



# 2019-2020 Annual Report

Making Space for Peace in the New Normal



Peace Brigades International  
Ireland

# Introduction

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So far, 2020 has certainly been a challenging year for the world, and particularly for the countries in which Peace Brigades International has its field projects – Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica/Nicaragua, Kenya, Nepal, and Indonesia. In the midst of a global pandemic, traditionally marginalised communities, such as indigenous peoples, gender and sexual minorities, and smallholder farmers, have once again been left out as governments scramble to deal with Coronavirus.

For those of us in Peace Brigades International Ireland, the challenge remains how to best support these at-risk human rights defenders (HRDs) as a small organisation with extremely limited capacity and resources. Nevertheless, thanks to the dedication and hard work of our volunteers, board and coordinators, we continue to provide solidarity and support for PBI field projects and the human rights defenders they accompany.

2020 was a year of change for PBI Ireland, as our friend, founder and coordinator, Karen Jeffares, left PBI to work on an environmental restoration and retreat project. The driving force behind PBI Ireland for the past six years, Karen oversaw the development and establishment of our organisation, from a small volunteer group to a registered charity. On behalf of PBI Ireland, I wish to thank her for her hard work in building our organisation, and her dedication to human rights that continues to inspire us every day.

A pillar of PBI's mission is the direct, physical accompaniment of human rights activists. As a result, COVID-19 and social distancing have represented a unique and unprecedented obstacle to the work of our field projects. But with more and more people connecting virtually, we have never been closer to the many defenders accompanied by the PBI family. Even under lockdown, we have been able to bring defenders' voices straight to our diplomatic corps, host virtual events with activists and the general public, and help to increase the profile of accompanied defenders by sharing and promoting their stories.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that these kinds of connections are more important than ever. In a context that was already defined by inequality, impunity, and a closing of space for peace, human rights defenders are showing the way forward under this new crisis. While Coronavirus transforms the world around us, these individuals continue to strive for a more peaceful, more inclusive society. In doing so, they are an inspiration and example to us all.



# OUR ACTIVITIES

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2020 has been a busy year for Peace Brigades International Ireland. Below, you can see a selection of some of our activities, and details on how we have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic:

## ALERTS & ACTIVATIONS

When a field project is faced with a serious and/or urgent violation of human rights, they can choose to activate their support network in-country and around the world through PBI country groups. In spite of the global lockdown, PBI Ireland has taken part in three alerts so far in 2020. Actions we can take to support at-risk human rights defenders include meeting with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and sharing our concerns with other organisations in Ireland.

### Case Study: Illegal Intelligence-Gathering in Colombia

In May, Colombian newspaper *Semana* revealed that the national military had illegally gathered intelligence on at least 130 figures including journalists, politicians, trade unionists and human rights defenders. Some of those affected are defenders accompanied by PBI Colombia.

PBI Ireland facilitated and attended a virtual meeting between an affected HRD and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to discuss the implications of the scandal. The Irish Embassy in Bogotá also helped to raise the profile of HRDs and the value of their work through social media, supporting defenders even under lockdown. PBI Ireland also liaised with organisations specialised in digital security to ensure affected HRDs were supported in securing their communications.

## BLOOD OF THE EARTH FILM SCREENING AND EVENT

In 2019, amid an historic drought, a documentary film crew travelled to Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras to allow water defenders to tell their stories of life, hope, and resistance. From dried riverbeds in Honduras and prisons in Guatemala, to communities under attack in Southern Mexico, their stories speak to the ferocity of megaprojects in their search for profits.

In June, PBI Ireland and the Latin America Solidarity Centre held a screening of this documentary film, followed by a virtual Q&A session with two water defenders accompanied by PBI: Diana Pérez (Mexican Institute for Community Development) and Julio González (Colectivo Madreselva - Guatemala).





