

## **Programme Department - Report for June 2007**

### **Sri Lanka**

#### *General situation*

The lack of security has had a major impact on the civilian population in the North and East where NP is active. Some of the more serious incidents in recent weeks have included the bomb blasts that killed civilians in Colombo, and the continuous assassinations, abductions and child recruitments. Amnesty International and other reputable sources have confirmed that the LTTE is engaging in forcible recruitment of both children and adult civilians on a large scale basis.

The continued worsening of the human security of the people is accompanied by the escalation of military operations between the government and LTTE. The shelling by government on LTTE areas in Thopigalla, the last LTTE position in the east, continued while air bombings and sea battles intensified in the north. Even the ICRC withdrew from the buffer zone in the north several times as a result of the shelling by the LTTE.

According to some preliminary findings gathered by PAFFREL about 30 police and military personnel are among 452 persons arrested in connection with human rights abuses, including abduction, disappearances and murders. Most violations, however, go unreported and uninvestigated. Nevertheless, the government recently decided to give more powers to the military; the armed forces are now expected to perform the functions of the police as well.

Early June, two Red Cross volunteers were abducted and shot dead by gunmen claiming to be policemen. The two, both from the Tamil community in the East, had been kidnapped from a railway station in Colombo on a Friday night when they returned from a workshop on Tsunami reconstruction. Their bodies were found near central Sri Lankan town of Ratnapura. The deliberate killings of humanitarian workers are one of the gruesome symptoms of the current phase of the conflict. Earlier incidents included the abduction and killing of TRO humanitarian workers in Welikanda in January 2006, the killing of ACF humanitarian workers in Mutur in August 2006 and more recent killing of a Chief Priest of a Buddhist temple in Moraweve in May 2007. The monk was a renowned worker for peace and tried to ensure inter-ethnic amity despite the divisions that are being created due to the war.

The atmosphere between the ethnic communities is worsening. This month, the police forcibly transported over 350 Tamil people out of Colombo overnight. This included many women and children who had been temporarily residing in Colombo in lodges and rented places. The eviction of Tamil citizens back to the north and east provoked a feeling of anguish, alienation and bitter anger within the entire Tamil community, and condemnation from other Sri Lankans and the international community. Thanks to the Center of Policy Alternatives which immediately filed a fundamental rights petition with the Supreme Court, an interim order was issued to stop the unlawful and discriminatory practice and many of those deported were allowed to return.

Some members of the international community such as the UK, USA and the Netherlands decided to hold back aid due to what they consider an appalling human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's largest donor Japan is still not considering any form of conditionality, but it recently expressed serious concerns over the ongoing human rights violations in Sri Lanka through the Japanese envoy Akashi. Although the USA continues to support the government of Sri Lanka, it also stated that it must dissolve and disarm the K group which is operating freely in government controlled areas.

The fifth session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva produced no tangible results on Sri Lanka. Similarly, Norway received once again the support by the Co-chairs in a working group meeting which is gradually becoming an excuse for inaction on the escalating conflict of Sri Lanka by the international community.

The lack of clear and robust messages internationally is making it very difficult for NPSL and other (I)NGOs to operate. In fact, the lack of a unified approach has further reduced the humanitarian space and has increased the risk for staff. This is clearly noticeable in the East and North.

In the East, a new challenge has emerged with the split within the TMVP (the political party of the “K-group”). This development has led to more danger and less accountability. Dozens of underage recruits escaped from the K group when the split happened but had no place to go. In several cases the K group held family members of the children hostage until the escapees returned, a practice that is widely used also by the LTTE.

### *The work of NP*

The level of fear of the families to report such cases is extremely high so NPSL raises these issues with police and military who are responsible for the security in the areas. At one point an armed group prevented a mother and child from visiting the NPSL office in Valaichchenai. NPSL brought this to the attention of the local commander and held talks with the armed group about the incident. This resulted in an apology to the mother by the group member that made the threat. Such a response is rare and many incidents continue to take place while those who try to speak openly are being silenced or threatened including the staff of international agencies.

