

ZAPATISTA ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION. MEXICO.

Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona

This is our simple word which seeks to touch the hearts of humble and simple people like ourselves, but people who are also, like ourselves, dignified and rebel. This is our simple word for recounting what our path has been and where we are now, in order to explain how we see the world and our country, in order to say what we are thinking of doing and how we are thinking of doing it, and in order to invite other persons to walk with us in something very great which is called Mexico and something greater which is called the world. This is our simple word in order to inform all honest and noble hearts what it is we want in Mexico and the world. This is our simple word, because it is our idea to call on those who are like us and to join together with them, everywhere they are living and struggling.

I - What We Are

We are the zapatistas of the EZLN, although we are also called "neo-zapatistas." Now, we, the zapatistas of the EZLN, rose up in arms in January of 1994 because we saw how widespread had become the evil wrought by the powerful who only humiliated us, stole from us, imprisoned us and killed us, and no one was saying anything or doing anything. That is why we said "Ya Basta!," that no longer were we going to allow them to make us inferior or to treat us worse than animals. And then we also said we wanted democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans although we were concentrated on the Indian peoples. Because it so happened that we, the EZLN, were almost all only indigenous from here in Chiapas, but we did not want to struggle just for own good, or just for the good of the indigenous of Chiapas, or just for the good of the Indian peoples of Mexico. We wanted to fight along with everyone who was humble and simple like ourselves and who was in great need and who suffered from exploitation and thievery by the rich and their bad governments here, in our Mexico, and in other countries in the world.

And then our small history was that we grew tired of exploitation by the powerful, and then we organized in order to defend ourselves and to fight for justice. In the beginning there were not many of us, just a few, going this way and that, talking with and listening to other people like us. We did that for many years, and we did it in secret, without making a stir. In other words, we joined forces in silence. We remained like that for about 10 years, and then we had grown, and then we were many thousands. We trained ourselves quite well in politics and weapons, and, suddenly, when the rich were throwing their New Year's Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over. And we left a message to everyone that here we are, that they have to take notice of us. And then the rich took off and sent their great armies to do away with us, just like they always do when the exploited rebel - they order them all to be done away with. But we were not done away with at all, because we had prepared ourselves quite well prior to the war, and we made ourselves strong in our mountains. And there were the armies, looking for us and throwing their bombs and bullets at us, and then they were making plans to kill off all the indigenous at one time, because they did not know who was a zapatista and who was not. And we were running and fighting, fighting and running, just like our ancestors had done. Without giving up, without surrendering, without being defeated.

And then the people from the cities went out into the streets and began shouting for an end to the war. And then we stopped our war, and we listened to those brothers and sisters from the city who were telling us to try to reach an arrangement or an accord with the bad governments, so that the problem could be resolved without a massacre. And so we paid attention to them, because they were what we call "the people," or the Mexican people. And so we set aside the fire and took up the word.

And it so happened that the governments said they would indeed be well-behaved, and they would engage in dialogue, and they would make accords, and they would fulfill them. And we said that was good, but we also thought it was good that we knew those people who went out into the streets in order to stop the war. Then, while we were engaging in dialogue with the bad governments, we were also talking with those persons, and we saw that most of them were humble and simple people like us, and both, they and we, understood quite well why we were fighting. And we called those people "civil society" because most of them did not belong to political parties, rather they were common, everyday people, like us, simple and humble people.

But it so happened that the bad governments did not want a good agreement, rather it was just their underhanded way of saying they were going to talk and to reach accords, while they were preparing their attacks in order to eliminate us once and for all. And so then they attacked us several times, but they did not defeat us, because we resisted quite well, and many people throughout the world mobilized. And then the bad governments thought that the problem was that many people saw what was happening with the EZLN, and they started their plan of acting as if nothing were going on. Meanwhile they were quick to surround us, they laid siege to us in hopes that, since our mountains are indeed remote, the people would then forget, since zapatista lands were so far away. And every so often the bad governments tested us and tried to deceive us or to attack us, like in February of 1995 when they threw a huge number of armies at us, but they did not defeat us. Because, as they said then, we were not alone, and many people helped us, and we resisted well.

And then the bad governments had to make accords with the EZLN, and those accords were called the "San Andrés Accords" because the municipality where those accords were signed was called "San Andrés." And we were not all alone in those dialogues, speaking with people from the bad governments. We invited many people and organizations who were, or are, engaged in the struggle for the Indian peoples of Mexico, and everyone spoke their word, and everyone reached agreement as to how we were going to speak with the bad governments. And that is how that dialogue was, not just the zapatistas on one side and the governments on the other. Instead, the Indian peoples of Mexico, and those who supported them, were with the zapatistas. And then the bad governments said in those accords that they were indeed going to recognize the rights of the Indian peoples of Mexico, and they were going to respect their culture, and they were going to make everything law in the Constitution. But then, once they had signed, the bad governments acted as if they had forgotten about them, and many years passed, and the accords were not fulfilled at all. Quite the opposite, the government attacked the indigenous, in order to make them back out of the struggle, as they did on December 22, 1997, the date on which Zedillo ordered the killing of 45 men, women, old ones and children in the town in Chiapas called ACTEAL. This immense crime was not so easily forgotten, and it was a demonstration of how the bad governments color their hearts in order to attack and assassinate those who rebel against injustices. And, while all of that was going on, we zapatistas were putting our all into the fulfillment of the accords and resisting in the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

And then we began speaking with other Indian peoples of Mexico and their organizations, and we made an agreement with them that we were going to struggle together for the same thing, for the recognition of indigenous rights and culture. Now we were also being helped by many people from all over the world and by persons who were well respected and whose word was quite great because they were great intellectuals, artists and scientists from Mexico and from all over the world. And we also held international encuentros. In other words, we joined together to talk with persons from America and from Asia and from Europe and from Africa and from Oceania, and we learned of their struggles and their ways, and we said they were "intergalactic" encuentros, just to be silly and because we had also invited those from other planets, but it appeared as if they had not come, or perhaps they did come, but they did

not make it clear.

But the bad governments did not keep their word anyway, and then we made a plan to talk with many Mexicans so they would help us. And then, first in 1997, we held a march to Mexico City which was called "of the 1,111" because a *compañero* or *compañera* was going to go from each zapatista town, but the bad government did not pay any attention. And then, in 1999, we held a consulta throughout the country, and there it was seen that the majority were indeed in agreement with the demands of the Indian peoples, but again the bad governments did not pay any attention. And then, lastly, in 2001, we held what was called the "march for indigenous dignity" which had much support from millions of Mexicans and people from other countries, and it went to where the deputies and senators were, the Congress of the Union, in order to demand the recognition of the Mexican indigenous.

But it happened that no, the politicians from the PRI, the PAN and the PRD reached an agreement among themselves, and they simply did not recognize indigenous rights and culture. That was in April of 2001, and the politicians demonstrated quite clearly there that they had no decency whatsoever, and they were swine who thought only about making their good money as the bad politicians they were. This must be remembered, because you will now be seeing that they are going to say they will indeed recognize indigenous rights, but it is a lie they are telling so we will vote for them. But they already had their chance, and they did not keep their word.

And then we saw quite clearly that there was no point to dialogue and negotiation with the bad governments of Mexico. That it was a waste of time for us to be talking with the politicians, because neither their hearts nor their words were honest. They were crooked, and they told lies that they would keep their word, but they did not. In other words, on that day, when the politicians from the PRI, PAN and PRD approved a law that was no good, they killed dialogue once and for all, and they clearly stated that it did not matter what they had agreed to and signed, because they did not keep their word. And then we did not make any contacts with the federal branches. Because we understood that dialogue and negotiation had failed as a result of those political parties. We saw that blood did not matter to them, nor did death, suffering, mobilizations, consultas, efforts, national and international statements, encuentros, accords, signatures, commitments. And so the political class not only closed, one more time, the door to the Indian peoples, they also delivered a mortal blow to the peaceful resolution - through dialogue and negotiation - of the war. It can also no longer be believed that the accords will be fulfilled by someone who comes along with something or other. They should see that there so that they can learn from experience what happened to us.

And then we saw all of that, and we wondered in our hearts what we were going to do.

And the first thing we saw was that our heart was not the same as before, when we began our struggle. It was larger, because now we had touched the hearts of many good people. And we also saw that our heart was more hurt, it was more wounded. And it was not wounded by the deceits of the bad governments, but because, when we touched the hearts of others, we also touched their sorrows. It was as if we were seeing ourselves in a mirror.

II. - Where We Are Now

Then, like the zapatistas we are, we thought that it was not enough to stop engaging in dialogue with the government, but it was necessary to continue on ahead in the struggle, in spite of those lazy parasites of politicians. The EZLN then decided to carry out, alone and on their side ("unilateral", in other words, because just one side), the San Andrés Accords regarding indigenous rights and culture. For 4 years, since the middle of 2001 until the middle of 2005, we have devoted ourselves to this and to other things which we are going to tell you about.

Fine, we then began encouraging the autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities - which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves - in order to make themselves stronger. This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the zapatistas' own experience. It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how, and, if they do not obey, they are removed. If the one who governs does not obey the people, they pursue them, they are removed from authority, and another comes in.

But then we saw that the Autonomous Municipalities were not level. There were some that were more advanced and which had more support from civil society, and others were more neglected. The organization was lacking to make them more on a par with each other. And we also saw that the EZLN, with its political-military component, was involving itself in decisions which belonged to the democratic authorities, "civilians" as they say. And here the problem is that the political-military component of the EZLN is not democratic, because it is an army. And we saw that the military being above, and the democratic below, was not good, because what is democratic should not be decided militarily, it should be the reverse: the democratic-political governing above, and the military obeying below. Or, perhaps, it would be better with nothing below, just completely level, without any military, and that is why the zapatistas are soldiers so that there will not be any soldiers. Fine, what we then did about this problem was to begin separating the political-military from the autonomous and democratic aspects of organization in the zapatista communities. And so, actions and decisions which had previously been made and taken by the EZLN were being passed, little by little, to the democratically elected authorities in the villages. It is easy to say, of course, but it was very difficult in practice, because many years have passed - first in the preparation for the war and then the war itself - and the political-military aspects have become customary. But, regardless, we did so because it is our way to do what we say, because, if not, why should we go around saying things if we do not then do them.

That was how the Good Government Juntas were born, in August of 2003, and, through them, self-learning and the exercise of "govern obeying" has continued.

From that time and until the middle of 2005, the EZLN leadership has no longer involved itself in giving orders in civil matters, but it has accompanied and helped the authorities who are democratically elected by the peoples. It has also kept watch that the peoples and national and international civil society are kept well informed concerning the aid that is received and how it is used. And now we are passing the work of safeguarding good government to the zapatista support bases, with temporary positions which are rotated, so that everyone learns and carries out this work. Because we believe that a people which does not watch over its leaders is condemned to be enslaved, and we fought to be free, not to change masters every six years.

The EZLN, during these 4 years, also handed over to the Good Government Juntas and the Autonomous Municipalities the aid and contacts which they had attained throughout Mexico and the world during these years of war and resistance. The EZLN had also, during that time, been building economic and political support which allowed the zapatista communities to make progress with fewer difficulties in the building of their autonomy and in improving their living conditions. It is not much, but it is far better than what they had prior to the beginning of the uprising in January of 1994. If you look at one of those studies the governments make, you will see that the only indigenous communities which have improved their living conditions - whether in health, education, food or housing - were those which are in zapatista territory, which is what we call where our villages are. And all of that has been possible because of the progress made by the zapatista villages and because of the very large support

which has been received from good and noble persons, whom we call "civil societies," and from their organizations throughout the world. As if all of these people have made "another world is possible" a reality, but through actions, not just words.

And the villages have made good progress. Now there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to govern. And - even though little by little - there are more women going into this work, but there is still a lack of respect for the *compañeras*, and they need to participate more in the work of the struggle. And, also through the Good Government Juntas, coordination has been improved between the Autonomous Municipalities and the resolution of problems with other organizations and with the official authorities. There has also been much improvement in the projects in the communities, and the distribution of projects and aid given by civil society from all over the world has become more level. Health and education have improved, although there is still a good deal lacking for it to be what it should be. The same is true for housing and food, and in some areas there has been much improvement with the problem of land, because the lands recovered from the *finqueros* are being distributed. But there are areas which continue to suffer from a lack of lands to cultivate. And there has been great improvement in the support from national and international civil society, because previously everyone went wherever they wanted, and now the Good Government Juntas are directing them to where the greatest need exists. And, similarly, everywhere there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to relate to persons from other parts of Mexico and of the world,. They are learning to respect and to demand respect. They are learning that there are many worlds, and that everyone has their place, their time and their way, and therefore there must be mutual respect between everyone.

We, the zapatistas of the EZLN, have devoted this time to our primary force, to the peoples who support us. And the situation has indeed improved some. No one can say that the zapatista organization and struggle has been without point, but rather, even if they were to do away with us completely, our struggle has indeed been of some use.

But it is not just the zapatista villages which have grown - the EZLN has also grown. Because what has happened during this time is that new generations have renewed our entire organization. They have added new strength. The *comandantes* and *comandantas* who were in their maturity at the beginning of the uprising in 1994 now have the wisdom they gained in the war and in the 12 years of dialogue with thousands of men and women from throughout the world. The members of the CCRI, the zapatista political-organizational leadership, is now counseling and directing the new ones who are entering our struggle, as well as those who are holding leadership positions. For some time now the "committees" (which is what we call them) have been preparing an entire new generation of *comandantes* and *comandantas* who, following a period of instruction and testing, are beginning to learn the work of organizational leadership and to discharge their duties. And it also so happens that our insurgents, *insurgentas*, militants, local and regional responsables, as well as support bases, who were youngsters at the beginning of the uprising, are now mature men and women, combat veterans and natural leaders in their units and communities. And those who were children in that January of '94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these 12 years of war. These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the zapatista movement did not have. This youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization. And, indeed, all of us have seen the deceipts by the Mexican political class and the destruction which their actions have caused in our patria. And we have seen the great injustices and massacres that neoliberal globalization causes throughout the world. But we will speak to you of that later.

And so the EZLN has resisted 12 years of war, of military, political, ideological and

economic attacks, of siege, of harassment, of persecution, and they have not vanquished us. We have not sold out nor surrendered, and we have made progress. More compañeros from many places have entered into the struggle so that, instead of making us weaker after so many years, we have become stronger. Of course there are problems which can be resolved by more separation of the political-military from the civil-democratic. But there are things, the most important ones, such as our demands for which we struggle, which have not been fully achieved.

To our way of thinking, and what we see in our heart, we have reached a point where we cannot go any further, and, in addition, it is possible that we could lose everything we have if we remain as we are and do nothing more in order to move forward. The hour has come to take a risk once again and to take a step which is dangerous but which is worthwhile. Because, perhaps united with other social sectors who suffer from the same wants as we do, it will be possible to achieve what we need and what we deserve. A new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible if the indigenous join together with workers, campesinos, students, teachers, employees...the workers of the city and the countryside.

[\(To be continued...\)](#)

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee - General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Mexico, in the sixth month of the year 2005.

Translated by irlandesa