



Breaking the Silence (BTS)
Rompiendo el Silencio (RES)

Application Package

Introduction to the Breaking the Silence Network Accompaniment Program

Please read this section closely even if you are already familiar with BTS

Thank you for your interest in accompaniment work with the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS). The following application package will provide you with further information on BTS and our history as a solidarity network working in Canada and Guatemala, as well as more details on the accompaniment project. You will find information on training, fundraising, and steps to become an accompanier, in addition to questions for self-reflection and the application package itself. Please read all sections and return the completed application to [btsaccompaniment\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:btsaccompaniment[at]gmail.com). References can either be mailed or emailed in. Once we receive your application, we will be in touch to schedule an interview and discuss next steps. If you have any questions along the way, please do not hesitate to get in touch!

Breaking the Silence (BTS) is a voluntary network of people in the Maritimes who began to organize in 1988 to support the efforts of Guatemalans struggling for political, social, and economic justice. We recognize that injustice is connected to structural inequalities both within and between countries, and BTS is committed to supporting structural transformation both in Guatemala and in Canada. Our work is guided by the understanding that we all deserve to be treated as equals, and that we need to build long-term relationships based on solidarity and mutuality. We respond to the needs and issues defined by our partners and by other Guatemalans with whom we work, and we support them in taking charge of their own lives. Our relationships are built on friendship, sharing, and dialogue as we work, learn, and grow together.

As a community of people who share this commitment to solidarity, we undertake advocacy and lobbying; organize delegations; send interns, volunteers, and human rights accompaniers; promote fairly-traded coffee; and raise awareness within our own communities through speaking tours by Guatemalan leaders and other political campaigns.

Since the early 1990s, BTS volunteers have participated in a human rights accompaniment program in Guatemala to act as international observers and witnesses to human rights violations and threats. The first BTS accompaniers were involved in accompanying the return of refugees to Guatemala during the signing of the peace accords.

Today there are two programs overseen by ACOGUATE in Guatemala to which BTS sends accompaniers:

1) The Equipo Regional (Regional Teams) program provides long-term accompaniment to witnesses in the genocide trials and their supporters. During the 1980s, the Mayan people of Guatemala and social activists became targets of the army in a genocidal war. Beginning in May

2000, approximately 30 communities in 5 regions of Guatemala requested security accompaniment. All of these communities are already or will be involved in a process of denouncing acts of violence that occurred between 1981-82 to the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP), with the hope of forcing an investigation that would lead to trials against key people involved in implementing a plan of genocide in Guatemala. Two legal cases have been launched against the Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt regimes for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed in the 1980s.

In May 2013, Rios Montt was convicted for genocide and crimes against humanity, and sentenced to 80 years in prison. Soon thereafter, the Constitutional Court overturned the sentence, sending the trial back to an earlier stage before the sentence was emitted. The case against Rios Montt is expected to resume in January 2015.

2) The Equipo Movil (Mobile Team) program provides short-term accompaniment to individuals and organizations who have received threats and intimidation due to the nature of their work and have requested such an international presence.

The people asking for accompaniment are aware of the great risk that they are taking by speaking out about the truth, not as anonymous victims or witnesses, but as public actors with names and faces. They are conscious of the fact that an international presence can (a) ensure that information about their situation reaches the outside world, (b) defuse a certain amount of tension and even (c) save lives.

Accompaniers will have three principle functions: 1) act as observers, 2) get information out about any intimidations, threats or acts of violence against members of the communities and 3) send out information about human rights violations &/or urgent actions at an international level.

Security accompaniers will work in teams at the regional level, with support (protection and communication) from various organizations in Guatemala and contact with CALDH's teams carrying out legal accompaniment. Accompaniers will receive training and support from BTS and from the coordination in Guatemala, letters of support from BTS, the Canadian Embassy, and several Guatemalan organizations. Logistical, communication, and moral support is available from BTS. Political support is offered by Amnesty International and numerous solidarity and Human Rights organizations (including BTS) from at least 12 countries via their participation in an international Urgent Action Network.

An international accompaniment coordination team based in Guatemala oversees this security accompaniment project. An accompaniment committee and coordinator in Toronto provide logistical and other support to accompaniers. We are also fortunate that we presently (though may not always) have a BTS representative based in Guatemala who helps provide support to BTS accompaniers while they are in Guatemala.

