

PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL - GUATEMALA PROJECT

MIP – Monthly Information Package - Guatemala

Number 22, July 2005

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1. NOTES ON THE CURRENT SITUATION

Impunity:

290 women murderd so far in 2005

According to Sandra Moran of the Network against violence against Women, 290 women have been killed so far in 2005. The network stated that the situation of violence against women continues to deteriorate but that at least the international community has begun to speak out about this situation in Guatemala. It is hoped that this international pressure will lead to a strengthening of national institutions which should be working on this theme.

CALDH denounces lack of investigation into attacks against human rights defenders

The Centre for Legal Action in Human Rights (CALDH) denounced the fact that the acts of intimidation and threats against human rights defenders have continued without any positive action on the part of the authorities to carry out investigations and find those responsible for these acts. Miguel Angel Albizures, spokesperson of CALDH stated that according to information gathered from January to June there has been 102 attacks against human rights defenders and that every 33 hours there is a new attack.

Social Cleansing group emerges in Sololá

In early July the body of Salvador Ziná Ramírez was found on a small neighborhood path. The victim was reportedly murdered by a group of hooded men who had carried out a rally in the nearby village of San Lucas Tolimán, Sololá. A similar murder occurred in June. Governance Minister, Carlos Vielmann, stated that Special Police Forces had been sent to the area in response to the various assaults which had taken place on highways as well as to the fact that a group had stated they would begin to take action against the criminals. He added that the Special Forces would be supported by members of the Army. In the community of Pachichaj, a group placed a banner stating "We are a Social Cleansing Group, reinforced by the National Civil Police..."

Anders Kompass, Head of the OHCHR

Anders Kompass from Sweden assumed the role of head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Guatemala. Birgit Gerstenburg has taken on the role as Assistant Director. Kompass previously carried out a similar role in the OHCHR offices in Mexico and Colombia. One of the primary functions of the offices mandate will be to provide assistance to the Government in the definition and implementation of polices and programmes to protect and promote human rights. The mandate will last for three years. During a meeting with Vice President Eduardo Stein, Kompass stated that his objective was to strengthen the work of the

team of the United Nations in Guatemala and to follow an agenda focused on development and institutional strengthening.

Congressional Commission to take up CICIACS once again

The Commission for Foreign Affairs of the Congress has stated that it is prepared to take up the theme of the Commission for the Investigation of Illegal bodies and Clandestine Security Apparatus (CICIACS) on the grounds that it be presented differently to the original proposal. Antonio Arenales Fomo, President of the Commission and one of the main objectors to the original proposal has stated that they are waiting for a new initiative on the theme, one in which a special entity linked to Public Ministry would be created with the capacity to act autonomously which in turn would separate issues related to clandestine security apparatus from organized crime. "The new institution would need the assurance of international institutions in order to receive funding," he stated. The original proposal was rejected by the Congress on the grounds that it conflicted with various articles in the constitution, including the creation of an entity separate from the Public Ministry.

Land:

70 families evicted in zone 18 of Guatemala City

70 families were evicted from the land they had been occupying since November 2004 in zone 18 of Guatemala City. The land is the property of the Ministry of Sports and Culture. Around 100 armed Police Men carried out the eviction with a warrant from a judge however, the families left the land pacifically. The Ministry of Sports and Culture plans to construct a football field on the land.

Campesinos in Alta Verapaz call for an end to evictions

The Union of Campesinos Organizations of the Verapaces (UVOC) carried out a protest walk on the 23 July to call on the Guatemalan authorities to bring an end to evictions of communities from occupied land. Carlos Morales of UVOC stated that the protest walk started out from the Santa Inés Estate. And that the community which has been occupying the estate also participated in the walk. He went on to state that this same community has been evicted three times by the authorities but that the community has returned each time as they argue that the land belongs to them. Through a newsletter, the organization denounced the extreme poverty, hunger and unemployment in rural areas stating that these are the reasons for land occupation. The National Civil Police in Cobán indicated that they have 35 requests for evictions pending.

Globalization:

Preparation begins for a consultation on mining in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, San Marcos

Local authorities and representatives of various sections of residents of San Miguel Iztahuacán, San Marcos have agreed to carry out a community consultation on the mining projects authorised by the Government in the region. In a press release, the Maya organisation "Mam Ajpop" stated that during an assembly local authorities and other representatives decided to consult the population as to whether they are in favour or against the gold and silver mining activities in the region.

