

With a Little Piece of Heart

Cecelia Rodriguez
US Coordinator of the National Commission for
Democracy in Mexico

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I bring you greetings from the front, from the war zone where two worlds clash, once again, much as they did 502 years ago. On one side are the “disposable” communities, those which the huge multinationals have crossed off as unnecessary because they do not consume, they do not produce, they do not fit into the scheme which they have designed for humanity. I bring you greetings from the “inditos” (the little indians), from “those who were chosen by God to be poor” as the feudal landlords of Chiapas call them, from the “transgressors of the law, the criminals” as the Mexican Army calls them. I bring you greetings from the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, an indigenous army based in the mountains of the Selva Lacandona of southeastern Chiapas which declared war on the Mexican government on January 1 of 1994.

I share the names of some of the original people of this continent with you so that the spirits of their dead and the dying and those who have chosen to die in order to live with the Zapatista Army echo between these walls and in your ears and in your hearts. I bring you greetings from the mazahuas, amuzgos, tlapanecos, nahuailacas, coras, huicholes, yaquis, mayos, tarahumaras, mixtéeos, zapotecos, mayas in the states of Yucatan, Campeche and Quintana Roo, the chontales of Tabasco, seris, triquis, kumiai, cucapa, paipai, cochimi, kiliwa, tequistlatecos, pame, chichimecos, otomis, mazatecos, matlatzincos, ocuiltecos, popoloca, ixcatecos, chocho, popoloca, cuicatecos, chatinos, chinantecos, huaves, papagos, pimas, tepehuanos, guarijios, huastecos, chuj, jalaltecos, mixes, zoques, totonacos, kikapus, purepechas, o’odham, tzeltales, tzotziles, choles, tojolabale!

And I hope that you hear more than the sound of their names. I hope that you hear their voices because you must listen very carefully or you will not understand their message.

When I first began to prepare this speech I did not know where to begin. I could tell you that NAFTA put an end to Article 27 which put an end to land rights for peasants and indigenous communities. I could tell you that from 1981 to 1989, 2,444,700 cubic meters of precious woods, conifers, and tropical trees were taken from the state of Chiapas, and that in 1988, the exploitation of the forest produced almost \$8 million in profit, six thousand percent more than in 1980. I am aware however, that this audience can more easily read these facts, and that rather than try to review numbers and geographies, statistics and histories, all of which I can provide to you in more efficient form, I should focus on the state of emergency in Mexico. I should try to explain to you the global significance of the struggle of the Zapatistas.

Perhaps to some of you the struggle of the Zapatistas is unknown or little known. It is about a handful of Indians who have taken up arms in a remote area of Mexico, or, as the mainstream media has successfully portrayed, a guerrilla group supporting the Party for the Democratic Revolution (PRD), a coalition of progressive and some mainstream forces, which opposes the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI), the party which has held power for 65 years, the perfect dictatorship as Carlos Fuentes has called it. As far as you may know, there is a conflict between two political parties in Mexico, but for the most part Mexico is stable, peaceful, progressive. This is the

way in which the powers that be want you to understand reality. They want you to perceive the struggle of the Zapatistas as a marginal one, an insignificant one which has little consequences for each of you. This, I tell you now, is a lie. Mexico is at the brink of a civil war, a war which, in its local and national implications has global ones as well.

The faceless ones, the ones with no names have had the audacity to say no to the ecological and human devastation promised by GATT and NAFTA, to the misery, oppression and despair brought upon the world by the policies of neo-liberalism. They have, as well, dedicated themselves for the past 10 months to building an alternative vision for Mexico, a national movement for democracy.

The Zapatistas want a very different future for Mexico. They struggle for land, jobs, housing, health, education, food and nutrition, independence, democracy, liberty, justice, peace. They insist that the right of every human being on earth to have these things is not a utopian dream, as many of us have come to believe, but indeed the *essence* of our humanity, that to accept less than this is to have lost ourselves. In the face of profound cynicism, when the immense failures of socialism and the rhetoric of the left has lost its meaning, the Zapatistas are about to give their lives so that all of us may know hope again, so that we may all understand that we cannot abandon hope because of human fallacies, that we must rise to the call of a struggle for human dignity, that we must struggle not just to survive, but to live.