So far, the efforts to accompany parents to interact with the TMVP offices in the East have produced little results in terms of releases. In May, NPSL accompanied a group of mothers, who claim their children have been taken by the K group, to the TMVP political office in Colombo. Although the meeting was positive in terms of pledges for release made, it has gradually become clear that the TMVP in Colombo is not in a position to hold its military commanders accountable. Although the families have come forward to claim their right, it has also made them more vulnerable. NPSL intends to review the strategy and may shift its attention to the GoSL's responsibility now that the silence on this sensitive issue has been broken.

Following the release of one child after the dialogue with the TMVP was sought between the parents and the political office of the TMVP in Colombo, other parents requested NPSL to facilitate a collective meeting with the armed group.

The lack of capacity on safe places in the east is a major concern and it is diminishing the ability of NPSL to respond. It continues to receive many requests from families whose children are at risk. Progress to identify more safe spaces was made in talks with Sarvodaya but interest and advocacy by Sarvodaya supporters internationally would help the process.

NPSL IDP activities concentrated on the resettlement process. There was less pressure by the security forces this time as a result of the previous advocacy efforts by agencies including NPSL. The GoSL has also now started to distribute its own leaflet that state the rights IDPs have. NPSL continues to monitor the return, using its presence to allow for a better process, meaning more civilian and less military involvement. However, the presence of armed groups in IDP camps such as the K group continues to be a threat to the vulnerable population.

The TMVP split and the fighting in Thopigalla also affected the Trincomalee district. Hundreds of the TMVP cadres moved into Trincomalee while security forces stepped up the military activities in areas where LTTE cadres retired from the fighting in Batticaloa. Part of May NPSL kept its status of restricted operations due to the ongoing investigation into the grenade incident including the legal process of its two staff members it is tangled in, with the next hearing scheduled for July 16<sup>th</sup>. (That hearing led to a dismissal of the case so that our staff could go free.)

NPSL continues to support the Peace Committees in Trincomalee District. NPSL has been able to facilitate the activation and reactivation of some of the Peace Committees by connecting them to other local partners that provide trainings in, among other, human rights. This work may now be able to expand due to a recent donation by NP Japan and the Niwano foundation. Awareness training on community child protection is another area that NPSL is exploring in order to increase the involvement of the committees in sensitive issues that affect the communities. NPSL has also made plans for overnight stay in Mutur which will facilitate the connection with the Mutur Peace Committee and also visit areas such as Echchilampattai, an area where NPSL used to work before the battle in Mutur last August and only now has become accessible again.

The situation in Jaffna remains extremely tense. Abductions continue including of students especially during curfew hours. Claymore mine attacks on SLA soldiers happen regularly. As a result, the SLA conducts cordon searches and roundups and has arrested hundreds of people during these checks. NPSL local partners are under significant threat. Their precarious situation has now forced them to leave the area. Despite this, 62 students graduated from a Human Rights course conducted by one of the local partners with the facilitation of NPSL. Many of them have volunteered to get involved working on the human rights violations that Jaffna is experiencing. NPSL has accompanied these volunteers to increase their confidence and reduce their fear about the important but risky work they will be involved in. NPSL is also involved in IDP security concerns in Jaffna. There is a request to assist in the return of IDPs to Allaipiddy. However, the risk these people will be exposed to upon return remains a big concern. They may be caught in the middle between attacks by the LTTE from the sea and navy and army defense.

The new NPSL Colombo Response Team (CRT) has made a good start. The activities that are being undertaken are advocacy, representations, connections with national peace and human rights organizations. The CRT has already been heavily involved in the protection of individuals at risk. It accompanied individuals to ICRC, Police, Human Rights Commission and political office of armed groups. Several of these cases have been part of NPSL work in the north and east but require attention in Colombo. More specifically, the CRT was able to involve the witness and victims protection unit of the international observers group currently present in Sri Lanka. This will hopefully increase the chances for more safety of several families that NPSL is assisting. At the moment, the CRT is developing a national level safety network together with local actors in Colombo. Its purpose is to increase the response capacity in Colombo in the protection concerns that civilians are dealing with.

Disappearances in Colombo seemed to have been reduced with the arrest of several individuals including an air force commander. Again, accusations about the involvement of high level government officials have come up in the press. It is learnt that the missing Vice-Chancellor of the Eastern University, which NPSL was actively trying to address, is dead. The family that sought the support of NP seems to have accepted the persistent rumors that appeared about his death even though there is no concrete evidence.