This decision to carry out a popular consultation on open caste mining in the region despite the fact that the mining project is already at an advanced stage, is due to the fact that insufficient information was presented to the local communities. These communities were not informed of the exploratory or exploitation licences granted by the Government to the company Entre Mares, a subsidiary of the Canadian company Glamis Gold. They learned of these licences only when the company initiated its project and began to cut down trees, demolish hills, drill wells and other environmentally destructive activities. Milton Saravia, director of the mining company Montana S.A. who is responsible for mining projects as well as a representative of the Health Ministry stated that, as established in the Mining Law, the company is not obliged to finance any local community development projects.

Sources: Prensa Libre, Siglo Veintiuno, El Periódico, Inforpress Centroamericana, La Semana en Guatemala, Informe Semanal Sobre Derechos Humanos.

2. ACTIONS OF PBI GUATEMALA – WITHIN GUATEMALA

Current Team: Vincent Castagnino (France), Melosa Aiyana Granda (USA), Sander Otten (The Netherlands), Fionuala Cregan (Ireland), Matthew Fawcett (Great Britain), Helen Woodcock (Great Britain), Silvio Köhler (Germany), Estefanía Sarmiento (Columbia).

2.1 MEETINGS WITH GUATEMALAN AUTHORITES AND MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Meetings with the authorities and members of the diplomatic corps in Guatemala are an essential component of PBI's work, strengthening the support for the project throughout the country. Throughout the month of June meetings were held with the following authorities:

Guatemalan Authorities:

José Francisco Lux López, Governor of Quiché Ricardo Goubaud, Director, Unit for the Development of Popular Housing, UDEVIPO Claudia Villagrán,Director of the Sub Secretariat for the Resolution of Land Conflicts, CONTIERRA Álvaro Noriega Urízar, Deputy Mayor of Uspantán and Carlos Enrique Velásquez, First Secretary Elvia Rosa Mo Caal, Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, Alta Verapaz Samuel López González, Head of the National Civil Police, Uspantán, Quiché Romeo Gómez Bal, Magistrate for Peace, Uspantán, Quiché

Diplomatic Corps and International Organisms:

Nelson Mamián Guzmán, Advisor on Citizen Participation, United Nations Development Programme and SEGEPLAN

Susana Villarán, Rapporteur for Guatemala of the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights (ICHR, Isabel Madariaga, attorney for Guatemala and Marisol Blanchard, Coordinator of the Unit for Human Rights Defenders of the ICHR.

2.2 MEETINGS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The PBI Guatemala Project team holds regular meetings with civil society organizations. This enables us to monitor the situation of human rights defenders and to exchange information on the work being carried out, as well as to gather information which helps us to develop our analysis of the internal political situation.

Civil Society Organizations:

Monseñor Mario Molina Palma, Archbishop of Quiché Orlando Blanco, Collective of Social Organizations, COS Alfredo Che, Coordinating Body of Campesino and Indigenous Organizations of Petén, COCIP Mateo Rodríguez, Commitee for Campesino Development CODECA Mario Tema, President of the Association of Indigenous Nations, Sipacapa (San Marcos) Sandra Moran, Women's Sector David Morales, Federation of Trade Unions in the Food and Similar industries, FESTRAS Silvia Valenzuela, Cáritas Suiza; Walter Valencia and Arnoldo Miranda, Technical Unit of Accompaniment, Relations and Assistance for the Guatemalan Social Movement, UTARA Damián Vay, Coordinating Body of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations, CONIC

International Organizations:

Follow-up Commission of the Peace Accords and Relation with Civil Society, Forum of International Non-Governmental Organizations (FONGI) Coordinating Body for International Accompaniment in Guatemala, CAIG Québec-Guatemala Accompaniment Project, PAQG Accompaniment Project for the witnesses of the genocide cases, ACOGUATE

Courtesy visits were also made to the following organizations:

Miguel Quiej and Juana Tipaz, Nacional Advisory Body on the Integral Development of Communities in Guatemala, CONCODIG Survivors of the Massacre the Nueva Linda Estate, Retalhuleu

2.3 ACCOMPANIENTS

Since 13 May we have been accompanying Carlos Morales, leader of the **Union of Farmers'** (Campesinos) Organizations for the Verapaces (UVOC), on a 24 hourly basis. During the month of July, we accompanied him during his activities in the Verapaces and the capital.

