

*Global Civil Society for Peace and Human Rights: Communicative Dimensions and Performative Effects of the International Accompaniment of Peace Brigades International in Colombia and Sri Lanka<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract:**

Since its implementation in Latin America in the early eighties, international accompaniment has been consolidated as an effective tool to increase the political space for local activist and communities threatened with politically-motivated violence.

Global civil society can channel its soft power and capacity of having a bearing on the armed parties in order to achieve a rise of the space for local peaceful action. This can be made through international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) offering protective accompaniment on the ground, such as Peace Brigades International, which pioneered international accompaniment.

This paper will argue that this model of intervention relies on a communicative body. The analysis of the still poorly researched relationship between nonviolent civil intervention and communication will be illustrated with Peace Brigades International and its tasks in Colombia and Sri Lanka.

Moreover, it is defended that the communicative strategies not only perform activities in themselves but also facilitate the achievement of positive goals which can be read in the language of needs and satisfactions.

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International accompaniment can be characterized as the physical accompaniment by international activists, of local individuals, organizations or communities threatened with politically-motivated violence. Accompaniment aims to deter the aggressor, taking advantage of the violators' concern about their 'international image'. Whereas the aggressor wants to minimize the political and economic consequences of human rights violations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offering protective accompaniment wish to maximize them.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a brief version of the MPhil thesis *International Accompaniment in Violent Scenarios. A Performative Reading of Peace Brigades International in Colombia*, defended on 15 June 2006, Centre for Peace Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway.

For the time being, several international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) provide protective international accompaniment, such as Witness for Peace (WFP), Fellowship for Reconciliation (FOR) or Peace Brigades International (PBI). Although sharing a commitment with peace and justice, each of these organizations is subject to distinct principles, mandate and objectives and follows a specific *modus operandi*. PBI, the research object of this paper, pioneered the practice of international accompaniment in the 1980s in Central America, intervening nonviolently in countries affected by armed conflicts such as Guatemala or El Salvador.

PBI was originally modelled on previous civil and unarmed peacekeeping experiences, having as closest referents Santhi Sena and World Peace Brigade. The former was envisioned by Gandhi as a major nonviolent force, and since its foundation in the 1950s it was active in fighting riots affecting India during several decades (Shepard, 1987; Arber, 1999). Regarding the latter, it attempted to apply the very same idea of nonviolent intervention on a global scale (Arber, 1999). Although World Peace Brigade achieved some success, it failed to accomplish its ambitious goals and dissolved. Failures coexisted, however, with partial achievements, especially with regards to the enriched exchange of ideas and testing of peace teams models. Moser-Puangsuwan (1995) cites the value of the lessons learned, saying that “the WPB left behind several empowered activists”.

Some of those “empowered activists” were behind the foundations of Peace Brigades International at an international consultation held in Canada in 1981. PBI Principles and Mandate adopted as a result of that meeting incorporated four features that organize and give sense to PBI’s actions. These included (1) a commitment to *nonviolence*, rejecting violence of all kind and from any source; (2) an *international* character, in a double sense: in its field of action, including armed conflicts worldwide, but also in its inner character, inasmuch as it encompasses national groups and volunteers in and from several countries; (3) a *non-partisan* approach to the parties, distancing itself from previous partisan peace interventions (i.e. World Peace Brigade) with the hope of gaining credit and broadening the base of support (Clark, 1983a: 7), and; (4) a *non-hierarchical* functioning, in which the processes and relationships are significant and not the only outcomes.

In that same Declaration of Principles and Mandate, PBI’s mission is stated as being the international presence in a plural sense, one which incorporates physical presence, physical accompaniment, public relations, networking, observing, reporting, and building international

support networks. In addition, it mentioned other methods that can play a role in peacebuilding, such as peace education and mental health recovery<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike Shanti Sena and World Peace Brigade, Peace Brigades International was less ambitious in its goals and instead of pretending that it had the resources to launch an intervention that could stop a war, it would focus on more modest actions that would contribute to the nonviolent transformation of a conflict. As Charles Walker would comment in his evaluation of the foundational meeting, “our determination not to have a second failure [the earlier World Peace Brigade] must moderate zeal with prudent achievable objectives”<sup>3</sup>. Those objectives would change with the daily practice and growth of the organization, and PBI international presence has mainly covered international accompaniment and observation in the field and reporting. In response to a request from local organizations committed to human rights in a violent scenario, PBI analyzes the situation and may establish a mission in the country.

That was the case when the first PBI project was set in motion in 1983 in Guatemala in response to previous petitions of intervention. At that time Guatemala, ruled by the military, was suffering from an armed conflict between left-wing guerrilla movements and the army, and paramilitary. After carrying out several meetings to evaluate the possibilities of entering the country and establish successfully a project on the ground, on 21 March 1983, two days before the state of emergency was to be lifted, the first PBI headquarters were established in Guatemala City.