At the BTS training in Canada, you and the trainers will help determine whether accompaniment is appropriate for you. The international accompaniment coordinator in Guatemala has final authority over selection of candidates. During the orientation in Guatemala, accompaniers will be selected for one of the two accompaniment programs. Accompaniment is done in pairs, and

most likely, you will not be matched with someone else from Canada. While in the community, lodging will be provided. You will be in regular contact with the international coordinator and should there be a crisis, the Urgent Action Network will be alerted immediately.

Costs and Funding:

Accompaniers will participate in a 10-day training session at the Tatamagouche Centre in Nova Scotia and an additional 10-day training (held in Spanish) in Guatemala City with ACOGUATE. Pre-departure and re-entry training costs at Tatamagouche Centre are covered by BTS (travel to Tatamagouche Centre not covered), travel to and from Guatemala and travel insurance while in country are covered by BTS, and accommodation and food in Guatemala is covered by a small monthly stipend. We find that the stipend is sufficient to cover basic expenses, but accompaniers may want to budget additional funds depending on spending habits. Accompaniers are responsible for fundraising \$1500 to contribute to program costs, although BTS can help accompaniers fundraise this portion of their expenses.

Interested accompaniers will be responsible for funding their own way to the training in Nova Scotia. We encourage you to seek support from a Guatemala solidarity committee or from churches, unions, community groups, and student associations in your area. The orientation in Guatemala is provided free of charge. However, accompaniers are responsible for their own meals and lodging during the training.

Support Groups

If you do not participate in, or live near, a Guatemala solidarity committee you are strongly advised to find or create a group to support you before and during accompaniment. Support groups typically:

- Assist with organizational aspects of preparation such as fundraising
- Provide moral support before, during, and after accompaniment
- Serve as a contact point between you and BTS
- Serve as emergency contacts should you encounter a situation where urgent action is required

Support groups also provide the BTS Selection Committee with a better idea of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses through the submission of a reference form. This assessment is especially important where an applicant is from a community that does not have a BTS local committee.

How can you participate?

The application process consists of:

1. Fulfilling the self-assessment and personal criteria requirements

2. Submission of this application form and a current CV
3. A reference questionnaire completed by an organization with which you have volunteered/ worked
4. A statement of commitment from you (form to be provided following receipt of application)
5. Completion of the BTS accompaniment training program
6. Completion of the orientation program upon arrival in Guatemala
7. Re-entry program in the Maritimes (for those able to return to the Maritimes), or organized elsewhere by the BTS Accompaniment Committee

Once the application form is received, the applicant will be referred to a BTS representative in his or her region. This will be followed by preliminary discussions, and an interview.

The second part of the selection process will consist of consultations between a representative of the interviewing committee and a representative of the Accompaniment Training Team. This may also involve an interview of the candidate.

If, at the end of this process, you are accepted for training, you will be contacted and provided with more information concerning the training.

Complete the application form, and send it to Valerie Croft by e-mail attachment to [btsaccompaniment\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:btsaccompaniment@gmail.com).

Personal Criteria Requirements of Accompaniers

Each stage in the application process is designed to provide both you and BTS with an opportunity to assess your suitability for an accompaniment placement in Guatemala. Before beginning the application form, please read the list of personal criteria and self-assessment considerations below:

- Must have a solid understanding of human rights and solidarity work
- Must understand and be able to manage issues of cultural sensitivity in rural indigenous communities
- Must have an in-depth understanding of the history and current situation in Guatemala
- *Should* have experience in Guatemala (or accompaniment experience in other parts of Latin America)
- Must be flexible, adaptable, open to differences and able to handle living and working under challenging circumstances
- Must be willing to learn and capable of working as part of a team along with other accompaniers
- Must have good judgment and be mature, responsible and discreet
- Must be in good health, both mental and physical
- Must be willing and able to commit to at least six months of accompaniment
- Must have sufficient money (or be willing to fundraise sufficient money) to cover the cost of the trip to and from Guatemala and during the stay in the country

- *Should* speak, understand, read and write Spanish at an advanced level in order to be able to understand the details and nuances of conversations, discussions, meetings, etc. [Must have a demonstrated commitment to improve their Spanish to the required level prior to accompaniment, and prior to accompaniment, must have an advanced level of Spanish]

Self-Assessment Considerations

We are not asking you for written answers to this section of questions. However, they are questions you should ask yourself. We ask that you assess your suitability for accompaniment based on your honest responses.