Background: Carlos Morales, leader of UVOC, has been victim of death threats, acts of intimidation, and persecutions by unknown individuals. Due to a serious increase of personal death threats at the end of April 2005, which led to a genuine fear of his life, Carlos Morales was forced into hiding in Guatemala City for a month, following which he requested 24 hour accompaniment from Peace Brigades. UVOC is a campesino organisation from de Verapaces Departments (Alta and Baja Verapaz) and works principally on the theme of access to land for campesinos and provides support in the process of legalisation of the communities' titles to land. UVOC also offers training for communities affiliated to UVOC and supports development projects within those communities.

We accompany members of the **Indigenous Municipality of Sololá**, and the **Maya Foundation**, **Fundamaya**. We have been accompanying the Indigenous Mayoress of Sololá, Dominga Vásquez and Carlos Guarquez of Fundamaya during since February 2005. During the month of July we accompanied them in their various activities in the department of Sololá

Background: On 11 January 2005, in the Department of Sololá, serious confrontations took place between the National Civil Police, supported by the Guatemalan Army, and the communities of Sololá who were protesting against the transportation of a cylinder (which was to be used for mining purposes) through their villages, leaving one person dead and over 30 injured. Following this, government authorities issued an arrest warrant against five community leaders and representatives of the Indigenous Municipality of Sololá, including the Indigenous Mayoress, Dominga Vásquez. The Indigenous Municipality is a non-governmental body representing indigenous communities in Sololá, which works to defend the rights of the Maya – including the right to speak their own language and to practice their traditional ceremonies and customs – as well as to ensure the development of the communities. On 25 March of 2005 in the village of El Tablón, Sololá, the vehicle used by Carlos Humberto Guárquez, of FUNDAMAYA, was doused in petrol and set on fire by unknown individuals. Death threats specifically naming Carlos Guárquez, Dominga Vásquez and her husband, Alfonso Guárquez, were found scattered around the vehicle. Part of the threat stated: "For your stupid meddling in society, tomorrow will be the day of your disappearance from this world." As a result of this threat we decided to activate our Support Network, during the last days of March, April and the beginning of May.

We continue to accompany the **Coordination of Widows of Guatemala, CONAVIGUA**. We carry out regular visits to their office and also accompanied them during an inhumation from 15 – 17 july in San Pedro Jocopilas, Quiché

Background: CONAVIGUA continues to facilitate the process of exhumations and inhumations in various departments throughout Guatemala, largely in Quiché, Chimaltenango, Guatemala and the Verpaces.

We continued to carry out regular visits to the office of the **National Coordination of Residents of Marginal Areas in Guatemala, CONAPAMG** and also accompanied them during a visit to the community of Getzemani in zone 18 of Guatemala city following the eviction of this same community. Background: CONAMPAMG works on the question of access to housing and the legalization of illegally occupied land. On the 4th of July 2004 their office was broken into and inventories, bills, computer discs and money were stolen. In December 2004, members of the Community "Nuestras Realidad" which belongs to CONAPAMG, received an anonymous threatening letter stating that if the community leaders continued to pressure the Government for the legalisation of their land, they would be evicted and arrested.

We accompanied **Eloyda Mejia**, Director of the **Association of Friends of Lake Izabal (AFLI)** in her activities in the town of El Estor in the Department of Izabal. We accompanied her during a Workshop on Lobbying around the issue of mining organized by Oxfam America in Mariscos, Izabal.

Background: Eloyda Mejia has suffered a number of threats as a result of her work to protect Lake Izabal, in the province of El Estor, East Guatemala, as well as her work to inform local residents of the possible damaging effects of the re-opening of the EXMIBAL mining operation in the area. The threats against her became particularly serious during a forum on the future of the lake which took place in El Estor on 21 February 2004 following which she lodged an official complaint with the Ministry of Justice and the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH).

