

Experience and struggle of a survivor of eye mutilation by rubber bullets

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My name is Carles Guillot and I am 52 years old. On 17 July 2001, 23 years ago now, during a protest against the illegal assault and eviction of a squatted house, the Kasa de la Muntanya, a national police officer shot me point-blank in the face and permanently damaged my right eyeball. As the neighbourhood was taken over by the police, we had to wait a few hours before we could go to a hospital. Finally, some colleagues took me to the Bellvitge Hospital, the furthest hospital in the area, to avoid being identified by the police. The prognosis was clear: I would be one-eyed for life.

The first days and weeks were very hard. Pain, headaches, and anger, a lot of anger.

I was fortunate to have the support of my family and my fellow fighters at all times. I come from a family of fighters. My grandmother was persecuted and imprisoned by Franco's regime and my mother, an avowed feminist, was already involved in the university struggles of the early 1970s. I remember that my mother, already in hospital, asked me if I thought it was worth going to show solidarity with the people in the squatted house. And I agree: solidarity is our best weapon, without putting something at risk, no matter how dramatic and painful it may be, change will never be achieved. As I said, I also had the support of my colleagues. At that time I was linked to many organisations of social struggle (the squatting movement, the anti-fascist platform, collectives against the capitalistic Europe, solidarity with the Zapatista movement, etc.) and they all showed me their support and solidarity. There were some marches and acts of protest against what had happened to me, which, I have to say, filled me up with pride. Somehow, I felt no different from many other people who suffered (and still suffer) the consequences of police violence. I think that, being a member of these political and social organisations, made me aware that, when you stand up to power, it reacts without mercy using violence against you.

Anger

At first, I had to adapt to my new reality. Everyday tasks became difficult. And what I felt was anger. Anger against the police,

against the state, against this "status quo" that the West has created and that forces the vast majority of the world's population to live in precarious conditions. Think that with only one eye we lose the depth of field that a bifocal vision gives. We see everything in two dimensions, and therefore, something as simple as pouring water into a glass from a bottle or a jug becomes complicated. You never know if the bottle is at the same distance as the glass, and many times, I would spill the water I was trying to pour. Or I would hit the right side of my face and forehead as I couldn't see what was on that side. With each failure, with each blow, the rage would appear again.

I don't know what it feels like to lose a hand or any other part of your body, so I can't (and don't want to) compare. But I know that losing an eye is terrible. Every day, every morning when you look into the mirror and you don't recognise the image it projects of you, it's heartbreaking. Seeing yourself deformed, not liking yourself, generates a feeling of self-rejection. You wonder if anyone will like you, if they will find you attractive, and your whole sex-affective life is turned upside down. Doubts, insecurities, fears, take over. And again, anger.

Prosthesis

Public health care in this country works well, and I was immediately given a prosthetic eye. At first I wore it, but over time I noticed that people looked at my ceramic eye (why is it that we are always attracted to people's physical defects?) and I felt that they weren't looking at me, but at the void left by my eye. So, I started to put on patches. On the one hand because I found myself more attractive, and, on the other, because it hid my mutilation and, I suppose, my trauma.

Little by little I got used to wearing nothing, to show my face as it was: mutilated. This made me realise that especially the children would stare at my wound and ask me what had happened to me (alas, the innocence of childhood). This allowed me to explain to them that I had been mutilated by a policeman who shot me with his gun (I never spoke of an accident; it wasn't. It was a deliberate act), and to explain to them and their families that the police use lethal weapons to disperse

demonstrators and repress protests. I haven't worn the prosthesis for years, and I've got used to people staring at me.

The judicial route

Parallel to that, I started my justice path. Not because I believed in this path to find redress (my trust in state justice was, and is, very limited), but because my mother insisted. She told me: "Do it, so that it is known and to prevent it from happening to anyone else".

First of all, I filed a criminal complaint. That meant trying to find the policeman who fired the shots so that a formal charge could be made. In this country, you can't file a criminal complaint if you don't identify the person responsible. And I was fortunate enough to be able to do that. In a judicial process parallel to mine, in which they were trying to resolve what had happened inside the Kasa de la Muntanya at the time of the eviction and the subsequent arrests, a policeman who had participated in the operation declared that he had not entered the house, that he had remained outside, and that at a given moment, he had shot at the people who were approaching the house. He placed himself in the exact spot from where they shot at me. So, we directed our accusation at him. Officer 77803.