This entirely virtual event – a first for PBI Ireland – brought their stories of resistance to environmental destruction directly to the homes of our supporters. This format also allowed us to record and upload the event to YouTube, allowing anyone who wishes to listen to our speakers at any time.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Moving to entirely online operations meant that PBI Ireland relied much more heavily on our social media, website and newsletter to keep human rights issues in our project countries on the radar. The field volunteers at the PBI Honduras Project wrote a series of articles on the impacts of Coronavirus throughout the country, ranging from smallholder farmers who have banded together to protect their communities from the virus, to trans women in Tegucigalpa supporting people living with HIV. PBI Ireland published, shared, and promoted the articles, along with other PBI Country Groups around the world, to help raise the profile of the defenders involved. This not only helps improve the security situation of Honduran HRDs, but also sends a clear message that their work is important and that they are not alone.

## 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

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### SPEAKER TOUR

In May, PBI Ireland invited Lorena Cabnal to speak to 21 participants in an interactive talk on community feminism and ancestral healing practices in Trinity College Dublin. Lorena is a woman human rights defender with a long trajectory in denouncing violence against women in Guatemala and in building community feminism as a grassroots response to patriarchy and structural violence in the communities in which she works.

Lorena is a member of Tzk'at Network of Ancestral Healers of Community Feminism who pay particular attention to the challenges and needs of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) as they respond to the social and political conflicts that continue to impact women in different parts of the country. As part of her visit to Ireland, she spoke to the public and government officials about Guatemala, her work as a WHRD, community feminism and the ancestral healing practices that she uses to transform violent structures and build peace from within. Lorena has been accompanied by PBI Guatemala since 2009.



## PEACE EDUCATION

In May and June, 25 participants took part in the PBI Ireland Peace Education course in our office space in Dublin. Entitled *Making Space for Peace: Human Rights Defenders and Peace-Building*, the five-week course covered key concepts in peace-building. Through cases studies and personal stories from HRDs accompanied by PBI as well as former field volunteers, participants explored key topics like nonviolence, the work of human rights defenders in different stages of peace, and the challenges faced by HRDs around the world. The course also covered the international protective accompaniment model pioneered by PBI in areas of conflict and post-conflict and how it supports defenders to do their work despite difficult circumstances.

## FUNDRAISING

Over the summer, PBI Ireland volunteers raised funds pouring pints with the Workers Beer Company and checking wristbands at concerts and festivals throughout the country, raising nearly €1,400. In November, PBI held its annual Table Quiz in Dublin, where over 70 contestants tested their knowledge on human rights and other topics. In total, the quiz raised almost €800 in support of PBI Ireland and human rights defenders around the world.

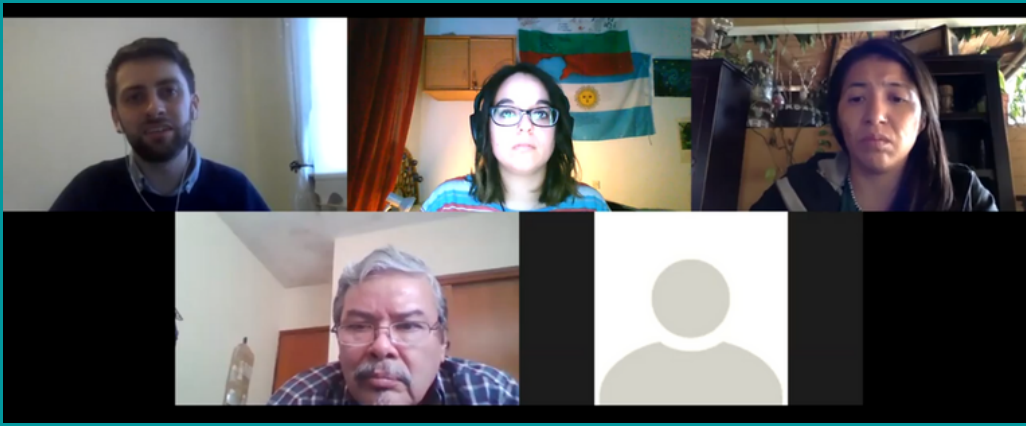
## SUCSESSES

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A major project PBI Ireland undertook in 2020 was our joint application to the Erasmus+ programme, alongside other PBI Country Groups and the PBI Secretariat in Brussels. As the driving force behind the application, PBI Ireland coordinated the effort and drafted the project. Based on our past Peace Education programmes, this ambitious new initiative would help amplify the reach of our project by greatly increasing our resources and capacity. As a Training-of-Trainers programme, it would also empower participants to become agents for change and ambassadors for human rights in their own communities.