We carried out weekly visits to the offices of the **Madre Selva Collective** and had frequent contact with their members.

Background: Madre Selva is an environmental organization which holds regular workshops on the negative impact of mega-projects and in particular those involving open caste mining and the installation of hydroelectric power plants. Members of the organization regularly receive threats because of their work.

We have been accompanying the Union of Workers of the company "Association of the Coffee Industry", and other related Industries, SITINCA. During the month of July we acted as international observers during their various protests against the unfair dismissal of José Armando Palacios and the situation of workers in the INCASA factory in Guatemala City.

Background: In January of the 2004, three workers of the company's internal security decided to join the trade union. Since then the company has carried out anti-union activities, against José Armando Palacios. On the 16 April, unknown armed individuals broke into the house of José Armando Palacios and threatened the life of his wife and their two children. They asked for Mr. Palacios, whom they wanted "to kill for being in the union." On the 6 of May, Mr.. Palacios was dismissed without any explanation.

We accompanied **Jose Ernesto Menchú Tojij**, member of the Committee of *Campesino* Unity (CUC) and of Northern Quiché Regional Movement for the Victims of the Armed Conflict through a visit to Quiché during which we carried out various meetings with local authorities to express our concern for the physical integrity of Mr Menchú-

Background: On 19 of June of 2005 four armed individuals entered the workshop where Mr. Menchú works. Only his wife was present. They demanded threateningly to know where he was and then violently entered the house where they stole about 5.000 Q and Mr. Menchú's mobile phone. According to Mr Menchu, the threats are related to his work against the eviction of the community of San Siguán, Quiché as well as the exhumations his organization has been facilitating in the region.

2.4. FOLLOW UP

We have maintained contact with the **Centre for Human Rights Legal Action, CALDH** through meetings with their Co-directors and visits to their office.

Background: On various occasions we have accompanied various members of the organization which is constantly under threat. During the month of June, four members of the organization were subject to attacks and acts of aggression and the organizations continues to receive threatening telephone calls and is under frequent surveillance.

We continue to maintain contact with members of the community of the El Maguey plantation

Background: The plantation used to belong to a company for whom relatives of the current residents of El Maguey worked for under extremely exploitative conditions. The signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 opened up the possibility of reclaiming land based on historic rights. The residents of El Maguey formed the Associative Peasant Company of San Antonio (ECA) and in 2002 attempted to register the land legally in their name with FONTIERRA. However during this process it emerged that the land belonged to the Ministry of Defence. Towards the end of 2002 the FRG Government, under pressure from a number of members of parliament granted the community access to the land. Nonetheless in April 2003 the army violently evicted the community, burning their homes and their school and forcing them to set up camp on the roadside outside the plantation with the few belongings they had salvaged. The eviction was publicly denounced by the Human Rights Ombudsman who also sent advisors to the site who denounced the behavior of the army towards the community, including acts of harassment and intimidation and denial of access to water and firewood. Shortly afterwards a Governmental Decree withdrawing the community's right to the land was issued. This Decree was appealed before the Constitutional Court which, in May 2004, decided in favour of the community. Reconstruction of the community has begun, but they continue waiting for the finalization of their title to the land.

3. ACTIVITIES OF PBI GUATEMALA: OUTSIDE GUATEMALA

The North America Representative of the Project, Tara Ward, has maintained regular telephone contact with the Americas Policy Group (APG)

The Committee of the Guatemala Project traveled to Guatemala for its bi-annual meeting to follow up and carry out evaluation of the project. During their visit they also carried out various meetings with members of the Diplomatic Corps.

4. PUBLICATIONS BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (IN SPANISH)

In this section we publish several press releases written by human rights organisations in which they express their concerns regarding recent events in Guatemala.