That investigation by the examining magistrate's court lasted about a year, and although the policeman later declared that he had only fired blanks (i.e. shot without ammunition), the judge told us that there was enough evidence to open proceedings against him. However, that judge was replaced in September of the same year. The new magistrate rejected the accusations and decreed that there was not enough evidence to charge the policeman, so it was not possible to know who was responsible for the shooting and that I was only left with the administrative route of a patrimonial claim, as he did admit that my injury was due to a shot fired by an officer. The patrimonial claim means that the guilty party will not be punished and will remain unpunished, but the State is sued as the party ultimately responsible so that it is obliged to make *reparation* (the word sounds like a mockery), which is usually basically financial compensation.

From this point on, I began a veritable judicial ordeal that took me through different judicial bodies (Provincial Court, National Court, Supreme Court, Constitutional Court), which in short ended up ruling the same thing: I had voluntarily placed myself in a situation of risk by protesting and showing my rejection to a police eviction (even if it was illegal) and, therefore, I had to assume the consequences of it. When the possibilities of redress in the Spanish justice system came to an end, I decided to take my case to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but the Court did not even accept it. They never

said why. Thus, culminating more than 14 years of litigation against the Spanish State.

As you can imagine, this whole never-ending process was exhausting, hard. Each rejection, each judicial setback, fell like a slab of the overwhelming weight of the State's power, which was no more bearable for being so well known. Each refusal generated anger, anguish and impotence at the same time. And a lot of economic expense.

Fortunately, together with my colleagues, we were able to raise money by organising parties, concerts, cultural events and even crowdfunding to raise funds to be able to pay for all these legal proceedings. I would like to mention the lawyers who handled my case during those years and who did everything possible to reach a successful outcome, even if we did not defeat the beast. As we say, the only fight you lose is the one you give up. And they never gave up. That was part of my life from 2001 to 2015.

The wave of repression and the response from the victims: STOP Rubber Bullets

During 2009 and 2010, Catalonia experienced a wave of repression by the new autonomous police (the one that was sold to us as more modern and democratic). In those years, and in the context of sporting celebrations (victories of FC Barcelona in the Champions League, La Liga and the Spanish national team in the World Cup), the Brimo¹ seriously injured and mutilated Jordi Naval, Jordi Sallent and Òscar Alpuente, who all lost an eye while celebrating their team's victory, while Edgar López was shot in the rib cage causing serious and irreversible coronary injuries and necrosis in a part of his heart. A few days earlier, during the champions league' celebrations, Gerard Molins had been shot in the ear, which caused him to suffer from vertigo for 6 months. Nicola Tanno, a young Italian resident in Barcelona, was mutilated by a police shot during the World Cup celebrations on 12 July 2010. A few months earlier, during the general strike in March, two other young people had lost an eye to projectiles. The police seemed to have taken a liking to shooting protesters in the head.

That same year, and encouraged by Nicola, who went looking for all of us, we decided to create the Stop Rubber Bullets Association (*Stop Bales de Goma* in Catalan). Our initial idea was to make the consequences of police brutality visible, to denounce the impunity of police officers in the face of these acts and to raise awareness in society and public opinion of the need

1 BRIMO: Mobile Brigade. These are anti-riot units of the regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, which depend on the regional government, the Generalitat de Catalunya.

to ban this weaponry. Let's think that during those years, and all previous years, the idea was widespread that if police had beaten or shot at you during a demonstration or in any other context, it was because you had done something wrong. In addition, another fundamental reason to meet and get to know each other was to be able to share our experiences and our daily miseries, our fears and our insecurities. There is no one better than someone who has been through what you have been through, to understand and support you.

So, some of those affected got together with people who supported our cause and we began to move forward. From that moment on, we carried out a few actions of denunciation in the streets and through social networks, with videos and "spots" that were easy to visualise, and an internal debate was generated about whether we should also question the political parties.

It was clear that in order to achieve a ban on rubber bullets, laws and regulations had to be changed. And these can only be changed by parliaments. Therefore, we needed the intervention of political parties. Nonetheless, some of us did not feel comfortable talking to those who for years had supported this police model and who used disproportionate police repression to attack political opponents. In the end, we decided that those who felt up to it would play that role, while the rest of us would continue to think and design new actions on the street. We didn't divide the work, but rather everyone did what they felt comfortable with or what didn't generate too many internal contradictions.