Although our application was approved, a lack of funds at the European level means that our project has been placed on a reserve list, and will receive funds should they become available later in the year. Nevertheless, this success demonstrates the value and viability of our peace education work, and is a clear testament to the hard work of our Peace Education Working Group.





In spite of COVID-19 restrictions, PBI Ireland was able to use technology to expand our impact and integrate HRDs into our work in new and exciting ways, including our public events.

As a very small organisation, PBI Ireland was also able to quickly adapt to the changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. While we moved internal meetings online, the increased use of digital communications programmes more generally allowed us to bring HRDs to the core of our work here in Ireland like never before. Between meetings with officials and public events, activities that we could previously only hold when our budget allowed us to invite speakers from our project countries became easier than ever. These are important lessons both for lockdown and for when restrictions on international travel are eventually lifted.

## CHALLENGES

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A notable challenge this year was the decision of Karen Jeffares to step down from her role as consultant coordinator. As the founder and driving force behind PBI Ireland, her years of expertise and passion for human rights have certainly left their imprint on our Country Group. Nevertheless, Karen left PBI Ireland in a very strong position, allowing current coordinator Eimhin O'Reilly to take the reins without disrupting our work.



### Welcome Eimhin

Eimhin has recently returned from volunteering with the PBI Honduras Field Project. Prior to that, he volunteered with PBI Ireland and served as Communications Coordinator with the Latin America Solidarity Centre. Eimhin has worked extensively in the Irish NGO sector, on issues ranging from financial justice to global health. Elsewhere, he has worked as a translator and writer, covering human rights issues throughout Latin America. PBI Ireland looks forward to working with Eimhin as our new Coordinator in supporting PBI volunteers and PBI field projects to help protect human rights defenders around the world.



## FUNDING

A perennial challenge for any small organisation, securing funding was made even more difficult by the lockdown. Annual sources of funding, such as our volunteers at concerts and festivals with the Workers' Beer Company or our Table Quiz Fundraiser, were suddenly unavailable as COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown saw our income decrease by 35%. Although this is a problem throughout the NGO sector and beyond, PBI Ireland has applied for new sources of funding and launched a special appeal for donations to help combat this shortfall.

## STRUCTURE

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### PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL

International  
Secretariat

General  
Assembly

Field  
Projects

Country  
Groups

### PBI IRELAND

#### Coordination

PBI Ireland has a part-time, consultant coordinator to manage the everyday operations of the organisation.

#### Board

The PBI Ireland is composed of diverse individuals with an interest in human rights. Current members are:

- Iain Atack, Chairperson
- Alexandra Capatina, Treasurer
- Saoirse Brady
- Heidi Riley
- Patty Abozaglo
- Robin Hanan


#### Working Groups

Working Groups are groups of volunteers working on:

- Advocacy
- Communications
- Fundraising & Finance
- Peace Education
- Governance

### VOLUNTEERS





**Peace Brigades International (PBI)** is an international NGO that has promoted nonviolence and protected human rights defenders since 1981. PBI provides protection, support and recognition to local human rights defenders who work in areas of repression and conflict and have requested our support.

PBI Ireland was founded in May 2014 at a public meeting in Dublin. We are the most recently-formed country group out of 13 active groups who are based in Europe, the Americas and Australia.

PBI Ireland is part of a community of Country Groups around the world who are responsible for carrying out vital support work that allows the field programmes to operate smoothly. The work of the Country Groups is integral to the effectiveness of our protection of human rights defenders in the field.

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