

Nuevo Día Ch'orti' Indigenous Association



Nuevo Día Ch'orti' Indigenous Association (Central Campesina Ch'orti' Nuevo Día, CCCND)

CCCND work in Chiquimula department, Guatemala providing support and legal representation to local communities campaigning on issues related to land, environmental, and cultural rights. Omar Jerónimo is the Coordinator of the CCCND. Omar and CCCND receive the protective accompaniment of Peace Brigades International due to the threats, harassment and criminalisation they receive.

Guatemala's indigenous population

Guatemala is home to 21 Maya indigenous groups and the Maya are estimated to make up 51% of the population. Many indigenous groups struggle to protect their collective rights in the face of ever increasing activity from the extractives industry and hydroelectric dam construction.

The Maya Ch'orti'

The Ch'orti' are a Mayan people who have lived for centuries in what is now Eastern Guatemala and Northern Honduras. The pressure on the lands and territory of the Ch'orti' has steadily increased, as a result of which they actively demand respect and guarantees

for their collective rights as indigenous people within a context characterized by economic interests, particularly those involving the exploitation of natural resources.

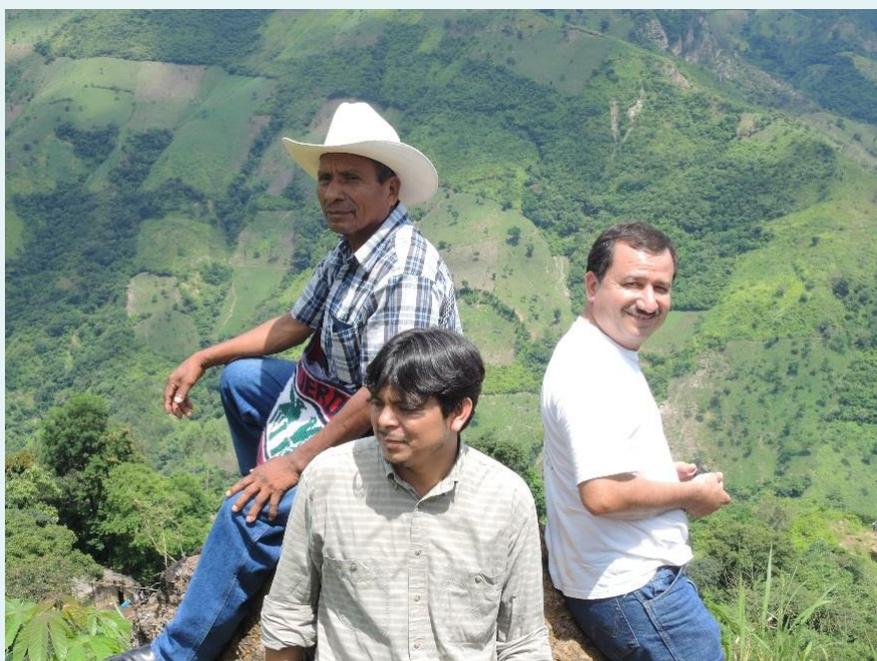
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CCCND has been involved in these **community processes** since 2003 in several municipalities in the Department of Chiquimula in Eastern Guatemala. Several **hydroelectric plants** are either planned or already under construction in the region. CCCND reports that inadequate information and a lack of

transparency about these projects, as well as the failure to consult the affected communities, has had detrimental effects on the population. Furthermore, community members are worried about potential environmental impacts.

Threats and Attacks

The recent security situation on the ground for CCCND members is dire. Between March and November 2014, PBI registered **109 security incidents**, including attacks, death threats, illegal surveillance and intimidatory acts. Members of the organisation continue to face serious risks, due to ongoing conflict surrounding the construction of



hydroelectric dams in the area, as well as the communities' struggles to get recognition as indigenous communities.

The dangers faced by the members of the CCCND are compounded by the fact that the murder of local human rights defender and union activists **Carlos Hernández** remains unpunished. He was shot on 8 March 2013 as he was returning by car from Honduras. Two people accused of his murder were released from jail in 2014. The impunity in this case is a denial of justice for the victim and increases the risk to other human rights defenders.



Omar Jeronimo, Edgar Hernandez (CCCND) and Carlos Hernández. Photo PBI 2010

Threats, Smears, Attacks and Criminalization: Some illustrative cases

Threats and pressure to sell land

According to witnesses, in July 2014 members of the CCCND in the community of Cajón del Río (Camotán) have received death threats for refusing to sell their land for the construction of a hydroelectric project.

Disparaging comments and smears of the organization and its work

In its bulletins, Jonbo Hidroeléctrica makes disparaging and defamatory comments about the CCCND, insinuating without evidence that the organization and its members have been involved in various crimes, leading to the stigmatisation of the CCCND, putting at risk their security.

Physical attacks

A member of the CCCND was attacked with a machete in the community of Suchiquer (Chiquimula) on 5 May 2014; he received serious injuries as a result. According to the CCCND, he was attacked for his and the organisation's work in defense of human rights in the region.

Criminalization

The organization continues to denounce a campaign of criminalization against it. Numerous CCCND members have had to respond in court to repeated accusations, mainly from the Chiquimula state prosecutor, after complaints were filed by private parties and local public authorities in relation to their human rights work in the region's communities. Part of the criminalisation includes the lack of due process for CCCND members and the State's failure to protect CCCND members from acts of intimidation and threats.



Peace Brigades International

PBI has provided protective accompaniment to CCCND since 2009. The regular presence of international observers helps to deter would-be attackers from carrying out their violent threats. This physical presence is backed up by an extensive international political and diplomatic support network, and meetings with civil authorities at all levels. As well as supporting these projects, PBI's UK Section engages in strategic targeted advocacy with the UK government, EU and UN bodies, to call for better mechanisms and policies for the protection of human rights defenders worldwide.

To make a donation and help PBI to continue our work protecting CCCND, please send a cheque to PBI UK, 1B Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ, or visit www.justgiving.com/peacebrigades

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