of the Pajules community against the construction of a hydroelectric dam.
- Accompaniment of CEHPRODEC during their tour to present the report of the Observatory on Natural Goods and Human Rights.

CRIMINALISATION AND IMPUNITY:
62 activities

- Accompaniments and observations related to the Berta Cáceres case.
- Information sent to the diplomatic corps and other organisations about the hearings on the killing of the indigenous leader and the results. Participation in the event to mark the second anniversary of her murder.
- Observations at hearings in cases of criminalised journalists, indigenous people and environmentalists.

COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION:
45 activities

- Security workshops with accompanied organisations: tools to identify different actors, context trends, digital security...
- Preparation of the Psychosocial Learning Community (CAP) with other organisations.

HOW WE WORK

- Physical presence: 335 Accompaniments, Observations y Office Visits
- Meetings with the Honduran authorities: 58
- Meetings with international authorities: 53
- Capacity-building: 18

WHERE OUR FUNDS COME FROM

Germany	30.75%
Spain	25.26%
Holland	24.13%
Switzerland	7.21%
France	4.41%
European Union	3.57%
USA	2.48%
UK	1.26%
Italy	0.83%
Others	0.10%

Public 81.82% Private 18.18%

HOW WE USE OUR FUNDS

Total budget: 332,238.26 euros

FIELD VOLUNTEERS

14 volunteers
1 man 13 women

Switzerland: 2	Holland: 1
France: 2	Italy: 1
Spain: 4	USA: 2
Argentina: 1	Germany: 1

INTERNATIONAL SPEAKING TOURS

7 human rights defenders have had the opportunity to travel to Europe or the United States to share information about the situation in the country and their organisation with the support of PBI.

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ASODEBICOQ, TWO YEARS DEFENDING NATURAL RESOURCES IN QUIMISTÁN

“When we visit the communities, people feel more protected. They always say ‘ASODEBICOQ is not only present here in the communities, but also in Tegucigalpa, and in other countries’”.
(Kevin Ramírez)

Kevin Ramírez’s community is located between the clear waters of rock pools where families bathe and the jungle-covered mountains that mark the border between Honduras and Guatemala. It was in this remote corner of the country that Kevin founded the Association for the Defence of Common Property in Quimistán (Asociación para la defensa de los bienes comunes de Quimistán- ASODEBICOQ), in the Honduran department of Santa Bárbara, to train the members of local communities in the area in human rights and the defence of land, territory and the environment. With this work, Kevin hopes that people can make informed decisions about the exploitation of natural resources and reclaim their individual and collective rights in public consultations and other forums, giving a voice to the population in the municipality of Quimistán.

Although the Association has only existed for two years, Kevin Ramírez has been dedicated to the defence of the environment since 2012, when he took part in a training workshop very similar to the ones he now delivers to communities from the municipality of Quimistán. The last two years have been complex, with much progress at the community organisational level, but also much opposition to the organisation’s work. Quimistán is home to many streams and rivers with huge hydro-electric potential, which has led to the installation of several extractive projects in its mountains and valleys. Although representatives from the hydro-electric companies arrive with promises that they will provide employment and electricity, build schools and medical centres and pave the roads, the members of ASODEBICOQ report serious effects and damage brought by these projects, as in the case of Santa Lucía.

Santa Lucía is the name of the community where the Cuyagual hydro-electric project was built, named after the river where it is located. Today, the members of ASODEBICOQ explain, this river is polluted with the explosives that were used to build the project. They also explain that there are no longer any animals or plants in the river and that in some places the river bed is totally dry. According to the local population, what is left of the river has been privatised and the community has to ask for permission to gather stones and sand. Kevin reports that the project was not adequately consulted with the community before it was built.

Using this example, ASODEBICOQ has raised awareness and organised dozens of villages in the northern part of Quimistán. However, both the organisation and the natural resources it protects are at serious risk, which is why PBI Honduras has been accompanying them since 2016. Since then, Kevin has reported numerous security incidents (including defamation, threats and criminalisation) against himself and other members of ASODEBICOQ. He says that accompaniment is a demonstration of international solidarity, which protects him and the community members of the association: *“When we visit the communities, people feel more protected. They always say ‘ASODEBICOQ is not only present here in the communities, but also in Tegucigalpa, and in other countries’. When PBI comes here it is because other people are interested in our struggle and in our process”*.