In parallel, PBI create a Ready Response Brigade for Central America to act in short-term crises, which later that year was deployed in Jalapa, Nicaragua, upon request from Nicaraguan junta. It worked in a refugee town close to the Honduras border for two weeks (Clark, 1983a; 2001). This action was a success story in line with previous peace teams that had interposed themselves between warring groups in order to discourage hostilities. Interposition, however, would not be the tendency of the organization, and in the following years it continued the model of intervention started in Guatemala and based on international accompaniment.

Later in the 1980s, PBI accepted another assignment in Central America, this time responding to a request for accompaniment from El Salvador (1987-1992). PBI also initiated activities in Asia, where it would maintain a presence in Sri Lanka for almost nine years, from

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<sup>2</sup> These are reflected in the mandate of PBI agreed by the 2001 General Assembly and its emphasis on protective accompaniment, which amended 1992 Mandate. See PBI Annual Review 2001, available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/annrept/review02screen.pdf> (Last access in February 2006).

<sup>3</sup> PBI, *The Founding of PBI*. Available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/history.html> (Last Access in May 2006). Clarifications in bracket in the original quotation.

1989 to 1998. To certain extent it was a challenge for the organization, considering the fact that since its foundation PBI had been working exclusively in Central America, where the political and cultural environment were substantially different from that in the former British colony. Despite differences, these countries shared a history of contemporary political violence. Independent since 1948, Sri Lanka has been suffering the effects of the internal armed conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil, in which sporadic armed clashes were replaced in 1983 by open war between the Government in Colombo and northern Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In addition, the Janatha Vikmuthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front that emerged in the southern Sinhalese areas launched a first armed rebellion in 1971, rapidly suppressed (Mahony and Eguren, 1997: 186). In 1987, two years before PBI entered into the country, the JVP launched a second rebellion. Although JVP gained great strength in two occasions in late 1988 and mid-1989, it was subsequently defeated (Moore, 1993: 593) in a "dirty war" with death squads and a bloody dynamic of attacks and counterattacks. According to Amnesty International, up to 30,000 killings were attributed to the government in 1988 and 1989, while the official figure for those attributed to JVP was of 6,517 (in Mahony and Eguren, 1997: 187). This is the situation that PBI encountered when it established its project in the country to accompanied civil society groups. After eight years and a half of presence in Sri Lanka, the project was officially close. The reason behind its closure was the impossibility to meet the Government demand to receive regular information about the accompanied and PBI contacts in the country, along with submitting to the authorities PBI reports before releasing them<sup>4</sup>.

PBI would later be active in North America (1992-1999), the Balkans (1994-2001) and Haiti (1995-2001). In addition, it conducted exploratory missions in the Philippines<sup>5</sup>, Namibia, India/Pakistan, the Middle East (Clark, 1983b: 9), Northern Ireland, Chad, South Africa and the former Soviet Republics (Mahony, 2000: 153). Peace Brigades has active projects in Mexico (1996/1999)<sup>6</sup>, Indonesia (1999), Guatemala<sup>7</sup> (2002), Nepal (2005), and Colombia (1994).

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<sup>4</sup> PBI *Eight and a Half Year of Unarmed Presence Ends*, and PBI *International Human Rights NGO Forced to Leave by Sri Lanka Government* (Press Release, 5 May 1998). Available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/lanka/slp98-5b.html> and <http://www.peacebrigades.org/lanka/slp98-5a.html> (Last access in May 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Peace Brigades International Annual Review 1998, available in <http://www.peacebrigades.org/annrept/ar98eng.html> (Last access in January 2006).

<sup>6</sup> In Mexico, PBI is present in a dual manner: with the coalition SIPAZ in Chiapas, since 1996, and with its own project, established in 1999. See PBI Mexico Project, at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/mexico.html> (Last access in March 2006), and PBI in the SIPAZ Coalition, at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/chiapas.html> (Last access in March 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The first project was active between 1983 and 1999. For an account of the activities of the first project and the reasons for its closure, together with the latter establishment of a renewed project in the country, see PBI Guatemala Project, at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/guatemala.html> (Last access in March 2006).

Regarding the latter, PBI has in Colombia its longest active project, which happens to be also its largest, with more than 30 volunteers distributed in four sub-teams on the ground.

On 3 October 1994, the first members of PBI Colombia arrived in Bogotá to carry out international accompaniment tasks in a highly complex scenario. Having lasted at least forty years, the Colombian armed conflict involves two large guerrilla movements (the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo [FARC-EP] and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional [ELN]), paramilitary forces (the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia [AUC]), and the Colombian army. These groups all act in varied geographical scenarios, including jungles, cities, villages, *haciendas*, lowlands, frontier regions, the Caribbean, and the Andes. This is a protracted armed conflict in which none of the parties have been able to overpower the others, and where civilians have been caught in the crossfire. The human rights situation in Colombia is critical, especially regarding physical security and protection (with assassinations, massacres, kidnappings, death threats, etc.), but also in terms of social, economic, and cultural rights. Although numbers do not tell everything, some are eloquent: from 1988 to 1995, 67,378 people were victims of political violence in Colombia<sup>8</sup>. Between 1994 and 2003, Colombia suffered almost 2,000 massacres which killed more than 10,000 people. In the same period, some 6,300 people “disappeared.” The armed violence generated more than three million internally displaced persons between 1985 and the end of 2004<sup>9</sup>. In 2003, 700 reported deaths were caused by political violence in Colombia<sup>10</sup>.