As indicated, NPSL is attempting to create space for local people at different levels. It has expanded its network significantly. Together with one of its partners it has been able to facilitate a networking and coordination and advocacy initiative between UNICEF and Colombo civil society actors.

Due to the involvement by NPSL in sensitive cases and the fact that few other organizations take them up, it also makes NPSL and the local partners more vulnerable. It is believed that the Trincomalee grenade incident where a grenade was found in our car is a result of the work by NP. In May, NPSL and other organizations received threats by email. This has been addressed at the highest levels and the threats stopped. NPSL takes these threats very serious but takes a proactive approach, thus continues to seek the dialogue with possible perpetrators and those who have the potential to make threats. At the same time, NPSL has revised and improved its security protocols and awareness with the arrival of the Security Coordinator, Bernard O'Sullivan, who has established a Security Working Group within NPSL.

NPSL welcomed three new FTMs early June – Gabriela Chiani (Italy), Jyoti Chakma (Germany) and Ali Palh (Pakistan) who were able to take part in one of NPSL's workshops before their deployment in the east. This retreat was a success - progress was made on some of the outstanding issues such as work plans and information management and the relaxing environment also served to reconnect with colleagues and to get recharged.

In May, NPSL also greeted NP's two external evaluators (Hagen Berndt and Hakima Habib) who came to Sri Lanka to hold interviews with NPSL staff and partners. Their report will be ready in July.

As part of the strategy, NPSL is developing the skills of the staff to be able to deal with the many areas it is involved in. Several staff, both national and international, took part in courses on IDP protection and advocacy. At the same time, NPSL believes it should share its lessons within the wider NP. For this reason, NPSL staff member, King, participated in the training of assessors in France. In Colombo, interviews were held for various local and international positions including a new Communication Manager and Grants Manager. (Early July, NPSL hired Niruban Muttiah (Sri Lanka) as new Communication Manager at NPSL.)

The months of July and August are generally difficult for NPSL. Many of our colleagues are on much deserved leave, just like the staff of other international actors in Sri Lanka. This is also understood by the combatants who, no doubt, will try to take advantage of the reduced presence of internationals.

## **Philippines- Mindanao (written by Atif Hameed)**

### *General situation*

1. MNLF and the Government of the Philippines (GRP) are scheduled to resume tripartite talks with the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Qatar in July. The talks between GRP and MILF were scheduled for after the elections, but mistrust arose with the sudden resignation of the Chair of the GRP Peace Panel. Given the parallel peace processes covering the same territories between MNLF and GRP on one hand and between MILF and GRP on the other, tensions are also observable between the two Moro organisations. Sometimes, these tensions escalate into localised bouts of fighting that result in burning of houses and displacement of villagers. Although MNLF and MILF have a Coordination Committee to sort out differences and strengthen ties, its operational structure has loopholes through which violence emanates.

2. Sporadic bomb blasts and kidnappings are on the rise and often go unexplained as to who the real perpetrators were. The most high profile kidnapping that occurred in June was of the Italian priest, Father Bossi, in Zamboanga Sibugay province. Mindanao Peace Weavers, the network of civil society networks, is advocating fervently for his early release.
3. There is an observable surge in US military and civilian presence in both Central and Western Mindanao. The Visiting Forces Agreement between the US government and the GRP has increased the apprehensions of the locals about the intentions and impact of Balikatan (US-Philippines alliance).
4. The Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division, which is in charge of Central Mindanao, is participating in peace-building and conflict resolution workshops/seminars organised by local civil society movements. The objective of the chief of the Division is to make his officer corps and soldiers more thoughtful about diplomatically resolving tensions instead of resorting to arms.
5. In Sulu, the Philippine Army is still hunting down 'Armed Lawless Groups' as well as what it considers to be "loose commanders" of the MNLF. This pursuit is connected to the mini-war in Panamao in April 2007. As the situation is yet to settle down, there are rumours that formal military operations could be launched in July.
6. New provincial and municipality-level Local Government representatives (including Governors and Mayors) have been sworn in around the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, although disputes about some of the election results for the national level (Philippine Congress) still persist.