Alongside the threats, attacks and defamation against the work of ASODEBICOQ, Kevin also describes attitudes aiming to discredit the defence of land and human rights as a significant obstacle to his work. Indeed, ASODEBICOQ believes that accompaniment from PBI Honduras increases their work’s visibility and impact: *“When we used to go to the authorities to reclaim our rights, they ignored us; they laughed and made fun of us. But when we have PBI’s accompaniment they have to be more careful, they know that [ASODEBICOQ] is not alone. It is clear that it is not just us, the communities, but also the eyes of the world observing them. Also, the work of ASODEBICOQ is talked about as a good thing, not a bad thing. This has a big impact which really helps us”*.



Quimistán is home to many streams and rivers with huge hydro-electric potential, which has led to the installation of several extractive projects in its mountains and valleys.

PBI TURNS 38 YEARS

Today Peace Brigades International is a global organization with an international office in Brussels, seven field projects working directly with vulnerable human rights defenders and 13 country groups around the world.

38 years ago, on September 4, 1981, the international human rights organization Peace Brigades International was founded. During the three-week meeting on Grindstone Island, Canada, the participants Raymond Magee, Lee Stern, Henry Wiseman, Murray Thomson, Narayan Desai, Gene Keyes, Charles Walker, Dan Clark, Mark Shepard and Jaime Diaz discussed among other things the experiences with non-violent actions, the role of international peace brigades in armed conflicts as well as non-partisanship and thus created the foundation for the organization. The fact that no women took part in this meeting was deeply regretted by all participants.

The protocol, published later, states: *“We are forming an organization with the capacity to mobilize and provide trained volunteers in areas of high tension, to avert violent outbreaks. Peace brigades, fashioned to respond to specific needs and appeals, will undertake nonpartisan missions, which may include peacemaking initiatives, peacekeeping under a discipline of nonviolence, and humanitarian service. We are building on a rich and extensive heritage of nonviolent action. We are convinced that this commitment of mind, heart, and dedicated will can make a significant difference in human affairs”.*

Today Peace Brigades International is a global organization with an international office in Brussels, seven field projects working directly with vulnerable human rights defenders and 13 country groups around the world.



“We are convinced that this commitment of mind, heart, and dedicated will can make a significant difference in human affairs”.

CELEBRATING THE POWER OF NON-VIOLENCE

OCTOBER 2019

October 2 marks the International Day of Non-Violence and the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. The UN General Assembly began commemorating this day in 2007 to raise awareness and educate the public on the principle of non-violence. The goal of the resolution is to ensure a *“culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence.”*

Mahatma Gandhi is an icon for leading India to independence from the British Rule by protesting through non-violent means. Gandhi inspired a culture of civil rights practices such as peaceful marches and hunger strikes in contemporary history. Martin Luther King Jr. is a notable figure who took inspiration from Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.

In PBI the philosophy of non-violence provides the foundation for our work. We are convinced that enduring peace and lasting conflict resolution can only be achieved through peaceful means. In this respect we reject violence of any kind and from any source. We encourage dialogue and transparency to create conditions of trust required to build peace. PBI's endeavor is to overcome injustice and violence in order to build peaceful societies where human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled, by ensuring that those who defend human rights are protected.

In practice, PBI rejects any armed accompaniment and only supports organisations and individuals who live by the same principle. In addition, PBI works through consensus, applying a horizontal structure across the whole organization. We understand this as non-violence in practice, as we encourage participation, dialogue and transparency to prevent conflicts and encourage collaboration. This allows us to be coherent with our internal decision-making processes and our principles and convictions. Everyone who passes through PBI receives training in order to fully participate in the organization's structure, so they understand the importance of non-violence in decisions in their daily lives, how to treat each other and live in community.

PBI has provided support to human rights defenders in protecting their spaces of work through non-violent means. As Gandhi once said, *“In the midst of death, life persists. In the midst of untruth, truth persists. In the midst of darkness, light persists”*. Non-violence offers optimism, solidarity and fraternidad, even in times of violence.

