



a joint programme
OMCT **fidh**
SOS-Torture Network
The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders



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Oral Statement delivered by Peace Brigades International, a non-governmental organisation with general consultative status, joined by World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (joint OMCT-FIDH programme)

Mr President, Mr Director of OHCHR in Guatemala,

Peace Brigades International, OMCT and FIDH, would like to thank **the Director of OHCHR in Guatemala** for its annual report. We fully share the concerns on the human rights situation highlighted in the report, and underline particularly those regarding the vulnerability of human rights defenders.

Our organisations have confirmed the trends documented by UDEFEGUA, of an increase in the number and intensity of threats and attacks against defenders, including physical and verbal attacks, and even 7 murders in 2014. This harassment especially targets those opposing the negative human rights impact of the exploitation of natural resources, and those fighting for the recognition of land rights. Moreover, between March and September 2014, PBI recorded 81 attacks and threats against the *Central Campesina Chortí Nuevo Día*, 5 times more than in the previous six months. Attacks do not only come from authorities but also from non-state actors in the context of companies such as in this case where CCCND members were smeared in bulletins of a local energy company.

Our organisations would also like to raise the growing problem of the obstruction of the work of HRDs through arbitrary detention and criminal prosecution based on trumped-up charges, as pointed out by the Report. The charges pressed against 4 members of the *Peaceful Resistance from La Puya*, in May 2014, which were only dropped in February 2015, are a good example of this trend. However, when complaints are lodged by HRDs in defence of their fundamental rights, they systematically remain in complete impunity.

As another component of the closure of the civic spaces of HRDs in Guatemala, our organisations have witnessed that dialogue mechanisms established by the government, have led to extremely long and meaningless processes. Human rights defenders have received legal claims against them following up to dialogue sessions. Furthermore, there is a tendency to pass restrictive laws that criminalise the activities of HRDs such as the '*Ley de Tumulos*'.

PBI and the Observatory acknowledge the work conducted by OHCHR in this context and would like to praise also its intervention following the decision to cancel the visas of two of PBI volunteers.

Our organisations welcome and fully support the recommendations of the OHCHR, in particular regarding the need to address the impunity of the attacks against HRDs and on the need for a public policy on the protection of HRDs to be elaborated in close collaboration with civil society.

Thank you