PBI Colombia, as well as others PBI projects, receives support from fifteen country groups and regional offices which represent the foundations of PBI<sup>11</sup>. Each of these groups is responsible for the recruitment of volunteers, fundraising, publicizing PBI’s activities, and maintaining and strengthening the political and civil support network in order to safeguard PBI volunteers on the teams and the people they accompany<sup>12</sup>. While some country groups are well established and include permanent offices and full-time staff, others remain loose associations of volunteers who joined for short-term campaigns (Mahony, 2000: 159).

Regarding PBI’s structure, each project has a Project Committee and a Project Office. For security reasons, the Project Office is located outside the project country, and it is staffed by a Project Coordinator and local volunteers. PBI’s organization chart also consists of a *General*

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<sup>8</sup> The Inter-Congregational Commission of Peace and Justice data bank (Giraldo, 1996: 17).

<sup>9</sup> Local newspaper *El Tiempo*, 26 September 2004. In PBI PIM, No. 22. Available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/colombia/pim22.pdf> (Last access in May 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Human Security Centre (2006: 73).

<sup>11</sup> As of this writing. See PBI website, at <http://www.peacebrigades.org> (Last access May 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See PBI, *History and Structure*, at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/history.html> (Last access May 2006).

*Assembly*, which is the highest decision-making body and meets every three years; an *International Council*, set up by the General Assembly to implement policies and procedures, with the authority to make decisions between meetings of the General Assembly, and; an *International Office*, based in London. Part-time workers in the International Office are assigned to organizational development, internal communication, finances, and administrative tasks<sup>13</sup>. All decisions within PBI are made through consensus.

### **A Communicative Approach to the Internal Dynamics of International Accompaniment**

PBI power would dissolve if there was not a shared concern among actors in an armed conflict about the projected image and subsequent effects, either positive (mainly funds, military support, and investments) or negative (political exclusion or sanctions). PBI presence on the ground reminds the actors that the eyes of the international community are focused on the conflict and on them in particular. PBI magnifies the possibilities of that pressure, stressing the reactions that would follow any violation of humanitarian law and human rights. It introduces an international variable in the calculation of costs and benefits of a violent action.

Traditionally, international pressure for the respect of human rights targets top officials and decision-makers. This strategy overlooks, however, that systematic violations of human rights requires cooperation along the chain of command. As Mahony (2004) points out in his analysis of the functioning of international accompaniment, international pressure in favour of human rights has been put in practice repeatedly for decades. It is no longer a novel practice; and states, the major recipients of criticism concerned with its international reputation, have had time to develop a full range of countermeasures to avoid the negative effects of that pressure<sup>14</sup>. Mahony (2004: 7-9) refers to these countermeasures as deflectors. One of the most common deflectors is the use of propaganda aimed at damaging the credibility of the organization denouncing the violations and also the victims. In this way, organizations and victims can effectively be labelled as subversives or terrorists, gaining the understanding and indulgence of peer states and international governmental organizations.

Moreover, there are multiple buffers by which states absorb international pressure, including the establishment of governmental agencies to deal with human rights defenders. In this way, the accused State feigns concern and willingness to solve the problem. Smokescreens allow decision-makers to defend themselves, arguing that they are not responsible for the atrocities even recognising their existence. Such is the case with paramilitary activity and death

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<sup>13</sup> PBI, *History and Structure*.

<sup>14</sup> On governmental responses to human rights accusations, see Cohen (1996).

squadrons acting in collusion with authorities. The lack of discipline can also be seen as a justification for the leaders to distance themselves from the abuses. According to Mahony (2004: 8-9), a good accompaniment strategy complements and magnifies international pressure for various reasons:

1. The volunteer accompanying the threatened is directly visible for the possible aggressors.
2. PBI extends the pressure along the chain of command with meetings at all levels, both within the armed forces and the civil institutions, assuring that the message about the international pressure reaches everyone, thus increasing the sense of responsibility.
3. The volunteer's presence in the field increases the profile and the sense of support.
4. The volunteer's presence is a sign of political abnormality in regard to human rights, counteracting the effects of the State buffers.
5. With foreigners on the front line, the respective embassies and governments are necessarily more involved, transferring more pressure on the highest political levels.
6. Even if PBI failed to deter an attack in spite of their presence, it would raise the alarm and activate its emergency international network immediately.