1. Finding yourself overseas requires adjustments: food, living quarters, pace, forms of entertainment, language, and companionship are all different. Please think about the adjustment process you have undergone in other situations in which a major adjustment has been required.
2. While you may be given details of accompaniment tasks upon your arrival, there is no guarantee that your activities will be exactly as outlined. In fact, accompaniment work requires an incredible amount of flexibility as plans often change at the last minute. You may find that some decisions require your input, or you may find that there is a set plan of work with little room for innovation. Please assess your previous experiences in and reactions to situations that required considerable flexibility on your part.
3. There can be a wide variation of climates and amenities in Guatemala. Wherever you are placed, many of the comforts of Canada will not exist. How have you reacted in the past to physical discomfort? Constant rain? Heat, cold? Insects? Unvaried diet, lack of sleep or lack of privacy? To constantly being with other people (particularly your co-accompanier)? Do such factors affect your state of mind or performance substantially?
4. Relationships that are sound and have undergone the test of "togetherness" often grow closer overseas. Those which are not solid or tested at home can easily fall apart under the stress and demands which life can present overseas. If you are intending to accompany with your partner, do you consider your relationship stable? Does your relationship thrive when you are together for long, uninterrupted periods of time? Or are you happier when each of you has a life in large part independent of each other? How would each of you cope if you are not able to be placed together for a period of time (e.g., several weeks)? Have you traveled overseas or accompanied together in the past?
5. The witnesses, community leaders, and other companions you will be working with have varied backgrounds, cultures and languages. The system of values which with they have grown up could be far different from yours. Think of problems you may have had with co-workers or acquaintances, both in Canada and in the south. How did you react to these problems? How successful were you in communicating with the people concerned (i.e. discussing your point of view and understanding theirs)? Keep in mind that accompaniment works brings together people from a wide variety of cultures.

6. Have you ever worked for a female employer? Do you have experience working with women in non-traditional roles or settings? Have you thought of how you respond in these situations and with these women?
7. How would you describe and assess your reactions to being in a situation that is threatening, fearful, or otherwise risky, for you personally or for others you are with?
8. Accompaniers hear incredibly difficult stories of massacres, sexual violence, forced disappearance, torture and other crimes against humanity. Many of the people we accompany are currently facing enormous pressure and threats for the work they are carrying out, regardless of whether or not they share those fears with us. Bearing witness to the impacts of trauma can also be difficult for accompaniers. What are your own experiences developing mental health care plans for yourself?

APPLICATION FORM

**Please attach additional pages or expand the sections allotted if you need more space for your responses.*

A) LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

1. Name:
2. Address:
3. E-mail:
4. Telephone: home: work:
5. In case of emergency, please provide the names of two contact people:

Name:
Relationship:
Address:
Phone:

Name:
Address:
Phone:
Relationship:

6. Passport number:
7. Expiry date:

(Before going to Guatemala, you must have a passport that is valid for six months after your planned departure time from Guatemala.)

8. Birth date (m/d/y):
9. Gender:
10. How did you become aware of the BTS accompaniment program?
11. When would you be available for accompaniment?
12. How long can you work as an accompanier?



8. Please describe your experience living and working in Spanish. *Although not required, you may chose to fill this section out in Spanish.*
9. List the personal skills you bring to a group, which you believe are your strengths (e.g. sense of humor, group facilitation skills, cooking, music). Please include practical skills and knowledge you have (e.g.. carpentry, accounting, photography, typing, translation, writing, legal skills, health care training). Mention also any skills you have which would be beneficial upon your return to Canada (e.g.. public speaking, writing, media work).

B) GENERAL HEALTH

10. Do you have any health problems, allergies, or illnesses? Please explain.
11. Have you been under a physician's care or received prescription medicine within the past year? If yes, please explain.
12. Would you have to take any special medical supplies with you?
13. How would you assess your overall physical and psychological stamina? How do you cope with harsh living conditions (e.g.. backpacking, uphill hikes, long bus rides, sleeping on the floor) See question #3 under "self-assessment considerations" at the beginning of this form. Provide examples of similar situations you have experienced.

C) BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

14. What is your understanding of the political and historical situation in Guatemala, particularly as it pertains to the legal cases being presented to the Public Ministry and/or the situation faced by human rights and community leaders?
15. What is your perception of the current situation in Guatemala? What are the main issues/struggles today?
16. What are some key issues facing human rights defenders and indigenous leaders in Canada today?

