

## ALLIANCE FOR LAWYERS AT RISK REPORT ON 2018 – 2019 ACTIVITIES

### News and activities

The Alliance acts to support lawyers and human rights defenders at risk worldwide. We aim to deliver practical assistance, public influence, and moral pressure in support of the rule of law. We do this by assisting in the training of human rights defenders (HRDs), preparing *amicus* briefs and shining a public spotlight on the victimisation of those fighting to uphold the rights of others. Over the course of 2018-2019 the Alliance has provided support to its pro bono partner Peace Brigades International UK section and its network of HRDs from Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Nepal and Indonesia.

An overview of actions in 2018 and thus far in 2019 is set out below.

### 2018 – an overview

In 2018 the Alliance carried out a range of activities in support of lawyers and human rights defenders at risk. These included letters of concern to the presidents of Kenyan and Colombia, trial observation in Colombia and presentation of the inaugural Sir Henry Brooke Awards publicly recognising outstanding activists. Some brief details are provided below.

*Sir Henry Brooke Awards:* On 13 November 2018 Kenyan social justice activist Naomi Barasa and Colombian human rights lawyer Daniel Prado won the inaugural Henry Brooke Award for Human Rights Defenders. The awards were presented by Lady Arden DBE, a Justice of the Supreme Court, at a packed event at the UK Supreme Court in London's Parliament Square. Details of the awards, profiles of the winners and their work, and a video of Ms Barasa's remarkable acceptance speech are available [here](#).

These awards will be made annually to outstanding activists who place themselves at risk in defence of the rights of others. The awards are made in honour of the life and legacy of Sir Henry Brooke – former Lord Justice of Appeal in the Court of Appeal of England and Wales, founder of the Alliance for Lawyers at Risk and dearly-missed patron of [Peace Brigades International UK](#). Sir Henry died in January 2018.

*Launch of Human Rights Defenders Toolbox:* An innovative bi-lingual (English-Spanish) resource for defenders working on corporate human rights violations has been produced by law firm Simmons & Simmons in collaboration with the Alliance's pro bono partner PBI UK. The Human Rights Defenders Toolbox is the first such centralised online resource targeted at rural communities. It comprises a range of legal fact sheets designed to inform and assist human rights defenders in their struggles to uphold the rule of law. The launch could have a global impact as the Toolbox draws on international law and has universal application. This resource is available [here](#).

### *Timeline of Alliance actions in 2018:*

- January. the Alliance wrote to the Kenyan president expressing concern at the harassment of human rights defenders. This followed attempts by the government to suspend leading human rights organisations based on unfounded allegations of illegal activity or administrative failings. The letter called on the government to implement legislation that would enable human rights organisations to function without fear of harassment.
- March. The Alliance wrote to the Mexican Ambassador in the UK, H.E. Julian Ventura Valero, on the case of criminalised human rights lawyers and human rights defenders in Mexico. On January 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, in the context of a community resistance to a hydroelectric project - eleven people lost their lives and 38 local leaders and human rights defenders were detained. The victims have been given legal support by the Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre, whose lawyers were under threat, particularly that of Abel Barrera Hernandez, Director of Tlachinollan Human Rights Centre, and

the lawyers Vidulfo Rosales Sierra and Rogelio Teliz Garcia. The local lawyers stated that the Alliance intervention was crucial in improving their protection, ensuring that the detainees were not transferred to high-security prisons and to keeping the international spotlight on the case. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 the remaining 16 human rights defenders were finally released from jail