This is a model of intervention that relies on a communicative body, both bi-directional, through dialogue, and unidirectional, with the transmission of messages aimed to show that one is powerful enough to carry out an action. Communicational processes and networks lay the foundations of Peace Brigades and the international accompaniment. A brief list of communicative interaction takes into consideration several levels, namely: firstly, a well-established intra-organizational communication that connects quickly the teams on the ground, the project office in the country, the international office and the international supportive network permits the practice of international accompaniment; secondly, PBI lobbies internationally for getting support towards its work and exercising pressure on stakeholders of the armed conflict; thirdly, PBI itself conducts meetings with authorities and diplomatic corps on a regular basis, to inform them about its activities.

In this study, the communicative analysis of PBI international accompaniment is mainly focused on linguistic organizational communication, at two interrelated levels: internal, within the several organs conforming PBI, and external, that is, with exogenous actors—the host State, other states, the accompanied, international organizations, and so on. PBI external organizational communication is basic in the functioning of international accompaniment. Furthermore, the study of the language used by members of its speech community (discursive

study) is crucial in understanding the performative dynamics of international accompaniment. All in all, the communicative movement generates the necessary requirements for PBI to work.

As stated by Mahony and Eguren (1997), the concept of political space<sup>15</sup> is necessary to understand the positive effects achieved by putting together a foreign volunteer and a local activist:

Each actor in a complex conflict situation, whether a soldier or a human rights activist, perceives a broad array of possible political actions and associates a certain cost or set of consequences with each action. The actor perceives some consequences as acceptable and some as unacceptable, thereby defining the limits of a distinct political space.

(1997: 93)

International accompaniment alters these limits, increasing the available political space to the accompanied while reducing the space for immunity of the aggressor. In spite of international accompaniment, however, there will still be actions of unacceptable consequences for the accompanied. Acceptable consequences may change over time and they depend on the accompanied: for some, torture or the killing of a relative marks the highest bearable point, while for others the threshold is the first death threat. Likewise, the understanding of what is acceptable differs when considering the aggressor.

Mahony and Eguren (1997: 94-95) recognize the factor of uncertainty associated with unforeseeable consequences and the acceptance or rejection of those consequences. For the activist, a death threat might mean an unbearable form of psychological torture. After a year of such threats on a daily basis, the same activist may become accustomed to it. A dictator can foresee an international reprimand as a reaction to the slaughter of a peasant community, but eventually he will discover that such a negative reaction can be handled without much trouble. In this sense, the function of international accompaniment refers to the expansion of the available space, increasing both the real and the perceived limits.

### **International Accompaniment and Communication: Performative Dimensions**

Mahony and Eguren (1997: 98) believe that deterrence is all about perception. It could be added that communication is a key factor in the construction of perceptions. As shown, the achievement of a real increase in the political space of the accompanied involves transmitting the message to the aggressor that his actions will have certain costs. In frequent and persistent contact at all levels, without threats but showing potential, the accompaniment becomes

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<sup>15</sup> Political space as used here refers to the existing space (possibilities) for carrying out a politically-oriented social action.



effective as a protective measure<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, the physical presence of the volunteer helps to guarantee that the message is received. The accompaniment of local activists and communities also has an impact on those accompanied in their perception of being accompanied in a personal and an emotional sense. At this level, interpersonal communicative interaction also plays a definitive role.

The communication produced by PBI is neither carried out in a vacuum nor neutral in its results; it has consequences such as empowerment or deterrence. From a philosophy of language in line with the Speech Acts Theory, as stated by J.L. Austin<sup>17</sup> (1975) it can be affirmed that the communicative message (discourse) not only *says* things in the sense of referring to but also *performs* an activity in itself. All forms of verbal communication, both written and oral, generate an action by the mere fact of existence. As Austin (1975: 12) puts it, “to say something is to do something, or [...] by saying or in saying something we are doing something”.

This performative dimension of the utterance at the internal level is known as illocutionary act or force, and it implies a compromise with one another: taking into account that to say something is equal to doing something, not only what we say is important but also the force behind what is said, that is, what we try to do when stating something (to admonish, to warn, to threat and so on). It is in the illocutionary act where the connection between the speaker and the listener is established through the illocutionary effects. If I seriously promise that I am going to do something, I am compromising myself to do it, and the understanding occurs when the listener takes up the force of what is said (Martínez Guzmán, 2001: 199). In every utterance there is present an illocutionary compromise (or speakers’ compromise) because of the force behind the message, and a perlocutionary consequence or action produced as an external result of it.

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<sup>16</sup> Those contacts, on the other hand, are also necessary to protect the foreign volunteer working in the field.