#### *NP's Work*

##### Main Office

1. The Cotabato Main Office continued to support the ICP field teams by offering advice on day-to-day basis. This included all the programmatic aspects, with a special emphasis on ways to build constructive relationships with stakeholders on the ground. Main Office staff spent considerable time in the field sites to guide the ICPs in their initial steps.
2. To facilitate the work of both field sites, the Main Office had detailed meetings with various top-level arms of the Government of Philippines and the two revolutionary groups. These included the GRP and MILF Coordination Committees on Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), the MNLF political leadership, and relevant Mayors. To get overall support regarding the NP Project, the main office contacted the Department of National Defence of the GRP through one Advisory Board Member.
3. The Main Office, in collaboration with NP Brussels, submitted a funding proposal to the Delegation of the European Commission in Manila. It also made follow-ups with other potential donors and gave them relevant updates from the field sites.
4. The Main Office is developing a communications strategy, involving the Communications' Officer and the Project Director. Regular meetings and consultations were kept up with all the key Advisory Board members and their point persons on the ground.
5. A new Administrative and Finance Officer was hired by the Main Office in mid-June. The Office interiors were rearranged after the training to reflect the fully operational nature of its work. A search has been launched to procure two second-hand vehicles of good condition. Alien Employment Permits of ICPs were secured by the Main Office from the Department of Labour and Employment in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

6. The Main Office acquired a name board, vests, T-shirts, stickers and other stationery items, all produced locally with NP insignia. The relevant items among these were instantly transferred to the ICP teams for usage in the field.

### Sulu Team

1. The Sulu ICP team was invited to participate in the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on the Tripartite Talks between OIC, GRP and MNLF. This was an event convened by the NGO umbrella “Mindanao Peace Weavers” (MPW) wherein NP was warmly welcomed to Sulu by many speakers. One NP ICP addressed this gathering of community members, parties to the conflict and civil society movements for about 15 minutes. The Sulu ICP team was accorded the honour of being podium guests at the swearing-in ceremony of the new Provincial Governor and Board Members (legislators) in Jolo.

2. The Sulu team went on its first field trip outside Jolo to the Barangay (lowest administrative unit) of Buansa in Indanan municipality along with an MPW medical mission. Given the risks that are often associated with foreigners in Sulu, the team slowly increased its visibility in Jolo by eating outdoors, taking tricycles and roaming around with local partners. The Team also assigned internal codes to various actors in Jolo and beyond for use in NP’s telephonic and Email communication.

3. The Sulu team maintained existing contacts and followed up with old relationships. It also initiated new contacts by paying courtesy calls to highly placed officials. The attitude of the AFP towards NP’s intention of opening a field office in Jolo has gradually shifted in a positive direction. The team also discussed and negotiated with the AFP to have security downgraded to civilian-clothed policemen not carrying visible firearms. The understanding is that, in the long run, the team will not be required to possess armed escorts.

A final decision if a permanent team in Sulu is feasible given the security situation will be taken around end of July.

### Central Mindanao Team

1. The Central Mindanao team, in consultation with the Main Office and local partners, identified Barangay Dapiawan in Datu Saudi municipality of Maguindanao province as the most suitable location for the field office that matches NP’s mandate. It continued the efforts for establishing the office in Dapiawan by visiting offices of the mayors of surrounding municipalities, local partners and MILF representatives in and around Dapiawan.

2. The Central Mindanao team, along with the Main Office, kept a watch on an armed conflict that broke out in Bakat area between two rebel commanders of different outfits. It was present along with local peace advocates in the Barangays of Ganta, Dapiawan, and Dasawao (which received evacuees from Barangay Bakat). The local partners appreciated the cautious response of NP, considering that these are the initial weeks of the team’s deployment. The team disseminated information about the situation in Bakat to NP main office, our partners in Cotabato on the ground, joint monitoring posts on the ground and international NGOs.

3. The Central Mindanao team strengthened relationships with the Local Government Units and some of the MILF and AFP commanders that it had already met. With the aim of boosting the legitimacy of NP’s presence, the team, in the company of local partners, met Barangay officials and scheduled meetings with communities in their respective areas. It also visited new Barangays

to meet local leaders and community members for the first time. It was also invited by the community to two large social events in the municipality of Datu Piang, where the team has a temporary residence in a boarding house. Such events helped the team to immerse itself in the field site.

## **Guatemala (written by Betsy Crites)**

### *General situation*

1. La Unidad - Proactive with National Police: In spite of the criticism and distrust of the National Police, The Unit of Protection of Defenders of Human Rights (La Unidad) has taken a proactive step to protect human rights defenders. La Unidad has reached an agreement with the National Civil Police emergency service, 110, to respond to calls of human rights defenders who are being watched and/or followed by persons presumably gathering information. This emergency number has been used in the past following break-ins, car robberies or assassinations. Now, the proposal is to use this service when suspicious persons or cars are seen in front of their offices or homes. The hope is to break the cycle of “intelligence” which later enables other kinds of attacks.

To establish this relationship, La Unidad is giving training workshops to the Police dispatchers explaining the work of human rights defenders and how they foresee this cooperation working. NP volunteers have accompanied the staff on these occasions and observed an open relationship between the Police dispatchers and La Unidad staff. On one visit, the dispatchers even showed the staff how their computer programs function.

On the other end of the operation, La Unidad has sent out a memo to human rights organizations asking that the defenders consider using this service. The memo states that international pressure has been directed to the Ministry of Government to provide more effective security measures and that this has opened up a new response mechanism for defenders that has a preventive character. Potential callers are instructed to identify themselves as a human rights defender in whatever category they belong (e.g. labor, farmer, journalist, activist) to allow for some follow-up on the preventive action. They may not want to give their name or that of their organization, but La Unidad explains that it would help this process if they did. They will need to give their location so a patrol car can be sent to the site.

This act of trust placed with the very agency that has been accused of abuses and incompetence has raised eye-brows, and some protests, in the human rights community. La Unidad staff counters that this opens several possibilities. It may help an institution such as the PNC recuperate some credibility and legitimacy by strengthening honest employees. It offers the PNC an opportunity to perform competently with assignments that require less technological capacity and skill. It allows the human rights defenders to follow up when the response has been inadequate before things get more life threatening. With an inside line of communication, defenders can report problems to the directors of the dispatchers. They can also track the record of patrols over time and watch for patterns of patrols that seem hostile or unresponsive.

2. Legacy of the War - “Civil Self-Defense Patrols”: The community of Los Cimientos, in the department of El Quiche, has been divided for many years by the legacy of the “Civil Self-defense Patrols” local groups of campesinos organized, armed, and forced by the army to do patrol duty during the war years. Over time, many recruits adopted the practices of the army and found it to their advantage. The Peace Accords of 1996 mandated the disarming of these groups.

In spite of that directive, many communities continue to deal with the divisive and violent legacy of these patrols, now self-named “community leaders”.

In Los Cimientos, at least seventeen men in this community kept their arms and, according to the “denouncements” continued to intimidate and control the rest of the population. One of the main leaders, a Mayan himself, is said to have acquired considerable wealth in the process. In recent years a large group of men in the community, some of whom participated previously, have tried to resist forced service in the patrols, and have sought the support of government authorities, but to no avail. According to those who are resisting, the armed men have used threats and assassinations to exact free labor of their neighbors. If farmers don’t patrol, they must pay Q50/day. If they don’t pay that, they are forced at gun point to work for 3 days in the fields of the leaders.

Eventually, the threats and attacks became so severe that many families fled the area, believing their lives were in danger. Some 218 people left between May 7 and 10. Some of them took refuge in the mountains, some sought help in other villages, and some arrived in the capital determined to press their case with the national government, the press, international bodies, and human rights organizations. NP accompanied La Unidad to take their testimony and afterwards as it has accompanied the group through the steps in “denouncing” the abuses.

The refugee group has presented a list of “changes” they are requesting including that the group of 17 be disarmed and that a police sub-station be established in the town to assure their safety. They have taken the direction of pressuring government officials to take responsibility for disarming the 17 and assuring their safe return. They also seek assistance in pursuing a legal process to bring the armed men to justice for past abuses. They have not favored a conflict resolution approach arguing that that was attempted on two previous occasions, but the same dynamic has recurred. They say they cannot come to a satisfactory resolution as long as the other group remains armed.

The government response has been sympathetic but slow. A police patrol was sent to the town, but was repelled by gunfire. Another attempt was made to look for arms, but none were found. The situation of the Los Cimientos refugees has some urgency. The owners of the donated space where they are lodged has tried to put a time limit on their stay. Even so the conditions of the place where 107 people share one bathroom are sub-human. They have lost this year’s harvest so even if they return now they will need food supplies through next year’s harvest in December of 2008.