EL MOVIMIENTO NACIONAL POR LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS --MNDH-

Frente a la continuación de las acciones de intimidación y amenazas contra los defensores y defensoras de derechos humanos, DENUNCIA:

- Que el día 25 de julio de 2005, a eso de las 7:30 horas de la mañana, fue encontrada una Corona Mortuoria colgada de la ventana de la sede de UNSITRAGUA (9ª av. 1-43 zona 1) y dos esquelas amenazando de muerte a los ocho compañeros miembros del Sindicato de Trabajadores del Crédito Hipotecario Nacional, quienes han denunciado anomalías en la gestión del gerente José Fidencio García Beltetón, así como planes para privatizar dicho banco.
- Que los compañeros amenazados: Luis Morales, Vinicio Ordóñez, Fernando Cirín, Efraín López, Elio Monroy, Manuel Arias, Lic. Danilo Chea, y Douglas Acencio, han denunciado intimidaciones en similar tono de parte del gerente del CHN.
- Que el mismo día 25 de julio, alrededor de las 9:40 horas, fue asaltada la compañera Jessica Yarrow, directora de NISGUA (red de solidaridad con Guatemala), robándole el vehículo en que se transportaba, a la entrada de las oficinas de dicha organización (3ª calle 3-48b zona 2).

4. Las compañeras de NISGUA han denunciado que desde hace casi un mes han tenido vigilancia de parte de hombres desconocidos frente a sus oficinas.

Ante estos hechos, el MNDH:

- 1. Manifiesta su solidaridad con los compañeros de UNSITRAGUA, el Sindicato de Trabajadores del Crédito Hipotecario Nacional y NISGUA, por las amenazas e intimidaciones de que están siendo objeto.
- Expresa su preocupación por el incremento de ataques contra defensores y defensoras de derechos humanos, así como de líderes sociales, los cuales a la fecha ya suman, en menos de 7 meses, 130 casos (cifra superior al total de casos ocurridos durante los años 2003 y 2004).
- Exige al gobierno de Guatemala, especialmente al Gabinete de Seguridad, cumplir con la obligación de proteger a la ciudadanía y garantizar que los defensores de derechos humaos puedan desarrollar su trabajo, como fue expresado en el comunicado público aparecido en campo pagado el domingo 17 de julio pasado.
- Solicita a la Comunidad Internacional su atención a estos hechos que atentan contra la democracia y la posibilidad de una paz firme y duradera en Guatemala, y le pide hacer presión para que el gobierno de Guatemala atienda esta situación.
- 5. Exhorta a los movimientos sociales y a la solidaridad internacional a manifestar su preocupación ante esta situación y su solidaridad con los compañeros afectados.

LAS AMENAZAS AL TRABAJO COMUNITARIO NO DETENDRAN LA VERDADERA CONSTRUCCION DE LA PAZ.

La Asociación Para la Promoción y el Desarrollo de la Comunicad "CEIBA"

A la comunidad nacional e internacional

DENUNCIA

- 1. Que el día 7 de julio a las 7.40 horas de la mañana, a sus oficinas centrales en Chimaltenango ingresó un fax conteniendo amenazas contra nuestro Coordinador General, Sr. Mario Antonio Godinez López, que literalmente mencionaba que "...las acciones desestabilizadoras hechas por su organización han provocado descontento e indignación en las organizaciones que trabajamos por la paz del departamento. Le recomendamos que se abstengan de llevar a cabo reuniones de mas de 20 personas en cualquier lugar ya que entenderemos como un acto de nueva provocación y reaccionaremos en respuesta de sus acciones desestabilizadoras. Le recomendamos mucha prudencia en lo que de aquí en adelante planeen en las comunidades y en el departamento...". Dicho documento está firmado por un grupo desconocido auto llamado GRUPO DE ACCION POR LA PAZ EN HUEHUETENANGO.
- Esta amenaza se une a varios hechos de intimidación que en distintas partes del país han recibido tanto miembros directivos de Ceiba como personal de la misma, durante el primer semestre de este año, mismas que han sido documentadas en la Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos y el Ministerio Público. (...)

SOLICITAMOS

A las entidades de derechos humanos y sociales su solidaridad ante estos hechos. A las organizaciones sociales guatemaltecas estar atentas a los acontecimientos, para poder movilizarnos masivamente en la defensa de nuestro espacio de expresión como sociedad civil, a las redes internacionales su apoyo para comunicar su preocupación ante las autoridades guatemaltecas por las situaciones preocupantes que vivimos en el país, y

REITERAMOS

Que tanto la Junta Directiva de Ceiba, el personal en general así como su Equipo de Dirección, continuaremos promoviendo el desarrollo comunitario y siendo críticos frente a la situación tan preocupante que vive el país, ya que, 12 años de historia nos han dado la razón, y hoy mas que nunca, vemos necesaria la vida de las organizaciones de desarrollo para apoyar esa construcción comunitaria.