WOMEN DEFENDERS OF LAND, TERRITORY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

“I was stigmatised but my husband wasn’t. He came out of this clean, he goes to court to sign, but he wasn’t stigmatised. The women from my community, including my family, make fun of my struggle”.

Despite being one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources, Honduras has high levels of inequality in land ownership and there has been a considerable increase in extractive projects in the country. The exploitation of natural resources and the concentration of land in the hands of few have forced communities to defend their territories. In 2016, Honduras was considered to be the deadliest country in the world for defenders of land, territory and the environment¹. Between 2015 and 2018 at least 31 defenders of land, territory and the environment were killed. Moreover, the attacks, forced evictions, harassment and criminalisation against this group of defenders.

In this context the particularly vulnerable situation of women defenders of land, territory and the environment is worrisome. Existing inequalities between men and women due to the patriarchal system enable discrimination, oppression and violence against these women. In the last two years at least six women defenders were killed. Moreover, between 2016 and 2017, 1,232 attacks against women defenders, their families and organisations were reported, with at least a third directed against women defenders of land and territory. In more than half of these cases, the perpetrators were state actors.

Women defenders face specific kinds of violence, many of which are related to their gender. Attacks against women are based on sexist attitudes which are deeply-rooted in the Honduran society. The attacks often refer to women’s sexuality or the traditional gender roles assigned to women: *“they discredit us, because they say that we are prostitutes, that we are looking for a husband, that we are irresponsible, that we leave our kids alone, we are stigmatised”*, explained a woman defender. The defence of human rights also implies an extra burden on top of the multiple responsibilities already assigned to women within , including almost all of the responsibility for the household.

In light of this situation, and in preparation of Honduras’ Universal Periodic Review (UPR) which will take place in May 2020, PBI Honduras has written a report which aims to highlight the specific risks and violence faced by women defenders of land, territory and the environment² and demonstrate the need for a differentiated response by the Honduran State to protect them.

¹ Global Witness, Honduras: the deadliest place to defend the planet, January 2017

² https://pbi-honduras.org/sites/pbi-honduras.org/files/file_attachments/PBI%20-%20Report%20UPR%20Honduras%202020_0.pdf

Impunity, militarisation and the excessive use of force

During the 2015 UPR, Honduras accepted important recommendations related to impunity, militarisation and the excessive use of force. Furthermore, since then we have seen an increase in the misuse of criminal prosecution against defenders. These structural problems have a severe and differential impact on women defenders of land, territory and the environment. For example, one woman defender told us about the different patterns and effects of criminalisation: *“I was stigmatised but my husband wasn’t. He came out of this clean, he goes to court to sign, but he wasn’t stigmatised. The women from my community, including my family, make fun of my struggle”*.



Moreover, the militarisation of public security has also created enabling conditions for aggression and sexual harassment against women: *“a lot of women were beaten, one woman answered back and they swore at her and touched her, they grabbed her and that’s harassment”*. According to women defenders, it is almost impossible to access justice for these kinds of violations, because of the structural impunity in Honduras.

During the 2015 UPR recommendations focused on improving this situation, related to the protection of human rights defenders and the active participation of civil society in the creation of public policies were made. However, these recommendations are not being implemented in a way which responds to the differential situation of women defenders. For example, protection mechanisms need to move beyond physical protection to include a preventative and differential focus. Equally, current measures often involve the police and do not respond to the local reality of women defenders: *“here they give you a bodyguard, and the machismo in this country is so deeply rooted, and with the mentality of these policemen, they sometimes might insinuate other things”*.

Faced with all these issues, women defenders report a lack of opportunities to participate in creating solutions. Indeed, because they are women, they face additional structural obstacles which limit or prevent their participation: *“the role women play in society or within the family isn’t easy, because they always try to belittle the role of women, it is the men who speak and who decide, and women have to listen”*. All this demonstrates the need for specific measures to promote the participation of women defenders and ensure that state policies include a differential and comprehensive focus to tackle the structural problems the country is facing.

“WE SEE OURSELVES AS CULTIVATORS OF HOPE”

“As small-scale farmers we need our values and role in society to be respected, to achieve food sovereignty”.

