



Notes on the Current Situation

•
Interview with Celsa Valdovinos (OMESP)

•
Tita Radilla (AFADEM) in Europe

•
PBI-Mexico's Work



National:

Upon observing its 15th anniversary in June 2005, the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) continues to receive complaints of torture, arbitrary arrests, cruel or degrading treatment, unlawful rendering of services, the unlawful exercise of authority, denial of the right to make claims, illegal search of home and premises, threats, solitary confinement, inconsistent integration of past investigations, breach in the procurement of justice and the continuation of the forced disappearance of persons. ⁽¹⁾

Amnesty International's secretary general, Irene Khan, visited Mexico in September 2005 and criticized the country's political parties for continuing to keep respect for human rights out of their political agenda – "or only present in words without content." She also challenged the directors of the country's main political organizations to have the subject become the center of Mexican life and a fundamental pillar in their electoral platforms. She suggested that the Mexican government has played a very active role in the promotion of initiatives related to the defense of international human rights, but "it has not shown this same intensity in following its responsibilities on a domestic level." During her visit, she urged the Mexican government to avoid having the Army play a prevailing role in safety enforcement or fighting crime, "because it is not trained for police or judicial-related work." ⁽²⁾

Guerrero:

The Mexico Seguro (Safe Mexico) operative began at the beginning of September, after the government of Guerrero had requested it for months. The program integrates federal police forces, such as the Federal Preventive Police, and entities of the Army in cooperation with the State's various police entities. The Mexico Seguro program is a response to the growing wave of violence in the State of Guerrero. ⁽³⁾

In September 2005, the State Congress approved the Law to Prevent and Sanction the Forced Disappearance of Persons in the State of Guerrero. Local and national non-governmental organizations, as well as the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Guerrero (CODDHUM) had been campaigning since 2003 to have the State of Guerrero adopt specific legislation on forced disappearances that would be in accordance with international standards. Amnesty International considers this new law to be a step forward in the prevention and punishment of this crime in Guerrero, and to have established an important precedent throughout Mexico. ⁽⁴⁾

The La Parota hydroelectric plant continues to be an important topic in the State. The Assembly for Communal Property of Cacahuatpec, scheduled for August 14, 2005 to discuss the consent for the expropriation of the properties, ended in a confrontation with 500 municipal and state police who beat the rural opponents of the La Parota dam with clubs and chairs, and sprayed them with tear gas.

On September 18, the communal member Tomas Cruz Zamora, an opponent of the La Parota hydroelectric project, was killed from a gunshot wound to the head by Cirilo Cruz Elacio, a villager in favor of the project. He was shot as he was returning from the assembly meeting in Agua Caliente where the governor Zeferino Torreblana had been invited to speak. The opponents of the dam qualified Zeferino Torreblana's absence as a "lack of political sensibility, capability and civil value" to listen and added that no date is set for any future dialogues, as there is nothing left to discuss. ⁽⁶⁾

Both state and federal civic organizations are eyeing the growing violence and polarization around this project with concern. ⁽⁷⁾

(1) La Jornada, June 6, 2005

(2) La Jornada, August 10, 2005

(3) La Jornada, September 10, 2005

(4) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ESLAMR410422005>

(5) La Jornada, September 17, 2005

(6) El Sur de Acapulco, August 15, 2005

(7) La Jornada, October 11, 2005

Entrevista a Celsa Valdovinos (OMESP)*

*This interview took place before the release of Felipe Arreaga.