<sup>17</sup> Originally formulated by Austin as lectures at Harvard in 1955 and compiled posthumously in 1962 in the largely referenced *How to do things with Words*, the Speech Acts Theory has caught the attention of many not only in the realm of the ordinary language philosophy or philosophy in general but in several other disciplines. Austin’s work was continued by Searle and debated and criticised in one way or another in some of the writings of Derrida, De Man, Benveniste or Bourdieu, to mention a few. The very same foundations of the Speech Acts Theory have paved the way to innovative approaches in linguistics, sociology and literary studies, along with feminist theory (Butler), security studies (Copenhagen School) or peace studies (Martínez Guzmán), among other fields in social sciences. The Speech Acts Theory has opened up a full range of possibilities and equally generated controversy and debate, deserving an extensive list of academic works. A detailed study of it is further beyond the scope of this analysis, which does not get bogged down in all the particularities of Austin’s work but remains close to its salient points regarding performativity and their applicability in the theory and practice of PBI’s work.

Applying this to PBI's model in the framework of meetings, networks, and interlocutors, from a focus on its performativity it is possible to map out distinctive relations at several levels. Interlocutors in PBI communicative relations include authorities, people accompanied, volunteers, the supportive network (including both "anonymous" citizens and high-level contacts and policy-makers) and members of the civil society (local/international). Each receives a similar message, with changeable illocutionary forces linked to compromises, and with different perlocutionary effects depending on *a posteriori* interpretation.

Communicative processes, the utterance with an illocutionary force and a perlocutionary act, require a speaker and a listener to perform an activity that entails interpersonal compromises, consolidating a social bond. Martínez Guzmán (2001:199) refers to that bond as "communicative solidarity", a necessary union for the communicative understanding to be possible. As far as PBI is concerned, the compromised word means in the first place an encounter between Colombian civil society and the "global civil society". Solidarity, intrinsic in the communicative relation, is rescued. Violence starts with the rupture of that communicative solidarity (Martínez Guzmán, 2001: 200).

Two major interlocutors have to be stressed, namely, the host government and the accompanied. Regarding the former, PBI strategy relies upon a communicative movement which includes a fluid channel of communication with the local authorities, on the one hand, and a strong international supportive network, on the other. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to analyze in depth the intrinsic characteristics of PBI-host Government relationships<sup>18</sup>, it is worth mentioning that there is a conflictive matrix at the very core of that relationship, one that relies on the competition over securitization between those entities and its illocutionary consequences.

PBI, as a human rights organization and because of its proximity to local civil society groups, is likely to suffer the effects of such a competition in the shape of verbal harassment. That has been the case in Colombia, where even the President of the Republic, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, has accused local NGOs of being "politickers of the terrorists" and openly criticized INGOs such as Amnesty International or PBI. Official statements against human rights NGOs in general, and PBI in particular, put them all in real danger, sabotage their work, destroy the social dialogue and exacerbate polarization and agitation. Denying these groups the word, or affirming that one is burdened by terrorism, as usually state representatives do unleashed the spiral of the violence by breaking the original communicative solidarity. In doing so, the seeds

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<sup>18</sup> For such analysis, see Fabra Mata (2006).

of direct violence are sowed. Finally, the targeted groups, such as PBI, use international mobilization to prove their capacity for reaction, the social capital for their work, and their power to use nonviolence against the complex violent dynamics of the armed conflict.

With regards to the accompanied, PBI major interlocutor since they are the ones benefiting from their work, PBI communicative strategy and the discursive practises attached to it bear a significant impact at the perlocutionary level. Is international accompaniment significant? What is/are its effect/s on those accompanied? From the study of statements made by members of local organizations accompanied by PBI in Colombia and Sri Lanka, it is inferred that PBI international accompaniment is not only a means of protecting threatened individuals. Although there is *prima facie* evidence of certain level of effectiveness of international accompaniment as protection, the very actors benefiting from it admit the axiomatic fallible condition of international accompaniment.

Despite its significance, the protection afforded by the PBI international accompaniment is not an impermeable shield. As shown before, it depends on the perpetrators' rationality and an evaluation of further costs and benefits. In spite of PBI attempts to increase the potential costs to the point of making the attack not "attractive", aggression will not vanish completely. In Colombia, like in other countries where PBI conducts projects, along with the extensive list of successful stories of protection of those accompanied there have been harassment, deadly threats, direct violence and killings.

But this acknowledgment that international accompaniment is not a sure-fire method, despite its great popularity, compels researchers to turn to its other possible effects. What does international accompaniment offer beyond personal protection? In connection with the opening of the political space, the international accompaniment also has a say in the empowerment of those accompanied, linked to a type of psychological encouragement and enhancement of organizational profile and visibility.

Why is the demand for international accompaniment so great if its measurement is difficult and at some point its deterrence seems to be substantially reduced? While accepting the effectiveness of international accompaniment as a protective measure, as recognized by those accompanied and many others, it is likely that other gains are attached to international accompaniment. One way of understanding international accompaniment that is frequently stressed by the accompanied is to depict it as a form of committed solidarity. Accompaniment, understood in this manner, has an ethical dimension with psychological positive effects: the type of solidarity given by PBI is a close and noticeable one, directly manifested in the

volunteers. There is a common ground for the exchange of experiences under very difficult conditions where the risks are present and extremely destructive.

Solidarity, in this sense, transforms itself into a form of personal support that is invaluable in situations of political violence: “The PBI armour-plate our hopes and dreams against the silence and isolation that the merchants of death force upon us”, said Soraya Gutiérrez from Colombian Jose Alvear Restrepo Lawyers’ Collective<sup>19</sup>, echoing a widespread opinion among the accompanied ones. Amara Hapuarachchi, Sri Lankan human rights defender, expressed in similar terms when commenting on the utility of PBI presence on the ground:

In many workshops, PBI has helped us with their presence. In the current situation, to get together groups of ex-detainees is a potential security threat. You never know what could happen, the participants feel very frightened of going out of their homes. *When they know that PBI will be there that's about 75% of the way to relax them. They feel more secure, comfortable [...]. Sometimes I feel kind of nervous, PBI helps me to relax, even if I know that the things that make me feel nervous are still there. People also relax when they see foreigners around. They know the forces will be more cautious with what they do. Your presence also gives us some more strength, courage. It may come a time when we will be able to do these things on our own. I don't see PBI as foreigners or white people, for me you are more like friends [...]. You have a big sense of being one with the people.*<sup>20</sup>

The sort of accompaniment offered is, in this sense, also psychological, and as such it has positive effects on those who are threatened. What is more, this solidarity between the foreign volunteer and his or her local accompanied may contribute to the establishment of bonds not only between them but also between their respective organizations and, in a more global sense, between social movements and civil society. As Coy (1993: 241-242) has put it, “such solidarity builds bridges between peoples, tearing at the interlocking but artificial barriers that define the nation-state system”.

For the organizations there is another positive effect of PBI international accompaniment: the enhancement of their profile. Although in the past the transition from a low to a high profile was not always collectively understood as desirable, in contemporary Colombia and linked with the openness of the political space, the increase in public visibility has an impact on international support for the organization. That international support constitutes valuable social capital that can be transformed into tangible profits, such as funds or protection. This fact is widely recognized by the accompanied. In 2004, PBI conducted through its European Office a survey on the perceptions of and proposals from local human rights defenders on the European

<sup>19</sup> *The Observer*, 27 November 2005.

<sup>20</sup> PBI, *Interview with Amara Hapuarachchi: A Batticaloa Human Rights Activist*. August 1995, available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/lanka/slp9501.html> (Last access May 2006). Emphasis Added.

Union missions' role in protection issues<sup>21</sup>. Answers from the Colombian participating organizations<sup>22</sup> have shown a “high level of contacts among Colombian organizations and EU Missions, directly or through International NGOs” and recognized explicitly that “the opportunity for HRD [human rights defenders] to advocate in Europe increase[s] their visibility and diminish[es] consequently threats and risks”.

All these positive effects (protection as personal safety, psychological encouragement, enhancement of the organizational profile, opening of the political space) converge in different manners and constitute, as we will see below, a certain empowerment of those accompanied, both at the individual and the group level.

### **International Accompaniment as Human Needs' Satisfier**

According to Chilean economist Max-Neef<sup>23</sup> (1991: 18), “fundamental human needs are finite, few and classifiable. [They] are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. What changes, both over time and through cultures, is the way or the means by which are satisfied”. This distinction between needs and satisfiers is a crucial one and helps to understand the universality and specificity of social groups, grasping cultural change as a matter of amendment of satisfiers.

Although Max-Neef does provide a taxonomy of human needs, he takes great care to acknowledge the danger of taking it in isolation and as definitive. His operational classification is conceived as a matrix in which needs are organized according to two main axes, the existential categories of Being (attributes), Having (institutions, norms, mechanisms, tools), Doing (actions) and Interacting (locations and *milieus*) and the axiological categories of Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Creation, Identity and Freedom.

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<sup>21</sup> *Peace Brigades International Survey on Perceptions and Proposals From Human Rights Defenders on the Role of European Union Missions in Protection*. PBI Brussels, November 2004. Available at <http://www.peacebrigades.org/beo/beopubs.html> (Last access in March 2006).

<sup>22</sup> ASFADDES, the Inter-congregational Commission of Justice and Peace, Freedom Juridical Corporation (CJL), Centre for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP), Leaders in Action Association (Colombia Peace Planet), The Association for Alternative Social Advancement “Minga”.

<sup>23</sup> In this analysis of international accompaniment through a human needs focus I have chosen Max-Neef's classification of basic needs as a theoretical paradigm, because of (a) its explanatory construct with a critical distinction between needs and their correspondent satisfiers, and (b) its methodological basis. Other authors, however, have dealt with the question of human needs and its typology, if any (i.e. Maslow, [1954] 1987; Galtung, 1994, 2001).

At this point, Max-Neef's typology leaves room for the introduction of a very specific satisfier, the international accompaniment, to see which needs it can fully or partially satisfy. As argued above, the international accompaniment of PBI provides much more than physical protection, covering other spheres which fit into the definition of human needs.