D) PERSONAL BACKGROUND

17. The *Breaking the Silence* Network accompaniment program is a unique form of non-violent action. Please describe your own training and experience in different methods of non-violent action (including previous accompaniment training and experience).



18. How do you deal with people you don't agree with? In what way is it difficult or easy for you? How have you confronted your own reaction in a conflict situation?
19. What experience have you had living and working in another culture or with people of diverse cultural backgrounds?
20. What experience do you have living and/or working closely as part of a group? Did you like it? What difficulties did you experience? What role do you usually take? How would you evaluate yourself as a leader and as a follower/group member? Give examples.
21. Describe stressful and fearful situations that you have experienced, both as an accompanier, and in other aspects of your life. See question #7 under "self-assessment considerations" at the beginning of this form. How did you react in these situations?
22. Are there fears or concerns you anticipate which could be addressed during the application process, the training in Tatamagouche or during the orientation in Guatemala?
23. Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

E) MOTIVATION

24. Why do you want to be involved in this aspect of accompaniment?
25. What does accompaniment mean to you? How is it reflected in your beliefs or philosophy?
26. What is your experience with anti-oppression ideas? How might these be relevant to work as an international accompanier?
27. Should you be placed as a volunteer, how would you see your experience in the context of the ongoing work in support of Guatemala in your community?

Please return this application through e-mail to:
Valerie Croft
BTS Accompaniment Coordinator
E-mail: btsaccompaniment@gmail.com
Tel: 416-892-8253



Reference for Accompaniment Applicant

Thank you for agreeing to act as a reference for an applicant to the *Breaking the Silence* Network accompaniment program. We would appreciate your honest and detailed responses to the following questions. The questions are based on our experiences with Canadian volunteer accompaniers in previous programs. The information you provide will help our selection committee and our staff in Guatemala to ensure that each approved participant receives the best possible preparation for the challenges she/he will face as an accompanier. Please get in touch through the contact information below if you need more information about the accompaniment program.

Background to the BTS Accompaniment Program

Since the early 1990s BTS has been sending volunteer accompaniers to Guatemala. The first BTS accompaniers were involved in accompanying the return of refugees to Guatemala during the signing of the peace accords. Beginning in May 2000, approximately 30 communities in 5 regions of Guatemala have requested security accompaniment. All of these communities are already or will be involved in a process of denouncing acts of violence in 1981-82 to the Ministerio Publico (MP), with the hope of forcing an investigation by the MP that would lead to trials against key people involved in implementing a plan of genocide in Guatemala. The process began in May 2000, when a criminal lawsuit was launched against the High Command of the former Lucas Garcia government. This initiative is led by the people themselves, through the Asociacion para la Reconciliacion y Justicia (AJR) and supported by the legal advice of CALDH (Centro para la accion legal en Derechos Humanos). The Coordination of International Accompaniment in Guatemala (CAIG) also provides accompaniment to individuals and organizations throughout Guatemala who face persecution as a result of their work.

The people asking for accompaniment are aware of the great risk that they are taking by speaking out about the truth, not as anonymous victims or witnesses, but as public actors with names and faces. They are conscious of the fact that an international presence can (a) ensure that information about their situation reaches the outside world, (b) defuse a certain amount of tension and even (c) save lives.

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Reference for Accompaniment Applicant

Name of applicant:

Your Name:

Your Organization:

Your Telephone and Fax:

Your Address:

Your E-mail:

1. In what capacity, and for how long, have you known the applicant?
2. What do you see as his/her strengths which could potentially affect the work of an accompanier?
3. What are some characteristics of the person which, while not necessarily weaknesses, could make difficult his/her work as an accompanier?
4. What have you observed about this person's ability to work cooperatively with others?
5. Keeping in mind the daily physical and mental stresses which are part of accompaniment work in Guatemala (e.g. long bus rides, unvaried diet, insects, lack of privacy, etc.) can you comment on the applicant's readiness for this kind of challenge?
6. Can you comment on the applicant's existing ability to speak Spanish?
7. Any other comments you wish to make?

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This form, once completed, should be returned to:

Valerie Croft

Accompaniment Coordinator

2 Ravine Court

Port Dover, ON

N0A 1N6

Or via email to: btsaccompaniment@gmail.com