Since August 2005, PBI has accompanied Celsa Valdovinos Rios, president of the Organization of Women Ecologists of the Sierra de Petatlan (OMESP). The organization, with more than 60 active members, works to improve the community's nutrition and hygiene, conserve the forests, reforest cedar and create Savings Banks. Celsa is the wife of the formerly-imprisoned rural ecologist Felipe Arreaga Sanchez. Sanchez had been accused of the murder of the son of Bernardino Bautista Valle, considered by ecologists to be an exploiter of the region's forest. Arreaga was imprisoned on November 3, 2004. Amnesty International (AI) considered the accusation to be a fabrication of crimes in retaliation for Arreaga's defense of the environment, and declared him a prisoner of conscience in March 2005.¹ After ten months in prison, a judge declared his innocence and he was released on September 15, 2005. Since that time, Felipe has been receiving PBI accompaniment, as well. Immediately after his release, AI asked the Mexican government to "guarantee the safety and protection of Arreaga, his wife and his family, as well as other human rights and environmental defenders in the state of Guerrero."² In August the Sierra Club, the oldest and largest environmental organization in the Americas, awarded Felipe Arreaga, Celsa Valdovinos and Albertano Peñaloza the Chico Mendes Prize "for their heroic protection of the global environment, for their extraordinary courage and leadership in the defense of the forests of Guerrero."³

How was OMESSP founded?

The women's organization was started in 2001. With Felipe, we conducted training on the environment. Then I saw that women also needed to receive this training because they are the ones who spend the most time with the children and they could teach them about the birds, the trees, the wildlife from when the children are young....So they would stop killing little animals. The trainings in Rural Development were focused on techniques and we haven't even gone to school. I decided to organize a course on planting vegetables and I went from house to house inviting the women. But they didn't want to come, only 12 women came. The others didn't trust it because they thought the organizer would keep the money. Finally we began planting vegetables which yielded a good crop. When the other women saw this, they began to come little by little to the meetings. In six months, we totaled 60 women.

What project is OMESSP currently developing?

We carry out clean-up campaigns (at the beginning we would clean the stream, and now trash is no longer thrown there). We want to make a water retention {area} in a branch of the river to raise shrimp. We also want to install an iguana pen to prevent their extinction. We would only pen them in when the iguanas have eggs, until they lay them (because people eat them). Then we would let them go.

What is situation of the forest in Sierra de Petatlan?

Ever since I can remember, the woods have always been exploited. We were even being left without any water. They came with an order to cut down so many trees, but they marked more than double. In 1998 the peasants organized themselves and had what we called the "Wood Strike" and didn't allow one more truckload to be taken out. Then the situation became difficult. Bernardino was from the Ejido Vigilance Council and he benefited every year from the logging of the wood. When the wood could not be exploited, because of the strike, Bernardino became very angry. After the wood strike, (in March), Bernardino's son was killed (in May) and that's when he accused the campesinos of this assassination. He made a claim against 40 peasants who were part of the Wood Strike. Including two of his brothers. It's clear that this was a revenge, his son was killed for personal reasons. That's why Felipe was arrested.



Celsa Valdovinos and her daughter collect the Chico Mendes Prize awarded to Felipe Arreaga, Albertano Peñaloza and Celsa Valdovinos by the Sierra Club.

What is the situation for the women in this region? Why is it important to work with them? Women aren't really taken into account here. I think we have the right to do things and we also are capable of doing things, even though we are women. We have held Human Rights workshops which have really helped us to feel better given the humiliation {we experience} that by being women we aren't good for anything. I think we are overcoming this.

With Felipe in jail, what is the possibility of continuing with his work? When they arrested him, I thought then I couldn't do anything. My daughters and I would spend the entire time crying. Then Felipe encouraged me to continue working. I began to hold the meetings thinking he would soon be released, but then the case starting getting dragged out. What happened to Albertino (campesino, member of the OMESSP, who was ambushed and two of his sons were killed) has made us fearful, since he was accused of the same thing as my husband. To see that these people have no conscience makes us afraid they'll do something to us. The work I do comes from my heart and I want for all people to see the need for us to take care of our environment. If not, our water will dry up and water is life. It's a serious problem all over the planet, but we still have time to salvage it.

¹ AI Index: AMR 41/008/2005

² La Jornada, September 17, 2005

³ El Sur de Acapulco, August 10, 2005

Tita Radilla in Europe

Since August 2003, PBI has provided accompaniment in Atoyac de Alvarez, Guerrero to Tita Radilla Martinez, vice-president of the Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Abuses in Mexico (AFADEM). The organization is made up of family members of disappeared persons from the “Dirty War” (from the ‘70s and ‘80s), who have brought claims of forced disappearances and torture before several Mexican authorities. There are 200 denunciations brought before the Special District Attorney’s Office for Past Political and Social Movements (FEMOSPP) which stand out, and of which most are attributed to the Mexican Army.