Satisfiers, as described here, are plural and countless, and they fall into five groups according to their scope (Max-Neef, 1991: 31-37):

- Violators or Destroyers, which in spite of being presented as satisfiers of a given need, do not only wipe out any chance to satisfy that need in the long run but also damage the adequate satisfaction of other needs.
- Pseudo-satisfiers, which produce a false sense of satisfaction of a given need.
- Inhibiting satisfiers, meaning those that over satisfy a given need and may curtail the possibility of satisfying other needs.
- Singular satisfiers, which generate the satisfaction of a given need.
- Synergic satisfiers, which satisfy a given need while stimulating and contributing to the fulfilment of other needs.

Into which group does international accompaniment fall? Taking as a starting point that international accompaniment is indeed a satisfier of at least one fundamental need, the need for protection<sup>24</sup>, the list of possible effects upon other human needs expands inasmuch as the accompanied themselves recognize its other benefits. In sum, international accompaniment acts as a synergic satisfier, recognized indirectly as such by the accompanied that benefit from it in more than a single manner. A possible reading of international accompaniment from a Max-Neef's taxonomy of needs and classification of their satisfiers will give this depiction:

<b>Synergic Satisfier</b>	<b>Need</b>	<b>Needs, the satisfaction of which it stimulates</b>
International Accompaniment	Protection	Affection, Participation, Freedom

<sup>24</sup> In my understanding, protection differs from subsistence in the more biological dimension of the latter. As Max-Neef stated (1991: 31), destroyers seem to be particularly related to protection: a supposed satisfier such as arms race or censorship, impairs the satisfaction of needs for subsistence, affection, participation and freedom (the former), and understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom (the latter).

Protection is the specific need addressed by international accompaniment: the history of PBI, its foundations and mandate show evidence of it. Moreover, Colombian PBI local partners benefiting from international accompaniment, and Sri Lankan civil society organizations before, have stressed protection as a major benefit and a decisive reason for its demand. As a synergic satisfier, international accompaniment has also a positive impact on the needs for affection, participation and freedom: the previously remarked solidarity attached to international accompaniment stimulates the satisfaction of the need for affection, combining it with a sense of care and contributing to psychological healing. Solidarity and encouragement represent distinctive outcomes (and roots) of international accompaniment that take action to satisfy the need for participation. In this regard, PBI international accompaniment is instrumental in the creation of a broader political space for those accompanied, permitting individuals and groups to exercise their rights. The latter is related directly to the need for freedom to develop oneself as an integral human being. On the relationship among participation, freedom and needs it is worth recalling Amartya Sen's depiction of the functions of democracy:

Political freedom is a part of human freedom in general, and exercising civil and political rights is a crucial part of good life of individuals as social beings. Political and social participation has *intrinsic value* for human life and well-being. To prevent from participation in the political life of the community is a major deprivation.

(1999a: 10)<sup>25</sup>

Sen, although not employing explicitly the term "need", elevates (political and social) participation to the category of intrinsic value, which certainly is not a need but shares a high degree of substance and any impediment to its satisfaction must be seen as a major deprivation, since political liberties are central to well-being (Nussbaum, 2000: 96). These effects of international accompaniment thus have an elevated significance because of their contribution to avoid the deprivation of participation and freedom.

Every need that is not adequately satisfied produces a human poverty (Max-Neef, 1991: 18-19). The conceptualization of poverty is more than the pitiable economic view of it as an income below a certain threshold; the concept itself expands to a point when it becomes more correct to talk about multiple poverties: poverty of subsistence, poverty of protection, poverty of affection, poverty of participation, poverty of freedom and so on. Each of these poverties generates a correspondent pathology (Max-Neef, 1991: 19). Hence, poverties of freedom, participation and protection, along with some others, engender what Max-Neef (1991: 21) labels as "collective pathologies of fear". Regarding Colombia, Max-Neef (1991: 42) recalls that during a seminar in Bogotá in 1987, fifty high-ranking university officials and academics from

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis in the original.

all over Colombia were asked to choose among a list the most serious destroyers affecting the Colombian society. The final list of components included aggressiveness, indifference, obedience, censorship, acceptance, apathy, dependence, alienation, neutrality, uprooting, ideological manipulation and repressive institutions.

The list determined the following analysis and conclusions. If one asks for a description of the Colombian society, the reply may well give an image of a society suffering from a high degree of violence. If one asks for explanations, one may be given a profile of all the different groups that are in conflict and, hence, determine that violence. But, if we look at the above list, which is the product of an intense process of introspective analysis, we perceive something quite interesting and probably unexpected. There is violence—a great deal of violence—in Colombian society, but the deep underlying problem, as revealed by the list, was deemed to be fear. Whether that fear is the result of violence or its cause (or both) is difficult—perhaps impossible—to say. But in any case, what appears to be probable, is that the “disease” the patient is suffering from is fear. Therefore, if the remedies prescribed concentrate exclusively on the attempt to cure violence, one may be applying an inadequate or incomplete prescription for the wrong “disease” [...].