- April. Members of the Alliance met with Colombian lawyer Luis Guillermo Perez Casas, a member of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyer's Collective (CAJAR), which works to defend and promote human rights in Colombia as a contribution to the construction of a just, equitable and inclusive society. For more than 30 years, the work of CAJAR's lawyers has resulted in landmark decisions that have improved access to justice for many victims of the country's long-running conflict. They have faced many serious threats for this work, including being linked to insurgent organisations by government officials, and being publicly identified as "military targets" by death squads. In the meeting the Alliance discussed support it could give to Mr Perez Casas and lawyers at risk in Colombia.
- April. Sir Patrick Elias, President of the Alliance, nominated Peace Brigades International for the UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence. This is a landmark award, which rewards outstanding contributions in the scientific, artistic, cultural or communication fields aimed at the promotion of tolerance and non-violence. In support of this nomination, the Alliance cited PBI's work of protective accompaniment on the ground and international advocacy and diplomacy work as a strategy for the protection of HRDs at risk. Three examples were given in the application that specifically related to the award. Since 2010, PBI has provided protective accompaniment and moral support to Claudia Duque, a Colombian journalist who faced torture for the work she carried out exposing human rights violations. PBI's international advocacy efforts contributed to the safety of Claudia Duque and the subsequent deportation of a member of the Colombian intelligence service fugitive in the USA. Since 2014, PBI has also provided protection to the Honduran Centre for the Promotion of Community Development, who has defended indigenous communities rights and exposed corporate abuses against the communities. PBI has also carried out training and capacity building on security and protection including risks analysis for communities and HRDs at risk aimed at strengthening their capacity and ability to manage their security and safety in Latin America, Africa and Asia.
- June. Launch of the Toolbox for Defenders (details provided above).
- July. The Alliance launched its website, providing public access.
- August. The Alliance wrote to the newly inaugurated Colombian President Ivan Duque welcoming him to his appointment and urging him to uphold the rule of law and protect lawyers at risk
- October. Alliance members met with Nepali lawyer Badri Bhusal, chairman of the COCAP Network which represents victims of gender based violence and defends the rule of law in Nepal. During his visit Badri spoke at a parliamentary event chaired by Dominic Grieve MP 'Celebrating the Contribution of Human Rights Defenders to the Rule of Law' about police torture and sexual violence in Nepal as well as the risks human rights lawyers face in the country. At the Alliance's request, the British Embassy in Kathmandu invited him to a meeting (see below), and the UK continued to offer him support.
- November. The Alliance wrote to the Colombian Constitutional Court in support of the Peace Community of San José de Apartado. The Peace Community is a collective of more than 500 farmers resisting displacement and promoting neutrality in the Colombian armed conflict. The Alliance wrote to the Second Mixed Jurisdiction Court of Apartado, urging it to revise the *tutela* judgment of 5 October 2018, which forced the community to retract allegations made against the army.
- November. The Alliance held the Sir Henry Brooke memorial and award ceremony event at the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom (detailed provided above).
- November. Alliance members met with Daniel Prado, a prominent Colombian human rights lawyer. He began his career by providing legal support to the family members of victims of enforced disappearance in the early 1990s and currently works with the Colombian NGO the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP). He represents victims of paramilitarism in the case of Los

Doce Apóstoles, an emblematic case in which Santiago Uribe, brother of former President Alvaro Uribe Velez, has been accused of creating paramilitary groups responsible for more than 500 murders. As the judicial process reaches its final stages, pressure and harassment against Mr. Prado have increased. Alliance members agreed to follow the case closely and support international observation in upcoming hearings.

- December. The Alliance wrote to the UK ambassador in Nepal, Richard Morris, urging the Embassy to meet with Badri Bhusal so that he could discuss the work of COCAP, the Nirmala Panta case and the security needs of lawyers in Nepal and how the diplomatic community can support them. Following the letter a meeting took place at the UK embassy in Kathmandu.
- December. Simmons & Simmons and PBI UK Roundtable on the business and human rights toolkit – which featured speeches from Simmons & Simmons pro bono partner Richard Dyton and his legal team (Chris Owen, Victoria Channing) as well as PBI UK Director Susi Bascon and Honduran human rights defender Dina Meza. The discussion covered the role of business in relation to human rights, and the specifics of the toolkit, including how it could be adapted to different contexts and implemented on the ground. The round table was attended by NGOs, lawyers, FCO officials and academics. The Simmons & Simmons legal team committed to incorporate into the fact sheets some of the feedback given at the round table. The FCO Human Rights and Democracy department expressed interest in the toolbox and agreed to include a link to the resource in their next Best Practice guide for Diplomats in support in HRDs that will be disseminated widely within the British Diplomatic network.
- December. The Alliance supported an international observation mission of the trial of the “12 Apostles” (see above) in Colombia, to apply public scrutiny and moral pressure in support of a fair trial and the granting of appropriate procedural protections. Alliance member Kirsty Brimelow conducted the observation on behalf of a group of organisations including the Bar Human Rights Committee, the Caravana UK and the Alliance.

### Steps so far in 2019 - overview

- February. The Alliance wrote a letter of concern to Foreign Office minister Sir Alan Duncan. The letter noted the Alliance’s serious concerns around the disappearance of Mexican human rights defender Otilia Eugenio, who works for the protection of human rights of the Mepha'a Indigenous People and has exposed sexual violence against indigenous women in the state of Guerrero. Five days after her disappearance Otilia was released by her captors due to the pressure from the international community. **Otilia stated publicly that the support of the international community was instrumental in setting her free and thanked PBI and the Alliance for its support.**
- February. The Alliance wrote to the newly appointed president of Mexico Lopez Obrador congratulating him on his taking office and drawing his attention to the serious international concern regarding the protection of human rights defenders within Mexico. The Alliance drew attention to the 32 recorded murders of human rights defenders in Mexico in 2018 and the victimisation of legal practitioners fighting to uphold the rule of law.
- April. The Alliance wrote to the Ambassador for Guatemala in the United Kingdom Acisclo Valladares Molina expressing concern about the trend towards the criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders in the country. The Alliance had received information regarding criminalisation processes against indigenous leaders and land rights defenders who protest against hydro-electric power projects in Guatemala. The letter outlined concern about this trend and specifically over the criminalisation of jailed indigenous leader Bernardo Caal Xol.

### Membership

- A current list of members is available on our website [lawyersatrisk.org](http://lawyersatrisk.org)