The case of Tita Radilla’s father, Rosendo Radilla Pacheco, is considered one of the most representative of the Dirty War. He was a social activist and ex-mayor of Atoyac de Alvarez in the 1970s, who disappeared in 1974. On August 12, 2005, an order to arrest the general Francisco Quiros Herмосillo for the crime of illegal arrest injurious to Rosendo Radilla was declared. If the case is decided in civil court, it will be the first time in the country’s history that a high-ranking military official will be brought before judicial proceedings for an offense considered a crime against humanity.

In April 2005, Tita Radilla visited Sweden, the United Kingdom and France, to present AFADEM’s work and gain international support. The PBI national groups from these three countries took advantage of her visit to organize talks, meetings and other activities.

Her trip to England provided the opportunity to increase the level of consciousness in the country on the human rights situation in Mexico, as well as increase international support for the work carried out by PBI and the organizations it accompanies.

Both increasing the level of consciousness about the current human rights situation in Mexico and attracting international community support are essential for PBI’s work in Mexico to be effective, and they are part of the organization’s principal objectives. The success of international accompaniment rests to a large degree on this international support and interest.

Tita had underlined the importance of PBI’s international presence in an interview in 2003, which she said helped her overcome her fear and permitted her to continue with her work to press the Mexican government for justice in accordance with international norms and treaties in the case of forced disappearances.

Between April 18 and 22, Tita Radilla presented the work of AFADEM before distinct audiences throughout the country, such as the Universities of Bradford and Sheffield and the London School of Economics. More than 80 people attended her talk in Sheffield, including Mexican students. She also participated in two events at the offices of the British Section of Amnesty International, where some 200 people listened to her story with interest and concern.

During her stay, Tita met with AI’s Research team for Mexico, where a video of her testimony was recorded. She also attended a meeting at the home of labor parliament member Jeremy Corbin, along with PBI’s coordinator for the national group of Great Britain. In a particularly productive meeting with the International Human Rights Group (SIRHC), the organization offered its support to Tita in her efforts to bring legal cases before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (CIDH).

“There was a lot of interest from the people I met in all of the countries. They were interested in my speech. They asked many questions. They approached me and were very receptive. In a university in England some young people requested my address. There were also older people, very sensible people.”

—Tita Radilla



Accompaniments

The team accompanied the following organizations and individuals in their various activities:

-Emiliana and Francisco Cerezo Contreras, members of the Cerezo Committee, in the Federal District and on their trips to visit their imprisoned brothers.

-The Organization of Women Ecologists of the Sierra of Petatlan (OMESP), in the municipality of Petatlan, Guerrero and on their visits throughout Guerrero.

-The Organization of the Indigenous People Me'Phaa (OPIM) in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres and on their trips throughout the state of Guerrero.

-"Tlachinollan" Human Rights Center de la Montaña, the members of the office in Ayutla de los Libres, on their trips throughout the state of Guerrero.

-Tita Radilla Martinez, vice-president of AFADEM (Association of Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Abuses) in Atoyac de Alvarez and on her trips throughout the state of Guerrero.

-"Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon" Regional Human Rights Center, in Chilapa de Alvarez, Guerrero.

Interviews with the Diplomatic Community and the United Nations.

We had meetings with the political advisers and Human Rights Officers from the German, Australian, Spanish, U.S., Italian and Swiss Embassies, along with members of the European Commission Delegation in Mexico.

We met with the representative from the office of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (OACNUDH).

In Mexico City, we met with members of the Federal District Government and from the Office of the Attorney General of Justice of the Federal District.

In Guerrero, we met with members of the Government, the Government Secretariat, the

Public Safety and Citizen Protection Department, the Office of the State Attorney General of Justice, the State Congress and the State Commission for the Defense of Human Rights.