At least two collaborators working in human rights have told NP they see this as an important case because of its potential to open the way for resolution with the many other communities that are plagued with this legacy of the “civil patrols”. The NP team is continuing to follow closely their progress.

3. Violence and Fear in Election Year: According to a study by Movimiento Pro Justicia, between January 2005 and June 2006, 94-96% of the crimes committed in Guatemala were never even investigated. In 2007, an election year, the levels of violence indicate that the criminals, whatever their motivation, understand the odds of being held responsible.

Fear in the population can be measured with polls such as we quoted in the May report (86% put insecurity as their top concern) or with the rolls of razor wire that line the tops of walls or the number of cars with darkened windows. Small stores guard their inventory behind a cage. Customers must request and pay for their goods through bars. Private security guards with high powered rifles stand at the doors of restaurants and stores that do allow the public to enter. But all this is the back drop even before election-related violence enters in.

A most disconcerting phenomenon that influences a large population is the assassination of urban bus drivers. During 2006, 53 urban bus drivers were assassinated. By June 10 of this year 25 urban bus drivers had lost their lives. Since there is a longer track record of this problem it would appear that the elections are not the primary factor. Earlier in the year reports focused on extortionists who threaten drivers if they don't pay a "tax". As the election campaigning has progressed, however, it has become a political football. High level functionaries including President Berger attribute the deadly trend to political parties seeking to destabilize the government or to gain advantage for a "get tough" program. Candidates have accused other parties of creating a climate of fear and they in turn have been accused of using the situation for their political advantage.

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States visited Guatemala as part of its electoral monitoring. Their report compared the situation with the last election stating, "the magnitude of the concern over the climate of insecurity and violence is greater than what we found in the electoral process of 2003." The mission was in the country 22 days and spoke to Government authorities, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Human Rights Ombudsman, civil society, and presidential and vice presidential candidates. Everyone agreed, according to their report, that the violence at this stage in the elections is cause for concern. They emphasized the problem of the economic influence of drug traffickers on the elections in some regions, but on a positive note, they applauded the review mechanisms that have been set up to monitor the electoral campaigns.

4. June 21, 2007 and the Law Against Forced Disappearances: The summer solstice was a long day of remembrance for the families of the disappeared. A mass in the National Cathedral and a photo exhibit in Central Park were the centerpieces of a week of events commemorating the victims of forced disappearances. Almost twenty years ago various organizations agreed to designate June 21 as the National Day Against Forced Disappearances. On that date in 1980 twenty-seven union activists were kidnapped ("disappeared") from their headquarters in Guatemala City and never seen again. The commonly quoted estimate is that 45,000 people were taken in similar fashion over the years, mostly in the late 70's and early 80's.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> the organizers invited members of Congress to speak about the proposed law, which would form a National Commission to Search for Persons, Victims of Forced Disappearance and other Forms of Disappearance. The Commission would be autonomous and its objective would be to identify and find the people or their remains, to provide some estimate of the damages and injuries caused by the crimes, and to coordinate the implementation of reparations.

The authors of the bill estimate the Commission will need 15 years to develop a National Registry of victims and to resolve all the cases. This bill does not propose to bring to justice the perpetrators. It will, however, extend psychological support and limited legal aid to family members.

Fifteen organizations supported this forum including GAM, a member organization of NP, The National Movement of Human Rights, and two semi-autonomous government agencies. On of these, the President's Commission on Human Rights (COPREDEH) went a step further and placed a full page ad voicing strong support for the bill.

Friday evening, the 22<sup>nd</sup>, four key leaders who survived the repression of the 70's and 80's, were honored and paid "homage" by an organization of children of the disappeared (H.I.J.O.S). All of the honorees had spent time in exile due to threats against their lives. One of the four is well known to NPG. Miguel Angel Albizuere is a founder of the National Movement of Human

Rights, the parent organization to the Unit of Protection of Human Rights Defenders, which NPG accompanies.

On June 30, H.I.J.O.S. organized a march in the main part of the capital. It was sparsely attended and included painting slogans on walls and cars. June 30 is also Armed Forces Day and the military held a large parade in the central park. NPG attended both events. PBI and twenty plus journalists were also present at the H.I.J.O.S. march. Heavily armed security forces blocked the marchers from reaching the central park and threw tear gas to deter their progress.