JUNTA DIRECTIVA Y EQUIPO DE DIRECCION DE ASOCIACION PARA LA PROMOCION Y EL DESARROLLO DE LA COMUNIDAD "CEIBA"

La Coordinación de ONG y Cooperativas, denuncia amenazas contra miembro de su equipo.

René Muñoz, miembro del Programa Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural de esta institución ha recibido llamadas telefónicas amenazadoras desde el 1 de julio de este año. Estas llamadas se han recibido tanto en la oficina como en su vivienda y las de sus familiares.

En la primera de estas llamadas, el 1 de julio, un hombre llamó identificándose como miembro de la Cámara del Agro y expresando que deseaba hacer comentarios a un campo pagado publicado por CONGCOOP ese día. Sus expresiones fueron "Ustedes son unos mentirosos de porquería" "Son de la gente que se escuda en el anonimato" "Si estuviera frente a mi ya sabría lo que es bueno" "Si esto fuera una amenaza ya estaría muerto".

El lunes 4 de julio a las 10:00 A.M., la esposa de René recibió una llamada al teléfono de su casa, en donde preguntaron "¿Es la casa del señor René Muñoz?" "¿Estará ese hijo de la gran puta...?" "No estoy bromeando hija de puta....". Su esposa colgó inmediatamente.

En esa misma fecha al medio día, la esposa de René recibió dos llamadas continuas; en la primera solamente escuchó gemidos como de alguien que está agitado después de correr con esfuerzo y en la segunda no respondieron y se quedaron con el teléfono abierto.

El día 5 de Julio en la oficina de CONGCOOP definimos la necesidad de presentar la denuncia ante la PDH, lo cual se hizo en la tarde de ese día. En la PDH ofrecieron presentar la denuncia ante el Ministerio Público y solicitar medidas de seguridad perimetrales, lo que significa controles policíacos en los alrededores de su casa y de la oficina de CONGCOOP.

La noche de este mismo día René y su familia llegaron a la su casa y encontraron bajo la puerta unas hojas del tamaño media carta, unas con líneas y otras blancas sin nada escrito.

El día 6 de julio 2005, la familia de René se quedó en casa de sus suegros y el se dirigió a la oficina. A las 8:30 de la noche regresaron a la casa y se encontramos con que la llave no entraba en la chapa, por lo que saltaron la puerta de servicio para llegar al patio trasero y entrar por esa puerta y abrir por dentro la puerta de la calle para poder entrar. Revisaron la chapa y observaron que fue golpeada con un instrumento con punta y que efectivamente no permite la entrada de la llave. Cerraron por dentro y pusieron refuerzos en las dos puertas de la casa.

El 11 de julio en casa de los suegros de René se recibió una llamada en la que un hombre preguntó por la esposa de René y cuando ella contestó le dijo ¡A ese hijo de la gran puta lo queremos fuera!

Estos hechos no son aislados. Forman parte de un clima de inseguridad, de amenazas y de acciones en contra de activistas sociales, entre otros los cuales se encuentran otros miembros de CONGCOOP.

El compañero René Muñoz, como parte del equipo de CONGCOOP, ha apoyado activamente a organizaciones campesinas en su lucha por el acceso a la tierra y el desarrollo rural; además participa en la Mesa Intersectorial de Diálogo y Participación para la Formulación de la Política Pública de Desarrollo Rural Integral, la Alianza para el Desarrollo Rural y en el Movimiento Indígena Campesino, Sindical y Popular (MICSP).

Por lo anterior CONGCOOP:

Demanda a las autoridades pertinentes la investigación exhaustiva y la aclaración de estos hechos, así como la identificación de los responsables de los mismos.

Hace un llamado a las organizaciones populares para mantenernos alertas ante esta ola de ataques a defensores de derechos humanos.

A la comunidad nacional e internacional, en general, a mostrar su rechazo a este clima de intimidación e inseguridad, y a solidarizarse, en lo particular, con el compañero René Muñoz y su familia.

PBI GUATEMALA PROJECT

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