(Vía Campesina)

At the end of 2018, small-scale farmers became protagonists at the United Nations. On 17 December last year, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas¹. This represents the culmination of a historic process lasting almost two decades, which according to Franklin Almendares, coordinator of the Board of Directors of the National Union of Rural Workers (Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo- CNTC) “contributes to raising awareness in different sectors of society and launching campaigns such as *Cultivating without Risk*²” which was recently launched by several organisations, including the CNTC.

The United Nations Declaration groups together rights that the international small-scale farming movement Vía Campesina has been demanding for more than 17 years, with the support of numerous social movement members and allied organisations. The Declaration also recognises the role of small-scale farmers in guaranteeing food and legitimises the work of the small-scale farming movement to defend collective property, in the face of attacks and criminalisation.

“This declaration is an important tool which must guarantee and support the rights of small-scale farmers. We urge all States to implement the declaration scrupulously and transparently, guaranteeing small-scale farmers and rural communities access and control over land, traditional seeds, water and other natural resources. As small-scale farmers we need our values and role in society to be respected, to achieve food sovereignty”, explains the Vía Campesina General Coordination Office.

Vía Campesina also point out that the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants is a political tool to empower the global struggle for dignified conditions in rural work. They are also demanding that it should be a springboard for an urgent agrarian reform at the global level as a necessary policy to be applied by States in rural areas³. This is especially important in a country like Honduras, where almost 45% of the population live in rural areas (according to data from the Honduran National Statistics Office) and where, according to data from Vía Campesina, more than 300,000 families do not have access to

¹ <https://viacampesina.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/Resoluci%C3%B3n-no.-AC.373L.30.pdf>

² This campaign seeks to promote compliance with the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants by the State to protect small-scale farmers in the country. This initiative also aims to inform and raise awareness among the general public about the vulnerable situation for people who defend the rights to land, territory and natural resources in Honduras.

³ <https://rnr.fm/documentos-posicionamientos-politicos/la-declaracion-de-derechos-campesinos-debe-ser-una-herramienta-politica-para-la-reforma-agraria-y-la-justicia-social/>

land. However, Almendares also recognises the limits of the declaration: *“it is not a binding instrument. In this State, as it functions currently, it does not work as a tool”*. It is nevertheless believed that the Declaration could have a significant impact at the global level.

The Honduras situation

In the case of Honduras, he explains that since the law on agricultural modernisation in the 1990s, which led to land privatisation, there are no institutional plans or support for small-scale farmers: *“this means that we only have our own tools to help us stay in our lands sowing seeds and growing crops”*.

That is why, according to Almendares, one of the challenges that lies ahead for the Honduran Government is the creation of a land fund and the approval of the Law on comprehensive agrarian reform with gender equality and rural development, a bill which aims to solve the agrarian problems in the country but which has been frozen for a long time. *“The government also needs to create a land register, by physically going to the regions to carry out a true mapping process, because they are currently carrying out aerial mapping which prevents them from gathering an exact image of the situation on the ground. They should also create an agricultural prosecutor responsible for investigating the whole situation”*.

The law also seeks to improve the security situation for land rights defenders like Franklin Almendares. When we ask where he gets his energy in the face of all the daily obstacles, attacks and defamation he has been suffering for years, at the hands of landowners and companies, as a consequence of his human rights defence work, he tells us that it is the land itself that gives him hope and strength to continue the struggle to protect the very same land: *“We see ourselves as cultivators of hope”*.

Almendares believes that this work is not only the Government’s responsibility, because it affects everyone. *“Society should get informed and learn about how to support small-scale farmers, by consuming our products”*. On this point, the CNTC spokesperson gives the example of beans from Yoro: *“It is very rare that the consumer goes directly to the producer, which is what needs to happen to support them. A new relationship must be established between consumers and producers”*.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT THE CENTRE

