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Nonviolent Protective Accompaniment – The work of Peace Brigades International in Making Space for Peace

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is a unique grassroots, non-partisan human rights organisation that maintains international teams of volunteers in areas of conflict around the world. For over twenty years, PBI has worked to protect the lives of individuals, organisations and communities threatened with human rights abuses and political repression. PBI currently has over ninety volunteers serving its four projects in Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico and Guatemala.

Upon request, PBI volunteers provide what is called *nonviolent protective accompaniment* for local human rights workers, trade unionists, indigenous activists, church leaders, and communities who live and work amid extreme political violence and repression. PBI volunteers literally walk beside threatened activists thereby reducing the likelihood that armed actors will carry out their threats. Nonviolent protective accompaniment is an increasingly sophisticated peacekeeping methodology that combines the deterrence of a international, non-partisan nonviolent third-party presence with the moral encouragement provided when activists under threat are physically accompanied by another person.

But the effectiveness of nonviolent protective accompaniment is not just due to the physical presence alongside threatened activists, something that is dangerously misunderstood by mainstream interpretations and by recent 'ad hoc' protective initiatives such as the 'Human Shields' in Iraq.

The effectiveness of nonviolent protective accompaniment relies on a thorough analysis of threat and conflict, the development and maintenance of a complex network of political deterrence and an intimate assessment of the perceived and actual impact that such deterrence has on all of the actors involved. PBI's protective presence is also backed up by an immense international support network that is judiciously applied. As more and more international peace teams and projects place volunteers in conflict zones around the world, a thorough understanding of how a nonviolent protective presence is applied is crucial.

The presentation will describe PBI's development and application of this highly effective tool for peace and describe protective accompaniment theory based on PBI's experience working in areas of repression and violence. It will also place PBI's work in the context of the growing worldwide use of citizen peace teams and cross-border nonviolent interventions, providing an outline to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of such initiatives.