The meaning of political action: internal debates

We contacted some politicians and asked for the creation of a commission to study rubber bullets, but the plenary of the Parliament rejected it. Yet, we learned something very important from this experience: none of the members of Parliament knew anything about how kinetic energy projectiles in general and rubber bullets in particular work. That is to say, those who in theory should control the correct functioning of the police forces know neither the weaponry that the police use, nor their protocols, nor their regulations, nor the very serious repercussions for physical integrity and life. They simply rely on what the police unions tell them (that must be the only union they obey). When we did some digging in this direction, we also realised the enormous power that the police unions have when it comes to designing the regulations that should be used to control their actions.

The association went from being a group of mutilated people, "victims" of police violence, to becoming a political collective. At first, some of the comrades did not understand why it had happened to them, if they were doing "nothing wrong".

They were innocent. That was a very interesting debate, because it meant that if they didn't deserve it because they weren't doing "anything", it indirectly meant that those who were doing something did deserve it. It was very nice to see how they changed their perspective and realise that it doesn't matter whether one is "innocent" or not; but that nobody deserves to end up mutilated, nor for breaking a shop window, neither for setting up a barricade to defend yourself from their aggressions. That was one of the moments when the collective started to become politicised.

Another of the big debates we had during those early years was about the terminology we used. Let me explain. It was very common to talk about "rubber balls" instead of "rubber bullets". And in that term, the word "balls" resonates in the collective imagination as less harmful, because it evokes play, something harmless and not pain, mutilation or death. If we wanted to begin to show the seriousness of the injuries that these projectiles cause, we had to talk about "bullets", for that is what they are.

There continue to be more and more cases.

The year 2012 was particularly tragic. During the first general strike of that year, Xuban Nafarrete was hit in the head in Gasteiz. As on previous occasions, we took an interest in him and have maintained a cordial and mutually supportive relationship with his family and entourage. In April, during the celebration of Athletic Bilbao's victory in a European match, the Basque regional police, the Ertzaintza, shot Íñigo Cabacas (Pitu to his friends) in the head. He died in hospital four days later, without waking up from the coma he went into after being hit by a rubber bullet². His friends, relatives and people from other anti-repressive collectives organised themselves to denounce the case, and we immediately got in touch with them to help in any way we could and to show our solidarity.

The mutilation of other people by police violence has always made me feel pain and anger, but at least we could say that we had survived, that we could go on, for better or worse, with our lives. Pitu did not. That death affected all of us very much.

Still in a state of shock after Íñigo's death, in July of that year, during the miners' "Black March" in Madrid, Chelo Baudín was shot in the back. She was in the ICU for a month and a half, debating between life and death. The injuries caused by the impact of the rubber bullet were very serious: pneumothorax, several broken ribs and vertebrae and problems in the

2 It was not the first time that someone was killed by rubber bullets in Spain. Rosa Zarra died in 1995 after being hit by a rubber bullet in the abdomen during a demonstration in the context of the armed struggle of the Basque organisation ETA, but it was the first murder since we were organised and warned about the lethal power of these weapons.

liver and kidneys that have left her with sequelae and a chronic illness. In the general strike called in Eukal Herria in September, Aingeru Zudaire lost most of the sight in his eye when he was also hit by a rubber bullet. With Aigeru, over time, we have created a great friendship and he is a member of the Stop Balas de Goma association.

Ester Quintana : the political class on the ropes

On November 14th, as part of the united demonstration for the general strike, Ester Quintana was shot in the head and taken to hospital. She lost her left eye and part of the bones in her face had to be reconstructed. That aggression would mark a turning point in our struggle.

There are many factors that determined that moment. I think the fact that she was the first woman in Catalonia known to have been mutilated by a rubber bullet made her seem more vulnerable and “innocent”. Things of the patriarchy, I suppose. But also the way she and her entourage handled the situation, confronting the situation and speaking from a more human and at first less “political” position. This made people sympathise with her and the misfortune that had befallen her.

The management of the political and police authorities was nefarious, as they initially chose to publicly deny the facts. However, each denial of the facts by the police was answered the next day with videos that proved Ester’s version. So, for example, the police denied having fired in that area and the next day, videos appeared, sent by people who were in the area at the time of the demonstration, in which police officers were shooting. I think they had to rectify this publicly up to five times.

A collective, “Ojo con tu Ojo” (Eye with your Eye) was organised around them, which was very active and proposed a series of symbolic actions that challenged civil society. From our side, “Stop Bales de Goma”, we invited them to meet us and to join forces, just like the rest of the people we knew who had been injured by kinetic energy projectiles. And we met one day at El Lokal, an emblematic space in libertarian Barcelona. From that meeting, a deep collaboration, companionship and friendship was born, and to the day, has been solidified.