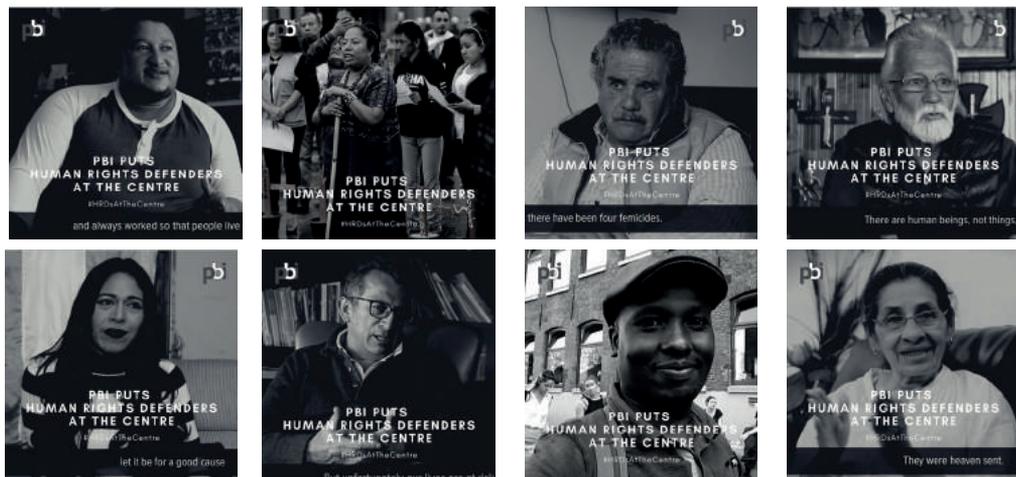
PBI believes that a world without human rights defenders is a world without human rights.

This December, and continuously, PBI puts human rights defenders at the centre, in the position they deserve given the fundamental role they play in the protection of human rights and the construction of fair and peaceful societies. Human rights defenders continue to provide voices for the voiceless, pushing for social justice. They often risk their lives to stand up for what they believe in, holding states to account and pushing for human rights to be respected, protected and fulfilled.

PBI believes that a world without human rights defenders is a world without human rights. We will continue to ensure that, despite the huge challenges that defenders face in the current political and economic contexts the world finds itself in, they receive the recognition and support they deserve so they are able to continue their fundamental work in secure conditions.

PBI recognises human rights defenders and the value of the work they do. PBI provides accompaniment support and is present in situations where human rights defenders are threatened and attacked. International solidarity can often provide these human rights defenders with the life-saving protection they need to continue their work.

From PBI we accompany several human rights defenders in different parts of the world. We want to share their stories and let others know that they are not alone. Putting #HRDsAtTheCentre we hope to continue to support their important work.





*I have been a defender since I was 15 years old. I started in my community, when I saw my ather had been taken prisoner because of a piece of land that we were fighting for.”
- Lilian Borjas from Honduras, dedicates her life to fighting for her land*

“We shouldn’t be afraid, we need to continue to seek justice that so many of us need in Guatemala for the wellbeing of the children that come after us” - Bernardo Caal Xol, human rights defender from Guatemala

“There are human beings, not things, inhabiting these lands.” -Javier Avila, human rights defender from Mexico works to ensure indigenous people are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve in their struggles to defend their land.

“I have fought hard for values I believe in and this has helped me bring important discussions back home.” - Rahma Wako is a community organizer and passionate advocate for women’s rights and children’s rights in Kenya.

“We felt very important, when we began to arrive at meetings with authorities alongside PBI, with their green vests, the authorities started to look at us differently.” - Yaneth Bautista from Colombia, on PBI volunteers who feel immense pride being able to accompany these brave people.

“WE JUST WANT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN RECOGNISED TO BE RESPECTED”

“LGBTI people in Honduras are particularly vulnerable because of certain highly intolerant religious trends and ideas that equate morality and gender expression with heteronormativity and binary identity”.

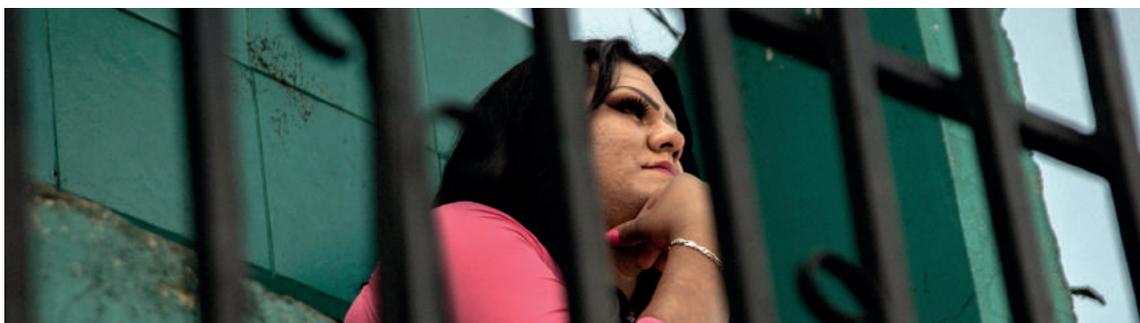
(OHCHR)

