



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Peace Brigades International opens a new team in the north due to the risks facing human rights defenders in Chihuahua and Coahuila**

Peace Brigades International opened its new team in the north of Mexico today. The team covers the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila. With its headquarters in Chihuahua City, the team of international observers will walk alongside those who defend human rights and will speak with local, national and international authorities with the objective to open safe spaces for the participation of local activists.

In the opening ceremony, Rubens Carvalho, the PBI Mexico Communications Coordinator, explained the decision to open a team as the result of an exploratory mission that was conducted in various states of the Republic. The PBI exploratory mission took place in 2012 in response to an increase in requests for international accompaniment from civil society.

PBI Mexico identified Chihuahua and Coahuila as high-risk states for the defense of human rights. This conclusion is supported by the [recent report](#) from the United Nations Mexico Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which places Chihuahua and Coahuila in the top five most dangerous states to defend human rights in Mexico<sup>1</sup>.

Defenders of these two states suffer attacks, threats, harassment, surveillance, beatings and criminalization because of their work. Due to the high level of risk, various members of the organizations are beneficiaries of precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. In Chihuahua, *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*, CEDEHM (since 2008) and *El Barzón* (2012) receive such measures, while in Coahuila, the *Saltillo Migrant House* (2010) and *Frontera Digna* (2012) are also beneficiaries.

According to research by PBI collected in [A Panorama of the defense of Human Rights Mexico](#)<sup>2</sup>, the issues of concern in the north are a reflection of the problems that exist throughout the country. Issues such as abuses committed by security forces, femicides, disappearances, exploitation of natural resources and violations against the migrant population.

In the event, Ben Leather, PBI Mexico Advocacy and Public Relations Coordinator, called on state and federal authorities to coordinate in order to ensure the protection and participation of human rights defenders in Chihuahua and Coahuila, and in particular:

- To counter any questioning of the work of human rights defenders in these states with statements recognizing their legitimacy and importance.
- To investigate crimes committed against activists, punishing the culprits in order to prevent reoffending.
- To guarantee the implementation of effective protection measures for any activist at risk, strengthening the implementation of the National Protection Mechanism.
- To consult civil society on the development of any public policy that may have implications in the area of human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://hchr.org.mx/files/doctos/Informe\\_defensoresDH\\_2013\\_web.pdf](http://hchr.org.mx/files/doctos/Informe_defensoresDH_2013_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://issuu.com/peacebrigadesinternational/docs/panoramadefensehumanrightsmexico/1>

Alberto Xicoténcatl (Director of the *Saltillo Migrant House*), Luz Estela Castro (Director of the *Center for the Human Rights of Women*, Cedejm, Chihuahua), Antonio Esparza (Director of the *Juan Gerardi Human Rights Center*, Torreón) and Padre Óscar Enriquez Pérez (Director of the *Paso del Norte Human Rights Center*, Ciudad Juárez) spoke as representatives of social organizations of the region. In addition to explaining the human rights violations that occur in the state, the activists demanded an end to the impunity and an effort from the authorities to protect human rights defenders in the north of the country.

Many local and national civil society organizations, as well as diplomatic and government representatives attended the event; including the Unit for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights of the Interior Ministry Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, Ambassadors of Canada and the Netherlands, the Consul General of the United States, the Political Advisor of the European Union (EU) Mexico Delegation, the Mexican Representative of the OHCHR and representatives of state and national ombudsmen.

Before the event PBI facilitated a roundtable with representatives from the embassies of Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the EU, as well as ten civil society organizations including the *Fray Juan de Larios Diocese Center for Human Rights*, the *Solidarity and Human Rights Defense Commission*, *El Barzón*, the *Roundtable Network of Women and Justice for Our Daughters*. The event took place at the headquarters of *Cedejm* and was witnessed by Javier Hernández Valencia, the OHCHR Mexico Representative.

PBI is an international non-governmental organization that was established in 1981 and has been registered with the United Nations (UN) since 1991. PBI has international accompaniment teams in conflict areas, always at the request of organizations from the countries themselves.

In no way does PBI intend to replace the promotion or defense initiatives that come out of Mexico, but rather to support such initiatives with the presence of international observers. PBI Mexico works in constant communication with the Mexican authorities, as well as the public security forces, non-governmental organizations, embassies and international organizations amongst others.

**More information:**

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*Also, see the briefing ['New PBI team in the north of Mexico: Tendencies and patterns in the defense of human rights in Chihuahua and Coahuila'](#) available on the PBI Mexico web page.*