From that moment on, Ester Quintana became a point of reference in the fight to ban rubber bullets. At the beginning she acted with her collective, with whom we coordinated actions and acts of denunciation, and we continued to focus on our own, which at that time was the preparation of a dossier and the campaign “*Municipalities free of rubber bullets*”. This campaign, which persists to this day, tries to get municipal councils to approve a motion in which it is made explicit that they do not want kinetic energy projectiles to be used in that territory. It was, and is, an attempt to make visible the rejection

of police violence from the municipal level, and to generate a debate about it.

Documenting scientific evidence for change.

We prepared a dossier with the means and knowledge we had about rubber bullets that could explain well what they are and how they function, with the aim of sending it to Human Rights groups and other collectives and associations to generate social debate about their use and to gather people to demand their prohibition. The same document was sent to some Catalan political parties with parliamentary representation.

In this report, we no longer spoke only of rubber bullets, but also referred to other equally dangerous projectiles (the so-called “foam”), which the Mossos d’Esquadra had acquired and used on some occasions. And we also broadened the focus: we no longer limited the responsibility to the police who fire these weapons, but denounced the complicity of the entire system. The disproportionate use of violence by the different police forces, the lack of visibility of the police identification number, which made it impossible to know who was responsible for each action, the lack of control and accountability mechanisms for police actions and, in short, the impunity enjoyed by the agents, both because of police corporatism (nobody ever sees anything, nor knows anything) and because of the complicity of the rest of the state bodies, that is, the judiciary and the political parties.

The road is long

At that time, some of the comrades affected left the collective. I think that some of them were overwhelmed by the dimension of public denunciation that we were doing, participating in the media, and others simply got exhausted and could not or did not want to continue being part of the mass-media circus. Be that as it may, we didn’t have the capacity to keep them in the collective and they stopped coming to the meetings and gatherings. I think we have to learn to take care of the other comrades, those who are perhaps more vulnerable or tired, to give them the space in which they can feel comfortable, each one giving what she can. We didn’t know how to do that and it was a shame.

With the commotion that arose after Ester’s aggression, and the continuous images of the Brimo charging and beating anyone (girls, women, elderly people, etc.), people started showing signs of being fed up, and finally a commission was created in the Catalan Parliament to study the use of rubber bullets, although it was called the Commission for the Study of Security and Public Order Models and the Use of Anti-Riot Material in Mass Events, to which we sent our report and asked to appear in that Commission.

Yet, while the debates of this commission were taking place, another very serious incident occurred. Juan Andrés Benítez, founder of the Catalan Association of Companies for Gays and Lesbians, was brutally beaten for 12 minutes by Mossos d'Esquadra officers in a street in the Raval district of Barcelona. He died three hours later, at the Clinic Hospital. The images recorded by the neighbours left no room for doubt. The top politicians again tried to exonerate the officers (as they had done in the case of Ester), and accused the victim of having suffered a cardiac arrest due to drug use and of having started the fight with the 6 officers who killed him. Nobody believed them. Although this was not a case directly related to rubber bullets, it was of enormous importance in the Parliament's decision to ban the use of less lethal weapons by the Mossos d'Esquadra, while dismissing the dismissal of the aforementioned characters.

I want to dwell for a moment on this point. Obviously the ban on the use of rubber bullets was experienced as a victory. We had achieved the initial purpose for which we had been organising for so long, despite the fact that there were still foam bullets, which, although we knew less about them, we knew were equally dangerous and lethal, because of the news coming from France, where the Gendarmerie used them regularly. But, the fact that we knew that this victory was the result of an agreement between political parties to keep those politically responsible for the murder of Juan Andrés in their posts, made us realise that our demands were nothing more than a bargaining chip on the political chessboard. Those responsible for a murder were covered up in exchange of approving our demands for a ban on rubber bullets. And that, at least for me personally, hurt. Very much.

From then on, our work took a different direction. On the one hand, we wanted to redo the work we had done with rubber bullets, but now focused on foam projectiles, to also demand their prohibition. On the other hand, we tried to broaden our field of action. If up to that moment our objective was rubber bullets in Catalonia, now we would go for the banning of rubber bullets in the whole of Spain.