(Max-Neef, 1991: 42-43)

The international accompaniment offered by PBI Colombia has a positive impact upon that disease or pathology of fear while addressing protection from direct violence at the same time. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the experiences of PBI in other armed conflicts, such as Sri Lanka.

### **International Accompaniment as Capability Facilitator**

International accompaniment and its positive effects upon the pathology of fear contribute to the empowerment of those accompanied. Through international accompaniment and other mechanisms, human rights defenders and all of those threatened by politically motivated violence find a way to deal with the pathology of fear and mobilize themselves. By exercising their freedom and rights, actors with public personality enhance their capacity of action and revitalize the social fabric. In this sense, international accompaniment contributes to materialize the potential, the power-of-being. Max-Neef (1991: 24) highlights in his analysis the double nature of needs: as deprivation, as we have seen so far, and as potential. “[...] to the degree that needs engage, motivate and mobilize people, they are a potential and eventually may become a resource”.

The empowerment facilitated by international accompaniment can be apprehended in terms of an increase in the capabilities of those accompanied. Both Max-Neef and Sen have consecrated a great part of their academic efforts to development, with different foci but sharing a similar interest with holistic development rather than pure economics. Whereas Max-Neef is the most representative introducer of a development on a human scale in stressing a needs-



approach, Sen (1999b: 13) sees development as “the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency”, an approach employed in United Nations Development Programme reports. Development, thus, is all about capabilities, “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being” (Sen, 1993: 30). The work of Sen and Nussbaum (2000, 2003) has moved the focus from nominal rights to effective rights expressed in terms of capabilities, that is, what people are actually able to do. To that description of capabilities as “what people are actually able to do” could be added the tag “to provide for their needs”.

Nussbaum (2003: 40- 43) provides a tentative list of central human capabilities, including ten capabilities expressed in the “being able to” formula: Life; Body Health; Body Integrity; Senses, Imagination and Thought; Emotions; Practical Reason; Affiliation; Other Species; Play; and Control Over One’s Environment<sup>26</sup>. Under this classification, PBI international accompaniment would produce the following positive effects in terms of increasing local capabilities, that is, facilitate the empowerment of those accompanied:

	<b>Positive impact on Central Human Capabilities of</b>
International Accompaniment	Life, Bodily Integrity, Emotions, Affiliation, Control Over One’s Environment

International accompaniment empowers the accompanied in multiple ways, increasing their possibilities of “being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length”, as Nussbaum (2003: 41) partially portrays the capability for life. International accompaniment contributes to it inasmuch as it is conceived as deterrence of violent attacks against the physical integrity of the victim. This relates to the second central human capability that is positively affected by international accompaniment, bodily integrity, articulated as “being able to move freely from place to place” (ibid)<sup>27</sup>. International accompaniment empowers the accompanied in the emotions capability since it reduces the pathology of fear, thereby contributing to a certain degree of “not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety” (ibid). Regarding affiliation, PBI international accompaniment revitalizes the possibilities for the accompanied to engage in social interaction, which in turn “means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly

<sup>26</sup> Most of these points are consistent with Max-Neef classification of human needs, although formulated in a different manner rooted in epistemological and procedural divergences. It is beyond the scope of this research to carry out a comparative study.

<sup>27</sup> The effects of international accompaniment on this realm are, however, more debatable if body integrity is meant “to be secure against [...] sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction” (Nussbaum, 2003: 41).

and political speech” (Nussbaum, 2003: 42). International accompaniment’s impact on affiliation is closely related to the capability of control over one’s environment, especially in its political dimension of participation.

## **Conclusion**

As seen, Peace Brigades International does have an impact on situations of political violence through the practice of international accompaniment. In Sri Lanka and in Colombia, like in the other locations where it had or has active projects, PBI set in motion a comprehensive communication movement that permits the practice of international accompaniment. Furthermore, the communicative structures behind international accompaniment functioning make possible the transmission of different speeches according to the distinctive nature of the interlocutors. Under speech acts lens, PBI establishes different relationships with its interlocutors, having through its discourse performative effects in two interrelated spheres, namely, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. Whereas PBI is likely to clash with the local Government at the illocutionary level, international accompaniment as a discursive practice has a multifaceted impact at the perlocutionary level.

As stressed by the accompanied themselves, the benefits of international accompaniment exceed physical protection. International accompaniment encompasses a plurality of intimately linked benefits. In a reading from a theory of needs, PBI international accompaniment acts as a synergic satisfier of multiple needs (protection, affection, participation and freedom). This reading, however, fails to highlight the empowerment facilitated by PBI international accompaniment; thanks to it, local partners received considerable enforcement of their power-to, as a capability reading shows. In this regard, PBI international accompaniment has a positive impact on several human capabilities.

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