“We are not demanding new or special rights for people who identify as LGBT. We are just asking for the rights of all people to be respected”. Those were the words of Esdra Sosa, director of the Asociación LGBT Arcoiris on 6 December during the launch of the documentary ‘We are. Voices of Diversity (Somos. Voces de la diversidad)’, an activity organised with the support of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. In the same way, Sosa insisted that “these rights are already recognised internationally, but Honduran governments have not respected them”.

This concern is shared by United Nations Special Rapporteur Michael Forst, who stated in his visit to Honduras in 2018 that he was very worried about “the high number of violent killings and attacks against LGBT people, the prevailing lack of accountability and almost total impunity”. In the same way, María Soledad Pazo, current Representative of the Office in Honduras of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), explains in the video that “LGBTI people in Honduras are particularly vulnerable because of certain highly intolerant religious trends and ideas that equate morality and gender expression with heteronormativity and binary identity”.

The figures back up these statements. From 2008 until the beginning of 2018, at least 295 LGBTIQ+ people were killed in Honduras; and at least 11 of them were recognised as human rights defenders. Nevertheless, the exact number is impossible to determine as at times, families and public institutions do not recognise or report that these killings are related to sexual orientation or gender identity, reporting them as common crimes. Moreover, LGBTIQ+ organisations frequently report that the perpetrators are members of the state security forces. This situation does not seem to have improved during 2019. So far this year, the Complaints Service in the Asociación Arcoiris has registered at least 21 murders of its sexually diverse membership, including 13 trans women.

Trans women represent a high percentage of victims of these attacks, although they are a minority within the LGBTIQ + community. “We are more vulnerable and we are more exposed to attacks, because we are more visible and, on many occasions, as a group



we are often forced to engage in street sex work”, said JL Córdova, coordinator of the Grupo Muñecas in the Asociación Arcoiris. “We are being killed, and we are victims of hate crimes and terrible cruelty”, added Córdova, who also mentioned the lack of progress in investigating these murders. In Honduras, impunity rates are higher than 90%, and in the case of attacks against the LGBTIQ + community, this percentage exceeds 95%.

In spite of everything, Esdra Sosa said: *“LGBTIQ + defenders do not get bogged down in thinking about who is going to be next; instead we continue with the struggle”*. And José Figueroa, head of communication in the Asociación Arcoiris recalled that they have been working for months on an Equality Law that will not only benefit people of different sexual orientations and gender identities but also other vulnerable groups in the country such as the elderly, people with disabilities, women, children, and indigenous people. Just last October, the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, Somos CDC and the Asociación Arcoiris signed a cooperation agreement to continue moving forwards in this direction.

The international community

To achieve this, Grecia O’Hara, head of communication at Somos CDC, recognises the importance of support from the international community. *“Knowing that we have international support is a relief, because we know that we are not alone. We know that pressure from international organisations can have a huge impact. If we go alone to seek support, they ignore us. If we go with an international organisation, the doors open for us”*. The international community was present at the event on 6 December. The Canadian Embassy, the delegation of the European Union and the Spanish Cooperation Agency, among others, showed their sensitivity and commitment to the situation of the LGBTIQ + community in the country.

Although LGBTIQ+ defenders are aware of all the obstacles, they also believe that they will achieve their goals. JL Córdova summed it up this way: *“We are a strong movement. And even if they kill us, or silence us with threats, we can still achieve what we want”*. María Soledad Pazo from the OHCHR spoke of these defenders as an example: *“In my experience as a representative, I have had the honour of meeting absolutely committed, dedicated, courageous, constant, studious, strategic people... who have given me a lesson in what it means to defend human rights”*.

