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PBI OPEN LETTER: CANCELLATION OF TEMPORARY RESIDENCE PERMITS OF TWO VOLUNTEERS OF PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL A new attack against the right to defend rights in Guatemala

2nd July 2014

Peace Brigades International (PBI) wishes to bring to your attention and express its grave concerns about the **cancellation of the temporary residence permits of two volunteers working for PBI in Guatemala**. This measure was decided by the Sub-Directorate for Foreign Citizen issues, which is part of the Office of Migration Services (Dirección General de Migración, DGM), and the Interior Ministry (Ministerio de Gobernación) in two resolutions dated 1st July, without stating the reasons or events that led to this decision. The resulting situation affects both the individuals and their immigration status and the work of international accompaniment and observation for the defence of human rights that PBI has carried out in Guatemala for over 30 years.

On July 1st 2014, two PBI volunteers, of Chilean and Spanish nationality, presented themselves at the Office of Migration Services, which had summoned them through written notification on 25th June (received 26th June) to provide “information regarding their temporary residence permits”. In the meeting, in which PBI Guatemala’s legal representative and a lawyer were present, the volunteers were informed that their temporary residency had been withdrawn and that they had 10 days to leave the country. However, the resolutions lack any reasoning based on specific evidence to justify the decision.

PBI Guatemala has enjoyed legal status in Guatemala since 1995¹ and is duly registered and accredited by the public authorities, with legal representation and capacity to act within the framework of its mandate and mission. Each PBI volunteer initiates the process of application for temporary residence upon arrival in the country in compliance with immigration law. At all times, PBI and its volunteers in Guatemala act in accordance with the legal framework. National authorities are regularly informed about our work both in Guatemala and outside the country.

The two PBI volunteers to whom the resolutions refer observed the violent eviction of the Peaceful Resistance of La Puya on 23rd May. In June, PBI Guatemala issued an alert calling for attention to these events². During the eviction, representatives of the Office of Migration Services were present but subsequently left without approaching the PBI observers after police officers had reviewed their identification documents to check their migration status and found them in order.

During the following weeks various articles with defamatory comments against foreigners and international organisations were published in the Guatemalan media. We are concerned that the cancellation of the temporary residence permits of the two volunteers may be related to false information published by the media about the international observation work during the eviction.

¹ Issued March 10, 1995 by Ministerial Agreement 148-95, the Interior Ministry.

² PBI, “Violent eviction of the Peaceful Resistance at “La Puya”, Guatemala, 2.07.2014, [http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/los-proyectos/pbi-guatemala/noticias/spanish-news-holder/?no_cache=1&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4293&cHash=5441a3148f9100e669d75f729666dda3](http://www.pbi-guatemala.org/los-proyectos/pbi-guatemala/noticias/spanish-news-holder/?no_cache=1&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4293&cHash=5441a3148f9100e669d75f729666dda3)

In the current context of closure of space for human rights defenders, we are also concerned that the above-mentioned resolutions undermine the possibility for international accompaniment and observation, the aim of which is to protect space for non-violent conflict resolution and the promotion of human rights in Guatemala. The work carried out by PBI in the country is done at the request of social organisations and actors who have the right to defend their rights and to seek international accompaniment and observation when they face threats and attacks.

PBI requests that the International Community take measures to actively support the Guatemala Project and the volunteers on its international observation and accompaniment team in the country. As an international non-governmental organisation that is well-known for its work to improve the human rights situation in Guatemala, **we trust that our support network will do everything it can to ensure that the two volunteers recuperate their temporary residence, which has been cancelled for no reason.**

Thank you in advance for your actions and demonstrations of support and solidarity,



Laura Clarke
International Coordinator
Peace Brigades International (PBI)