The Tarajal massacre

At that time, another despicable event occurred. On 6 February 2014, 15 migrants who were part of a group of 200 people who were trying to enter Spanish territory from Morocco by swimming towards the Tarajal beach, in the city of Melilla, died when they were unable to reach the shore due to the rain of 145 rubber bullets and smoke canisters that 56 agents of the Guardia Civil shot at them from the shore. Although the judges have not judicially recognised the authorship and the case has remained in

complete impunity, for us they are part of the black computation of those killed by rubber bullets.

A year after the murder of Iñigo Cabacas, a large part of the collective went to Bilbao at the invitation of the Iñigo Gogoan (*Iñigo in memory*) Platform, who were in charge of publicising his case and demanding justice. Despite the circumstances, it was a wonderful trip. And it was because it allowed us to get to know each other better, to get to know each other as humans, and not just as comrades in struggle. To be able to exchange opinions about life, about our desires and wishes, our expectations, beyond police, weapons, pain and death. It was very important to create those bonds of friendship and respect that we have today. It also allowed us to meet others, like us, who were fighting for dignity and justice. I'm talking about the comrades, friends and people in solidarity who were fighting for Iñigo's memory in the Basque Country. And, of course, I am talking about Manu and Fina, Iñigo's parents, who, without knowing us, opened their arms to us and welcomed us and treated us like the son they had lost. The greatest love and respect for all of them, with whom from that day on, we were united by unbreakable bonds. Together we have made a good part of the journey. Every year, on the commemoration of Pitu's murder, as many of us as possible meet up in Bilbao to be with them and share their pain, and we have travelled to regional, state and European parliaments in the pursue of justice, reparation and non-repetition.

Searching for other logics

Another of the positive points of this first visit was a colloquium organised under the name "Check the police model". This event defended the idea that the Basque police model had to change, as it was a model based and designed in a context of conflict against the ETA organisation. Yet, ETA had disappeared, and therefore, the conflict context was no longer present. Consequently, the police model also had to adapt to this new reality.

I think that thanks to that debate and the subsequent talks we had among ourselves and with other people, we strengthened our arguments. The problem was no longer just the police who were shooting, nor the protocols that existed (if there were any). The problem was (and unfortunately still is) the whole model: how officers are recruited, how they are trained, why they are taught that "the others" (i.e., us) are the enemy, etc. etc. etc. From that moment on, we were not only talking about rubber bullets, but we were criticising the police model as a whole, the police brutality taught in the academy, the excessive violence with which they act against anyone, against "their" enemy. As I say, our arguments were solidifying, becoming more compact, more organised.

Indemnities as an instrument of division

With the banning of rubber bullets in Catalonia, the Parliament also approved the duty to compensate those affected, without this meaning that they had to withdraw the lawsuits that had been filed and that should continue their course. I have to say that my case did not fall into this category, as they only took responsibility for the actions in which the Mossos d'Esquadra had been the agents involved, and in my case, as I said, it was the National Police. They did it on a case-by-case basis, and that divided us. Because even though it wasn't necessary to withdraw the lawsuits, the state pressured them to do so. Some comrades were told that it was no longer necessary to continue with the judicial process, that they already had what they wanted, that this would only serve to delay everything a little more and make it more difficult. Without a common position, everyone did what they considered was best to do. Some got paid more, some got paid less and some didn't get paid at all. It also led to unrest between those who agreed to withdraw the demand and those who did not. We lost collective strength and this affected the mood of the group for some time. Between the "victory" over the ban and this confusing malaise, the association was losing members. A few survivors remained, along with some of the people who had been in solidarity with us from the beginning and were part of the association.

During the following years, we kept a low profile. We gave talks, participated in debates to which we were invited by anti-repressive collectives, issued communiqués expressing solidarity with others affected or denounced police actions in any part of the state. I don't think we ever stopped doing things and going to places, but we did reduce the intensity. Life, our lives, also had other variables (partners, children, family, friends, work,...) that we had to and wanted to take care of. Until October 2017.

Catalan independence referendum

On 1 October 2017, a referendum was called in Catalonia to decide whether we wanted to remain part of the Spanish state or whether we wanted to become a new state within Europe. The repression unleashed that day by the state and its police forces had not been seen since the so-called "Spanish transition". Beatings, kickings to anyone, regardless of age, condition or gender. Police violence was democratised. And, of course, rubber bullets were fired. The ban on their use only affected the police under the Generalitat (Mossos d'Esquadra), but on that day, the Spanish state had mobilised its agents from the National Police and the Guardia Civil to prevent the voting from taking place nor-

mally. In this case, it was Roger Español who lost an eye due to the impact of the projectile. As always, we contacted his entourage to let him know that we were at his disposal for whatever he needed. It didn't take long for us to get to know each other, and since then he has been an active member of the association.

