



On January first, 1994, much of the world was shocked with the news of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. Mexico internationally recognized as a stable, peaceful and democratic country, proud of its government and admired by others, finally stood revealed. The uprising showed the world what many of us already knew: the extreme exploitation, oppression, discrimination and misery of the close to fifteen million Indigenous people that live there. We also know that the same conditions exist in the majority of the countries on this continent.

We hope that the events in Chiapas cause to reflect not only governments but also the so-called national societies which have generally remained indifferent to Indigenous demands--so that this indifference is recognized as complicity with injustice. Governments and societies in general cannot continue to ignore the clamor for justice being made by our people. In the meantime, Indigenous people are creating the necessary strategy and ideology to see more clearly our road to liberation, and to avoid confusion in the sense that Indigenous aspirations are reduced only to class or economic demands. We want to clarify that Indigenous demands are not just for a better salary, or a piece of land, rather they oriented towards reconstructing our communities and cultures.

In the last edition of Abya Yala News, we noted that even though some attention had been given to Indigenous problems by governments, institutions, and non-governmental organizations, little justice was actually achieved. Nonetheless, and despite everything, there are positive signs which hold out hope for a better future. We can affirm that Indigenous peoples continue to develop and communicate their objectives and policies with increasing clarity and unity.

The International Year of Indigenous Peoples declared by the United Nations in 1993 created many expectations. But with few exceptions, and despite the good intentions of some international agencies and governments such as those of Norway, Canada and Australia, little has changed. Not only do Indigenous demands continue to be denied, but the systematic violation of our peoples' human rights continues. Repression, murders, forced displacements and indiscriminate natural resource exploitation are the continuation of work begun five hundred years ago.

The United Nations has now declared this the decade of Indigenous Peoples. It is likely that governments will use this declaration to divert attention from existing problems, with the usual paternalistic propaganda. The difference is that now, Indigenous peoples scrutinize government policies. We are better organized and have more experience. The current challenge for Indigenous organizations is create the necessary strategies for change and a solid continental unity.

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