### *The work of the team*

Personnel: Ann Frisch finished her three month term and returned to the U.S. on June 30. Ann left us with an extensive photo gallery and the written summaries of several of the cases covered by La Unidad. Her blog was an important outlet for information about our work to friends and followers of NP. We are grateful for her positive contributions and attitude and for all her strength and spirit in helping to launch the Guatemala project.

NP Staff visit: David Hartsough visited the Guatemala team for 4 days and assisted with evaluation interviews with members of the staff of La Unidad. He also participated in an accompaniment here in the city. Betsy and David met with Claudia before she left for two weeks of travel. David introduced us to Amilcar Mendez, an internationally renown human rights activist. We also shared two social occasions with Heidi Flores, daughter of Mel Duncan, and her family. We greatly appreciated David's visit, his helpful observations and his connections.

Three-month evaluation: The evaluation carried out during and after David's visit consisted in informal conversations with individual staff members of La Unidad in which we asked for their general assessment of the accompaniment and their opinion on specific issues (e.g. risk assessment, whether to accompany inside meetings and testimonies, accompaniment to their homes in the evenings, concerns and suggestions for improvement.

La Unidad staff all affirmed that our presence had increased their sense of security and even that of the people they visit. They appreciate that we are versed in the overall situation of Guatemala and they want us to be well informed on the cases they are covering as well. Therefore, they prefer to have us in the meetings with them rather than sitting outside, even though we don't participate. They see it as enhancing their security in various ways.

The staff also noted that the threats received in February and last May were directed at the institution and not the individuals so at this time they don't feel that the risk justifies full time accompaniment beyond work hours. Claudia had also said this and that she would let us know if she felt the risk justified more intensive accompaniment. The staff said they most appreciate our presence when they leave to take testimonies and especially for trips in the countryside.

The staff mentioned some concern or discomfort that we are underutilized for hours or days while the staff is occupied in administrative matters. (At least one NP volunteer maintains a presence in the office everyday, all day. Usually, one other volunteer accompanies Claudia. On many days, this leaves at least one volunteer free, unless the first volunteer leaves with a staff member.)

Given this, and the sense that the security risk for the individuals in La Unidad is low at this time, we have started conversations with NP and La Unidad about the possibility of taking on some additional short term accompaniment assignments, without exposing La Unidad at a time when we might be needed.

Public Relations: During the month Betsy continued outreach to various organizations including the Forum for International NGOs, which hosted a workshop on computer security technology. She met with Frank LaRue, head of the government President's Commission on Human Rights and later accompanied La Unidad to a gathering they hosted to solicit input on the national plan for human rights. She met with a representative of the Dutch Platform Against Impunity in Guatemala, which includes several international organizations working to encourage embassies to take a proactive stand on human rights. The team has also maintained collegial contacts with members of the other accompaniment organizations.

## **Colombia**

### *Project Preparation*

Consultant René Perea was joined in June by fundraising Director Agnieszka Komoch and for a shorter period also by Regional Coordinator Alvaro Ramirez Durini. René and Agnieszka visited a number of potential donors as well as other INGOs working in Bogotá, and with Alvaro they went to visit one of the communities that had received the NP exploratory team the year before: The community Civipaz in Meta.

Regarding the registration of NP, it was decided to delay that process until a concrete starting date of the project could be identified.

## **Uganda**

### *General situation*

The Ugandan government and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels have signed a new agreement in the latest round of talks. A five-part peace process is envisaged, with the issue of war crimes remaining a problem with the ICC indictment on the one hand, and the attempts by both Uganda and LRA to find alternative ways of addressing human rights abuses locally rather than sending Kony and his people to The Hague.

### *Project Preparation*

In the second half of June a two person Advance Team arrived in Uganda: Oloo Otieno (Kenya) who earlier served as a FTM in Sri Lanka and who is the designated Project Director for a project in North Uganda, and Shall Sinha (Canada) who had already spent two months in Uganda mostly for fundraising purposes in January and February. Their main task is to re-assess the need for a NP project in North Uganda given the quickly changing circumstances in that area. We hope to have a report ready for the IGC around or even before the International Assembly in Nairobi in late September.

*This report has been written by Betsy Crites, Atif Hameed, Christine Schweitzer and Marcel Smits.*