We also met with municipal authorities and commanding officers of the Ministerial Investigative Police in the municipalities of Acapulco, Atoyac de Alvarez, Ayutla de los Libres, Chilapa de Alvarez, Petatlan and Zihuatanejo.

Interviews with Mexican authorities:

At the federal level, we met with members of the Ministry of Interior (SEGOB), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), the Ministry of Public Safety and Citizen Protection (SSP), the Attorney General's Office of the Republic (PGR), Office of the Sub-Attorney General's Office for the Special Investigation of Organized Crime (SIEDO), the Attorney General's Special Office on Past Social and Political Movements (FEMOSPP), Senate of the Republic, Chamber of Deputies and the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH).

In Mexico City, we met with members of the Federal District Government and the Attorney General's Federal District Office of Justice (PGJDF).

In Guerrero, we met with members of the state Government, the Ministry of the Interior, the Department of Public Safety and Citizen Protection, the State Attorney General's Office of Justice, the State Congress and the State Commission for the Defense of Human Rights (CODDEHUM).

We also met with municipal authorities and commanding officers of the Ministerial Investigative Police (PIM) in the municipalities of Acapulco, Atoyac de Alvarez, Ayutla de los Libres, Chilapa de Alvarez, Petatlan and Zihuatanejo.

Interviews with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

In Mexico City: we met with members of the Fray Francisco de Vitoria Human Rights Center, "Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez" Human Rights Center, the Mexican League for Human Rights (LIMEDDH), the National Civil Organizations Network "Todos los Derechos para Todos", International Service for Peace (SIPAZ), the Decade Against Impunity Solidarity Network.

In Guerrero, we met with members of the Authentic Residents of the United Workers of the Leonardo Rodriguez Alcaine Settlement, Collective Against Torture and Impunity (CCTI), the Collective of Peasant Women (COMUCAM), Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Committee "Sembrador de la Esperanza", Guerrero Coordination of Indigenous Women, The Voice of the Voiceless, Emiliano Zapata Revolutionary Agrarian League of the South Emiliano Zapata (LARSEZ), Leftists Social Movement (MSI), the Southern Sierra Peasant Organization (OCSS), Organization of Peasant Environmentalist Organization of the Sierra de Petatlán and Coyuca de Catalán (OCESP), the Guerrero Human Rights Network, Environmental Organizations of Zihuatanejo Network, SOS Bahía.

Forums

In Mexico City, we attended the First Human Rights Defenders Forum, organized by the Decade Against Impunity Solidarity Network.

In Guerrero, we attended the following forums: in Coyuca de Catalan, "Aguas Blancas, 10 Years of Impunity"; in Tlapa de Comonfort, the 11th Anniversary of "Tlachinollan" the Human Rights Center de la Montaña; the "Forum in Commemoration of the Week of the Disappeared and Detained" (AFADEM) in Acapulco; in Ayutla de los Libres, the "Indigenous, Campesino and Popular Meeting."

Peace Brigades International

PBI is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that, upon request, maintains international accompaniment teams in conflict areas. The organization's objective is the protection of the political space for individuals and organizations who promote human rights and who, in turn, are under threat of persecution and repression as a consequence of their work. International accompaniment is in this way a conflict transformation tool, through which third parties can contribute in creating the conditions necessary to resolve a conflict peacefully. At no time does PBI attempt to replace Mexican initiatives promoting respect for human rights, but rather limits itself to supporting such initiatives with the presence of international companions. To achieve this goal, PBI teams work in-country accompanying those people or organizations under threat, making periodic visits to conflict zones, distributing information on the

conflict's development and maintaining a dialogue with civil and military authorities in an effort to raise international awareness.

PBI Mexico's Project Information Bulletin is a published three times a year and produced by the Team in Mexico. PBI maintains the highest level of objectivity possible thanks to the use of a wide variety of public sources (newspapers, magazines, public reports from civil organizations, 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 San Francisco or the PBI Team in Mexico.