The struggle of the Zapatistas runs clearly and directly against the policies of Neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is a set of global economics re-hashed in the 70's by Milton Friedman, the University of Chicago, and Friedrich Von Hayec and are not well-known to North Americans as such. I want to describe them to you, because I am sure each of you will recognize them, once I do.

Neo-liberalism states that economic crises or problems are the fault of government intervention in the economy, Its fundamental principle is "economic liberty". What does this mean? It means that an economy must be free of impediments in order to operate. It therefore views things like social programs and regulations as impediments (in fact in GATT it calls them "barriers to the free flow of trade and capital") and so requires the elimination of social security programs, government housing programs, minimum wage laws, environmental protection laws, labor legislation which protects workers, import taxes, price controls, subsidies. Because the principal goal of neo-liberalism is to maximize the profits of private enterprise, it dedicates itself to the privatization and liberalization or de-regulation of the economy, while carrying out so-called stabilization programs. What does this mean? Well, if it were true that "free market" forces were allowed to operate for example, today the USA would not have an automobile industry, a steel industry or a computer industry, and certainly not the microchip industry. It was the Reagan administration which greatly extended government protectionism for the rich and saved those industries. In essence, neo-liberalism guarantees free markets for the poor, government protection for the rich.

The government or the state apparatus therefore has a role insofar as aiding the rich and controlling the population through state repression; stronger anticrime measures like more prisons, longer prison sentences, more police. Neo-liberalism, according to Friedrich Hayek, requires a new moral system, and I quote:

“A free society requires certain morals which ultimately are reduced to the maintenance of life; not all life because it may be necessary to sacrifice individual lives in order to preserve major numbers of lives. Therefore the only moral rules can be those which provide for the ‘computation of lives’ determined by private property and its contract.”

And the evidence of the last quarter century speaks for itself; indigenous communities, industrial workers, and women, for example, represent disposable lives, so the “structural adjustment” which has taken place has found it necessary to eliminate their livelihood, all for the “greater good” of course. Under such a set of morals, for example, you can justify the dumping of nuclear waste on Indian reservations in the U.S. What do a few million lives mean, when balanced with the importance of profits? You can also justify the elimination of millions of peasant and indigenous communities in Mexico, so that land, which was once cultivated collectively, can now pass to the hands of multinationals who will use it to cultivate crops for exportation, a much more profitable activity.

You recognize neo-liberalism now? Remember the television ads of all the Republicans who won political seats on Tuesday: less government, tough on crime, eliminate welfare and put people back to work by reducing taxes for the rich? Understand as well that it is nothing new, that it is a regression, a re-hashing of the old formula of exploitation, global rape and pillage of human and natural resources so essential to the most primitive form of capitalism; that it is doublespeak, lies and ideological manipulation. These economic policies are in fact eliminating “individual entrepreneurs” from the marketplace and sustaining powerful multinationals who know no borders, who have loyalty to no national identity, who recognize no government, except their own corporate one. The democracies that the multi-nationals will nurture and support are “democracies of the free market”; futile exercises, because the real political power and decision-making occurs in board rooms, and is carried out by faceless technocrats who are accountable to and elected by no one. It is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization who call the shots in the world today.

It is neo-liberalism which the Zapatistas are fighting against, in the midst of progressive forces which are unable to identify their enemy, and the failures of rigid Marxist dogma, and this is the global significance of their struggle, this therefore makes their front line your front line as well.

Some have called the Zapatista project “crazy, desperate, impossible, suicidal, idealistic.” I want to mark for you now, the history of the Zapatista struggle, to point out those things which make it very different from anything which has been seen before.

FIRST: The Zapatista Army emerged by adhering closely to the Mexican Constitution and the Geneva Accords which govern war and clearly set itself on a trajectory to win political objectives much larger than its military capacity. On January 1, 1994, hundreds of Zapatista troops were transported to the cities of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Altamirano, Comitan, and held the cities in their possession while the Mexican Army slept off its New Year hangover. The Zapatistas posted a declaration of war. They stated they were adhering to Article 32 of the Mexican Constitution which states that the Mexican people are the source of legitimacy for the Mexican government, and that they have the right to overthrow the same if it is not representing their interests. They demanded the right to be recognized as a “belligerent force” under the Geneva convention, and called upon the Mexican Army to respect the well-being of the civilian population. They have never characterized themselves as an irregular, guerrilla force, but as an Army, one which trained in the Lacandon jungle for ten years, whose members undertook armed struggle after many years of peaceful but unsuccessful political activism.

SECOND; The EZLN has made it a political priority to maintain a public dialogue with the civilian population of Mexico, and the international community challenging its concepts of democracy, citizen participation and social change. It has used its moral authority to organize a new political space for independent activists. Through communiques, through dozens of delegations to their territory, and through the progressive media, they have maintained a high public profile, explaining the reasons for their actions, their demands, their positions on different issues, reaching out to broad sectors of the Mexican public. They have been visited within the conflict zone by hundreds of activists from around the world, and are interested in developing a global resistance movement to neo-liberalism.

THIRD; The EZLN has called for and nurtured the peaceful activism of the civilian population by consistently allowing it to take a leadership position, indeed to suggest that peaceful civil protest defeat the need for armed struggle. How has this happened? In January, it was the civilian population who called for a ceasefire by massive mobilizations all over the country. The EZLN accepted the cease-fire and has abided by it since January 12th. In March, the EZLN met with the PRI government in San Cristobal. It was civilians who formed an unarmed security belt in response to the EZLN’s call, by standing arm to arm in shifts for the days in which the EZLN negotiated with the government. Lastly in August, the EZLN launched its massive project of organizing what is now called the National Democratic Convention. It has not called upon the civilian population to undertake the armed struggle, has not called the armed struggle a superior form of struggle, and has not interfered with other forms of struggle (it cooperated with the elections of August). It acknowledges that there are many forms of struggle and all are valid. In this spirit, the CND was convened in the Lacandon jungle by over 6,000 delegates representing communities from every corner of Mexico. The CND is working on the following issues;

1. The Transition to Democracy as a response to the inviability of the State-Party system.
2. Peaceful Methods of transition to democracy; the elections, civil resistance, and the defense of the popular will.
3. A National Project around the 11 points of struggle of the EZLN.
4. A plan for a Transitional Government.
5. A plan for a New Constitution and Constitutional Congress.

FOURTH; As part of its demands, the EZLN has asked for complete autonomy for the indigenous communities which constitute its base. It demands special provisions for indigenous peoples which will establish indigenous regions with their own governments, economies and justice systems.

FIFTH; The EZLN, in a determined effort to maintain the unity of democratizing forces in Mexico, has disassociated itself from the ultra-left; criticizing antiquated Marxist dogma and sectarian tactics which divide, and fracture a national movement for democratic change.

I just returned from the second session of the CND where more than 2500 delegates met to move the Convention's agenda forward. Contrary to what the mainstream press has said, the CND is not a gathering of "leftists", there are certainly delegates from left organizations, and registered political parties, but more importantly there are hundreds of people from the grassroots: campesinos, students, indigenous leaders, workers, teachers, colonos/or neighborhood activists, human rights activists, ecologists, women, gays and lesbians. In the hands of this grassroots activism, Mexico has moved into an era of social fervor; massive mobilizations which have had a severe impact on local economies, and which are for the most part ignored by the media.

Encircled by what are now 55,000 troops, the EZLN has nevertheless constructed a relationship with an organized national body of civil resistance committed to a democratic change for Mexico. In the period of 10 short months, a democratic movement in Mexico has taken steps never seen before.

So what happens now? What does the future hold? As some of you know, the ruling party of the PRI won the election of August 21, with "supposedly" the cleanest elections in history. Although hundreds of eyewitness accounts and testimonials of irregularities have now come in, few international bodies have taken note of these and the PRI now insists it has a popular mandate to continue its rule.

Zedillo will be inaugurated as president on December 1. Eduardo Robledo Rincon will take office as governor of Chiapas on December 8. In its well-known habit of speaking out of two sides of its mouth, the PRI proclaims a commitment to a negotiated peace, while carrying out provocative military actions.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the civil resistance movement begin to suffer the harassment and persecution of the armed forces. Some of you may know that the PRD,

which is the party of opposition has already had 280 of its militants killed since 1988, the most recent in September and October of this year (Amado Avendano, the PRD candidate for governor in Chiapas suffered an assassination attempt in July which he survived). Peaceful marches have been met with armed force, a march in September in Guerrerro had 300 of its participants injured by Mexican judicial police, as well as one in Mexico City, where the cavalry was used against protesters in the Zocalo. In addition, several indigenous and peasant leaders have been murdered.

It is said that the state of Chiapas is entering a state of siege. Amado Avendano has announced his intent to take the governor's palace on December 8th and install a transitional government. High on his agenda is his intent to develop a plan for the autonomous government of indigenous communities in that state. Such is the strength of the peasant and indigenous movements of that state that experts have said the entire state must be militarized in order for the PRI to maintain control.

The prospect of a war in Mexico is the ultimate irony. The same corporate forces which implement neo-liberalism have now impoverished the world's peoples to the point of unleashing unprecedented waves of immigration, and the governments of developed countries scramble to close down their borders.

The war which the forces of neo-liberalism has unleashed on the world has gotten a response; one which it did not expect and intends to contain. This war has as its booty thousands of acres of land, miles of rainforest, tons of precious minerals, water, flora and fauna. It is a war for a new jugular vein for the vampire of capitalism; the new blood which will give life to its rotting carcass. A war to eliminate those peoples who stand in its way, who do not fit, who do not have a place in the scheme of things because of their cultural traditions, their commitment to the land, and their moral values. A war to define democracy on its own terms, to delude the peoples of the world into believing that it is they who choose the decision-makers, when in reality, the decision-makers are not even in the room.

I do not believe the democratic movement in Mexico will remain localized, I believe the seeds have been planted for a national movement and that the people of Mexico have reached the limits of their patience.

And so I stand before you today, to ask you the most unbearable of questions — can we do anything against the power of the multinationals? Is it possible that as a species we have given up the only quality which distinguished us, the ability to control the forces which we ourselves have created?

Whether or not the Zapatistas and the Mexican democratic movement struggles and dies alone, depends on our answer to this question. The Zapatistas can mark the beginning of a new era of struggle, one which reaches across issues, across cultures, across methods of struggle and across borders; one which looks for completely new formulas and new methods for our proposed struggles; one which questions the meaning of democracy and seeks to re-construct its basis, because only in that way can we respond to the power of the multinationals.

And for us, for those of us who are the inhabitants of developed countries there is a greater issue at stake.

Subcomandante Marcos recently commented that Mexicans who immigrate to the United States should stop exporting their hopes, that they abandon their homeland in the hopes that a different social-political system can give them all they hope for.

In developed countries, we don't export hope, we are constantly shrinking it, squashing it, whittling it down to size, Clinton is better than nothing we say, miserable social services are better than nothing, hanging on to environmental protection laws which has been diluted to the point of extinction is better than nothing we say. In this way the 11 points of struggle of the Zapatistas become utopia, we cannot tolerate unleashing our imaginations to conceive of such a thing.

The path to those 11 points is in fact quite simple, we must go there together. Our only strength is in our numbers, is in our ability to understand and see our enemy clearly. We must throw our fates together, give up our illusions that our little organizations will, -if they only work hard enough, be able to do it alone. We must learn to see beyond the immediate, learn to look towards one another, instead of towards some magic, easy solution which will present itself to us in the midst of one of our projects. We must leave our individualism behind and construct a different future with the wisdom of our experience and the passion of our commitment to a World which is balanced, just, and responsive to human needs.

So we can view this recent Republican victory with our usual dose of despondency, or we can understand it as the groping around of a people looking for an answer. Something is wrong, the American electorate believes; the standard of living is no longer rising; it's gotta be somebody's fault — the Bushes, the Clintons, the Congress, the criminals, the courts, the immigrants; something is wrong and there has to be something out there that can fix it.

From the armchairs of passivity, the American electorate seeks to define democracy as something which some individual politician is responsible for. Until that electorate is engaged in a political and social process, one which assumes responsibility for society and the well-being of the globe's resources, it will continue to seek the easy answers of ignorance, of hate, of xenophobia, of arrogance, of individualism. It is intended that way; it will preserve the rule of the corporations in that way.

That is why your work is important. That is why you must re-double your efforts to reach out beyond your own constituencies, to educate, to explain. To engage those who belong to the opposition is more important at this point in history than legislative advocacy, than demonstrations and marches. It is this difficult and painstaking educational process which we continue to sacrifice in the name of "impact" and "productivity" and so the results are that our movements do not have the mass base to support our demands. We remain marginalized, weak and disorganized.

We fear a \tfhr in Mexico. A War conducted by military men trained by the United States, by guns and bombs made and sold by the United States, for reasons which benefit the needs of the multinationals.

I hope my presence here tonight will provoke you, will move you, will make you refuse to have Zapatista blood on your hands.

I am making a call to action in hopes that each of you will be willing to do something for the Zapatistas, that each of you will reject the idea that the death of these communities is necessary to sustain the privilege and power of the multinationals.

There are some basic demands that we need you to fight for;

1. That the military blockade around Zapatista territory be eliminated and the federal troops withdrawn from the state of Chiapas
2. That all economic and military aid be suspended until a process for a transition to democracy is established.
3. That the EZLN be recognized as a legitimate political and military force as defined by the Geneva Accords.
4. That NAFTA be suspended until the questions regarding the impact on indigenous communities be address, the effect on immigration is analyzed and an appropriate binational response is designed, and the impact on jobs and the environment is evaluated.
5. That the peace initiative designed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz be supported as well as the Bishop himself who has come under pressure by the PRI and the Vatican.
6. That this network participate in the peace camps being established by the CND in the conflict zone, that it bring its capacity for mobilization to bear on examining and denouncing the exploitation of natural resources in the region, and that it educate its membership and constituencies about the reasons for the Zapatista struggle and the movement for democracy in Mexico.

It doesn't matter to me if this network only takes up one of these points, only that you do it well and you do it with all your hearts.

In conclusion I want to read a section of a Zapatista communique. It expresses well what needs to be done:

“Today; 502 years after that power invaded our lands, the powerful want to corner us in our Indian sorrow, despair, pain. They want to make us deaf to the laments of our brothers who are of a different color, language, and culture, and who walk the same sad journey we do under the domination of arrogance. We know that our oppression is not the fault of a skin color or the curse of a foreign language.

There are those who have white skin and a dark sorrow. Our struggle walks with these skins. There are those who have dark skins and a white

arrogance; against them is our fire. Our armed path of hope is not against the mixed-blood; it is against the race of money. It is not against a skin color but against the color of money. It is not against a foreign language but against the language of money...today we say that that foreign vocation which sits, without reason or right, in the large chair of the government, must be expelled by the shame and the curse of all the good people of this land.

We have heard the doublespeak of the powerful: where he says peace, he makes war. Where he says life, he gives death. Where he says respect, he decrees degradation. Where he says truth, only lies walk.

Today our sorrow turns to seek a place in your hearts. Our thoughts ask little, only that you no longer hold back your desire to find that lost dignity. We only ask that a small piece of your heart be Zapatista. That it never sell out. That it never surrender. That it resist. That you continue, in your places and with your means, to struggle forever so that dignity and not poverty, be the harvest in all the corners of our nation.”

Good peoples of the Native Forest Network, I ask that a little piece of your heart be Zapatista so that human dignity is the harvest in all corners of the globe. Thank you very much for your attention.

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Cecelia Rodriguez
US Coordinator of the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico
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