In the following years, from 2018 to 2020, different protests took place in Catalonia, more or less related to this process for independence, and to the imprisonment of the rapper Pablo Hasel for the lyrics of his songs, which were harshly repressed by the Mossos d'Esquadra. As a result of these actions, nine people suffered serious injuries, including loss of eyes, loss of a testicle or serious liver damage from the impact of foam projectiles. Once again, as we had already announced, it was not so much about the projectile, but about the police model, its structural violence and the impunity enjoyed by the agents.

In addition to denouncing these new cases, together with IRIDIA and NOVACT, two Human Rights and Nonviolent Action organisations respectively, we worked on the preparation of another report, this time much more exhaustive³, in which we tried to gather all the cases of which we were aware, as well as to approach the issue from a more legal perspective of defending human rights. Working on this report was hard work, and it shook me up again. Yes, anger again. Searching through newspaper articles and websites in search of other mutilated people who had not denounced, for whatever reason, did not leave me (and still does) indifferent. In fact, we are still searching. One of the objectives that we have set ourselves at "Stop Balas de Goma" is to make a list, a repository of all the people seriously injured by kinetic energy projectiles, as there is no official count on this subject.

As well as trying to gather this information, the report was also intended to encourage the same debate against the projectiles that had taken place in Catalonia, but at a national level. So we gave talks and presented our arguments in all the cities where we could organise events and denouncing talks. I must say that to our surprise, in many of these events we made contact with other people affected, many of them also blind, whom we did not know, but we were unable to organise these people around Stop Balas de Goma.

Nor were we able to achieve that in the reform of the law on Citizen Security, which was due to be debated in Congress at the end of 2022. It wasn't the right political moment and they did not listen: again that eling of being a bargaining chip for the political parties (for all of them) and again the anger.

3 "Stop Balas de Goma. Report on the use and impact of rubber bullets in Spain from a human rights perspective [2000-2020]". https://novact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Final-Informe-Balas-de-Goma_compressed1.pdf

Expanding international networks

Throughout this life journey, we have tried to get in touch with other affected people's organisations that we knew existed in other parts of the world. The ultimate intention of the use of kinetic energy projectiles by the security forces is, in my opinion, to generate fear. Fear of going out to protest, to defend your rights and your dignity. Fear of the possibility of returning home maimed or even of not returning at all, which can make you desist from rebelling. That is why it is widely used all over the world. We knew that in Northern Ireland, the British police killed 17 people (9 of them children) with kinetic energy projectiles between 1973 and 1981, and thanks to a talk organised in the European Parliament we met one of the driving forces behind the banning of rubber bullets in England, where they are no longer used. We were also in contact on occasion with French comrades who had been mutilated during their Yellow Vests protests. But none of these contacts went any further. No network was woven.

But in the spring of 2023 and thanks to some comrades from the Maloka collective from Colombia living in Barcelona, we were able to establish contact with the people of *MOCAO*, the Movement in Resistance against the eye aggressions of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) in Colombia. And as a result of that first meeting, the idea of doing a campaign together was born. An international campaign that would make this global problem visible, trying to bring together more organisations. We contacted our colleagues from the *Coordinadora de Víctimas de Trauma Ocular* in Chile and our colleagues from the *Organización Social Etnias* in Ecuador. With these organisations we are preparing a first international meeting of survivors of police violence with eye trauma, which is planned for the summer of 2024.

The main idea of this meeting is to generate an international support network, to share experiences, both personal and organisational, and to put pressure on governments around the world on the need to stop the use of kinetic energy projectiles by law enforcement agencies and forces.

In this sense, one of the projects that we can recover is the one initiated by Amnesty International and Omega Research Foundation on the need for an International Torture-Free Trade Treaty that foresees a ban on the manufacture and trade of weapons and inherently abusive material, including kinetic impact projectiles.

So we are still there, seeking and finding new allies in the struggle for the prohibition of kinetic energy projectiles and in the denunciation of the police model, its violence and impunity. It has been 23 years of living with mutilation and turning it (as it could not be otherwise) into a space for political struggle and social demands. During these years, there have been moments of despair, discouragement and anger, but also many moments of feeling the solidarity, companionship and love of many people. Together, we have learned to overcome the blows and difficulties of fighting against police violence and to generate spaces of fraternisation and solidarity that strengthen the believe that, only united, organised and active, we can change the current police model based on violence and fear.

Carles Guillot

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