

Democracy, an End to Discrimination and Regional Development:

THE ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY PROPOSALS

The extent to which the Zapatista army has been able to communicate its positions and observations to the national and international press is unprecedented in the recent history of Latin American armed uprisings. On June 10, in a rejection of the government's peace proposal the EZLN issued a "Second Lacandon Declaration" (the first being the January 1 declaration of war). In addition to reiterating old demands for national democracy, the EZLN proposed a new constitutional convention.

"...We address our brothers and sisters in different non-governmental organizations, in peasant and indigenous organizations, workers in the cities and in the countryside, teachers and students, housewives and squatters, artists and intellectuals, members of independent political parties, Mexicans. We call you all to a national dialogue with the theme of democracy, freedom and justice. For this reason, we put forward the following invitation to a National Democratic Convention...we call for a sovereign and revolutionary National Democratic Convention to create a transition government and a new national law, a new constitution that will guarantee the legal fulfillment of the people's will.

This sovereign revolutionary convention will be national in that all states of the federation will be represented. It will be plural in the sense that all patriotic sectors will be represented. It will be democratic in the way in which it will make decisions by na-

tional consultations. The convention will be presided over, freely and voluntarily by civilians, prestigious public figures, regardless of their political affiliation, race, religion, sex or age. The convention will be launched by local, state and regional committees in every ejido, settlement, school and factory. These committees will be charged with collecting the people's proposals for the new constitution and demands to be carried out by a new government following the convention.

The convention should demand free and democratic elections and should fight for the people's will to be respected. The EZLN will recognize the National Democratic Convention as the authentic representative of the interests of the Mexican people in their transition to democracy. The EZLN is now to be found throughout the national territory and is in a position to offer itself to the Mexican people as an army to guarantee that the people's will is carried out. For the first meeting of the National Democratic Convention, the EZLN offers as a meeting-place a Zapatista settlement with all of the resources to be found there..."

Apart from the fairly general comun EZLN stated its positions most specifically in their now famous 34 point peace proposal last March. This proposal included demands for national democracy, regional economic development and in general, the abolition of discriminatory attitudes, policies and government repression. The following is a list of central demands in each of these categories.

Political Change

1. We demand free and democratic elections with equal rights and obligations for all political organizations contending for power, true liberty to choose one or another proposal and respect for the majority's will. Democracy is a fundamental right of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Without democracy there can be no liberty, justice or dignity and without dignity there is nothing.
2. To ensure free and truly democratic elections it is necessary for the Federal Executive and occupants of state offices who reached their positions of power through electoral fraud to resign. Their titles do not come from majority consensus but rather are the result of usurpation. Consequently, it will be necessary for a transitional government to be formed.
3. The recognition of the EZLN as a belligerent force.
4. A new pact between federation members to do away with centralization and allow regions, indigenous communities and municipalities to govern themselves with political, economic and cultural autonomy.
5. General elections in the state of Chiapas and the legal recognition of all the state's political forces.

Regional Development

6. It is of the utmost importance that all Chiapan communities receive

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Members of the EZLN general command at press conference in San Cristobal de las Casas

electricity and that a certain percentage of the taxes earned from the commercialization of Chiapan petroleum be applied to industrial, agricultural, commercial and social infrastructure projects for the benefit of all *Chiapanecos*.

7. The revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement signed with the United States and Canada. In its present form it does not take into account the indigenous population. Furthermore, it represents a death sentence because it does not include any labor qualifications whatsoever.
8. Article 27 of the Magna Carta should respect the original spirit of Emiliano Zapata: land is for the indigenous people and peasants who work it, not for *latifundistas* (large landowners).
9. We demand that the government build hospitals in the capitals of all municipalities which are equipped with specialized doctors and sufficient medicine to attend to all patients and rural clinics in smaller communities with training and fair salaries for health representatives.
10. That indigenous people be guaranteed the right to information on local, regional, state, national and international levels through an in-

dependent radio station that is directed and operated by indigenous people.

11. We demand that housing be built in all rural communities in Mexico, and provided with necessary services such as: light, running water, roads, sewage systems, telephones, public transportation, etc. And also that we be granted the benefits of the city such as televisions, stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, etc.
 12. We demand an end to illiteracy in indigenous communities. For this we need better elementary and secondary schools in our communities which provide free materials and have teachers with university degrees who are at the service of the people and not just defending the wealthy.
- In addition, the proposal calls for jobs with fair salaries for all, cancellation of high-interest debts held by the poor, an end to hunger and government supported cooperatives stores in each community, and access to free markets without intermediaries. This "Indigenous Women's Petition" was also included:

We, Indigenous peasant women, demand the immediate solution to our urgent needs which have long been ignored by the government:

- a) Childbirth clinics with gynecologists;
- b) