

EZLN Demands at the Dialogue Table

Zapatista Army of National Liberation

On January 1, 1994, the very date when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was supposed to enter into effect, Mexico was shocked by an uprising in Chiapas led by a group calling itself the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. This largely indigenous peasant uprising was surprising for a number of reasons. First, such insurrections were widely supposed to have become obsolete with the end of the Cold War. Most Latin American leftist guerrilla armies had laid down their weapons, and those that remained in the field—such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—were generally regarded to have lost their ideological direction. Second, the uprising seemed to have a different character. Its leading spokesman, who called himself Subcomandante Marcos, smoked a pipe through his ski mask as he bombarded the national and international press with opaque letters full of parables and poetry. Indeed, it quickly became apparent that the movement was more concerned with the tactics of guerrilla theater than guerrilla warfare, its main objective being to win the hearts and minds of Mexicans. To prevail in this ideological war of position in a transnational environment, the EZLN made full use of the new internet technology: it sought to build international solidarity in opposition to the market-driven doctrines of neoliberalism, which, it argued, favored large corporations seeking cheap and docile labor, readily exploitable resources, and lax environmental regulation in places like Chiapas.

Although the uprising began with violence and has since seen occasional violent episodes, the history of the movement since its inception has been mostly characterized by a tense standoff between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government forces and sporadic bouts of unproductive negotiation. As of this writing, the conflict remains unresolved. The roots of the rebellion, which can be gleaned from the following list of demands made by the EZLN as it first entered into dialogue with the government, lie in the drastically unequal and exploitative socioeconomic structure of Southern Mexico. Some of the ills of that structure can be seen in readings elsewhere in this volume, notably in those by B. Traven and Rosario Castellanos.

COMMUNIQUE FROM THE CLANDESTINE REVOLUTIONARY INDIAN COMMITTEE-GENERAL COMMAND [CCRI-CG] OF THE EZLN, MEXICO

March 1, 1994

To the people of Mexico
To the peoples and governments of the World
To the national and international press

Brothers and sisters,

The CCRI-CG of the EZLN addresses you with respect and honor in order to inform you of the list of demands presented at the bargaining table in the Meetings for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas.

"We are not begging for change or gifts; we ask for the right to live with the dignity of human beings, with equality and justice like our parents and grandparents of old."

To the People of Mexico:

The indigenous peoples of the state of Chiapas, having risen up in arms in the EZLN against misery and bad government, hereby present the reasons for their struggle and their principal demands:

The reason and causes of our armed movement are the following problems, to which the government has never offered any real solution:

- (1) The hunger, misery, and marginalization that we have always suffered.
- (2) The total lack of land on which to work in order to survive.
- (3) The repression, eviction, imprisonment, torture, and murder with which the government responds to our fair demands.
- (4) The unbearable injustices and violations of our human rights as indigenous people and impoverished campesinos.
- (5) The brutal exploitation we suffer in the sale of our products, in the work day, and in the purchase of basic necessities.
- (6) The lack of all basic services for the great majority of the indigenous population.

(7) More than sixty years of lies, deceptions, promises, and imposed governments. The lack of freedom and democracy in deciding our destinies.

(8) The constitutional laws have not been obeyed by those who govern the country; on the other hand, we the indigenous people and campesinos are made to pay for the smallest error. They heap upon us the weight of laws we did not make, and those who did make them are the first to violate them.

The EZLN came to dialogue with honest words. The EZLN came to say its

word about the conditions that were the origin of its righteous war and to ask all the people of Mexico to help find a solution to these political, economic, and social conditions that forced us to take up arms to defend our existence and our rights.

Therefore we demand. . . .

First. We demand truly free and democratic elections, with equal rights and obligations for all the political organizations struggling for power, with real freedom to choose between one proposal and another and with respect for the will of the majority. Democracy is the fundamental right of all peoples, indigenous and non-indigenous. Without democracy there cannot be liberty or justice or dignity. And without dignity there is nothing.

Second. In order for there to be truly free and democratic elections, the incumbent federal executive and the incumbent state executives, which came to power via electoral fraud, must resign. Their legitimacy does not come from respect for the will of the majority but rather from usurping it. Consequently, a transitional government must be formed to ensure equality and respect for all political forces. The federal and state legislative powers, elected freely and democratically, must assume their true functions of making just laws for everyone and ensuring that the laws are followed.

Another way to guarantee free and democratic elections is to recognize in national, state, and local law the legitimacy of citizens and groups of citizens who, without party affiliation, would watch over the elections, sanction the legality of its results, and have maximum authority to guarantee the legitimacy of the whole electoral process.

Third. Recognition of the EZLN as a belligerent force, and of its troops as authentic combatants, and application of all international treaties that regulate military conflict.

Fourth. A new pact among the elements of the federation, which puts an end to centralism and permits regions, indigenous communities, and municipalities to govern themselves with political, economic, and cultural autonomy.

Fifth. General elections for the whole state of Chiapas and legal recognition of all the political forces in the state.

Sixth. As a producer of electricity and oil, the state of Chiapas pays tribute to the federation without receiving anything in exchange. Our communities do not have electric power; the export and domestic sale of our oil doesn't produce any benefit whatsoever for the Chiapanecan people. In view of this, it is vital that all Chiapanecan communities receive the benefit of electric power and that a percentage of the income from the commercialization

of Chiapanecan oil be applied to the agricultural, commercial, and social-industrial infrastructure, for the benefit of all Chiapanecans.

Seventh. Revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement signed with Canada and the United States, given that in its current state it does not take into consideration the indigenous populations and sentences them to death for the crime of having no job qualifications whatsoever.

Eighth. Article 27 of the Magna Carta [Constitution of 1917] must respect the original spirit of Emiliano Zapata: the land is for the indigenous peoples and campesinos who work it—not for the latifundistas. We want, as is established in our revolutionary agricultural law, the great quantity of land that is currently in the hands of big ranchers and national and foreign landowners to pass into the hands of our peoples, who suffer from a total lack of land. The land grants shall include farm machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, credits, technical advice, improved seeds, livestock, and fair prices for products like coffee, corn, and beans. The land that is distributed must be of good quality and include roads, transportation, and irrigation systems.

The campesinos who already have land also have the right to all the above-mentioned supports in order to facilitate their work in the fields and improve production. New *ejidos* and communities must be formed. The Salinas revision of Article 27 must be annulled and the right to land must be recognized as per the terms of our Magna Carta.

Ninth. We want hospitals to be built in the municipal seats, with specialized doctors and enough medicine to be able to attend to the patients; we want rural clinics in the *ejidos*, communities, and surrounding areas, as well as training and a fair salary for health workers. Where there are already hospitals, they must be renovated as soon as possible and include complete surgical services. In the largest communities, clinics must be built and they too must have doctors and medicine in order to treat people more quickly.

Tenth. The right to true information about what happens at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels must be guaranteed to indigenous peoples by way of an indigenous radio station independent of the government, directed by indigenous people and run by indigenous people.

Eleventh. We want housing to be built in all the rural communities of Mexico, including such basic services as electricity, potable water, roads, sewer systems, telephone, transportation, and so forth. And these houses should also have the advantages of the city, such as television, stove, refrigerator, and washing machine. The communities shall be equipped with recreation centers for the healthy entertainment of their populations: sports and culture that dignify the human condition of the indigenous people.

Twelfth. We want the illiteracy of the indigenous peoples to come to an end. For this to happen we need better elementary and secondary schools in our communities, including free teaching materials, and teachers with a university education who are at the service of the people and not just in defense of the interests of the rich. In the municipal seats there must be free elementary, junior high, and high schools; the government must give the students uniforms, shoes, food, and all study materials free of charge. The larger, central communities that are very far from the municipal seats must provide boarding schools at the secondary level. Education must be totally free, from preschool to university, and must be granted to all Mexicans regardless of race, creed, age, sex, or political affiliation.

Thirteenth. The languages of all ethnicities must be official and their instruction shall be mandatory in elementary, junior high, and high school, and at the university level.

Fourteenth. Our rights and dignity as indigenous peoples shall be respected, taking into account our cultures and traditions.

Fifteenth. We indigenous people no longer want to be the object of discrimination and contempt.

Sixteenth. We indigenous people must be permitted to organize and govern ourselves autonomously; we no longer want to submit to the will of the powerful, either national or foreign.

Seventeenth. Justice shall be administered by the same indigenous peoples, according to their customs and traditions, without intervention by illegitimate and corrupt governments.

Eighteenth. We want to have decent jobs with fair salaries for all rural and urban workers throughout the Mexican republic, so that our brothers and sisters don't have to work at bad things, like drug trafficking, delinquency, and prostitution, to be able to survive. The federal Labor Law shall be applied to rural and urban workers, complete with bonuses, benefits, vacations, and the real right to strike.

Nineteenth. We want a fair price for our products from the countryside. Thus we need the liberty to find a market where we can buy and sell and not be subject to exploiting *coyotes* [middlemen].

Twentieth. The plunder of the riches of our Mexico and above all of Chiapas, one of the richest states of the republic but where hunger and misery most abound, must come to an end.

Twenty-first. We want all debts from credits, loans, and taxes with high interest rates to be annulled; these cannot be paid due to the great poverty of the Mexican people.

Twenty-second. We want hunger and malnutrition to end; it alone has

caused the death of thousands of our brothers and sisters in the country and the city. Every rural community must have cooperative stores supported economically by the federal, state, or municipal governments, and the prices must be fair. Moreover, there must be vehicles, property of the co-ops, for the transportation of merchandise. The government must send free food for all children under fourteen.

Twenty-third. We ask for the immediate and unconditional liberty of all political prisoners and of all the poor people unfairly imprisoned in all the jails of Chiapas and Mexico.

Twenty-fourth. We ask that the Federal Army and the public security and judicial police no longer come into rural zones because they only come to intimidate, evict, rob, repress, and bomb campesinos who are organizing to defend their rights. Our peoples are tired of the abusive and repressive presence of the soldiers and public security and judicial police. The federal government must return to the Swiss government the Pilatus planes used to bomb our people, and the money resulting from the return of that merchandise shall be applied toward programs to improve the lives of the workers of the country and the city. We also ask that the government of the United States of North America recall its helicopters, as they are used to repress the people of Mexico.

Twenty-fifth. When the indigenous campesino people rose up in arms, they had nothing but poor huts, but now that the Federal Army is bombing the civilian population it is destroying even these humble homes and our few belongings. Therefore we ask and demand of the federal government that it compensate the families that have sustained material losses caused by the bombings and the actions of the federal troops. We also ask for compensation for those widowed and orphaned by the war, for civilians as well as Zapatistas.

Twenty-sixth. We as indigenous campesinos want to live in peace and quiet, and to be permitted to live according to our rights to liberty and a decent life.

Twenty-seventh. The Penal Code of the state of Chiapas must be revoked; it doesn't permit us to organize in any way other than with arms, since any legal and peaceful struggle is punished and repressed.

Twenty-eighth. We ask for and demand an immediate halt to the displacement of indigenous peoples from their communities by the state-backed *caciques*. We demand the guaranteed free and voluntary return of all displaced peoples to their lands of origin, and compensation for their losses.

Twenty-ninth. Indigenous women's petition:

We the indigenous campesina women ask for the immediate solution to our urgent needs, which the government has never met:

(1) Child-birth clinics with gynecologists so that campesina women can receive necessary medical attention.

(2) Day-care centers must be built in the communities.

(3) We ask the government to send enough food for the children in all the communities—necessities such as milk, corn starch, rice, corn, soy, oil, beans, cheese, eggs, sugar, soup, oatmeal, and so forth.

(4) Kitchens and dining halls, with all the necessary equipment, must be built for the children in the communities.

(5) Corn mills and tortilla-makers must be placed in the communities according to the number of families in each area.

(6) We should be given the materials necessary to raise chickens, rabbits, sheep, and pigs, including technical advice and veterinary services.

(7) We ask for the ovens and materials necessary to build bakeries.

(8) We want craft workshops to be built, including machinery and materials.

(9) There must be a market where crafts can be sold at a fair price.

(10) Schools must be built where women can receive technical training.

(11) There must be preschool and day-care centers in the rural communities where the children can have fun and grow up strong, morally and physically.

(12) As women we must have sufficient transportation to move from one place to another and to transport the products of the various projects we have.

Thirtieth. We demand political justice for Patrocinio González Garrido, Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, and Elmar Setzer M.¹

Thirty-first. We demand respect for the lives of all members of the EZLN and a guarantee that there will be no penal process or repressive action taken against any of the members of the EZLN, combatants, sympathizers, or collaborators.

Thirty-second. All groups and commissions defending human rights must be independent, that is, non-governmental, because those that are governmental only hide the arbitrary actions of the government.

Thirty-third. A National Commission of Peace with Justice and Dignity should be formed, the majority of constituents being people with no government or party affiliation. This National Commission of Peace with Justice and Dignity should be the agency that ensures the implementation of the agreements reached between the EZLN and the federal government.

Thirty-fourth. The humanitarian aid for the victims of the conflict should be channeled through authentic representatives of the indigenous communities.

As long as there is no answer to these fair demands of our peoples, we are willing and determined to continue our struggle until we reach our objective.

For us, the least of these lands, those without face and without history, those armed with truth and fire, those who came from the night and the

mountain, the true men and women, the dead of yesterday, today, and forever . . . for ourselves nothing. For everyone, everything.

Freedom! Justice! Democracy!

Respectfully,

From the Mexican Southeast

CCRI-CG of the EZLN

Mexico, March 1994

Note

1. Castellanos Domínguez was governor of Chiapas from 1982 to 1988; he was succeeded by González Garrido. When González Garrido was named Interior (*Gobernación*) Secretary by President Salinas in 1993, Elmar Setzer was named interim governor. All were denounced for corruption and abuse of power by the Zapatistas. *Ed.*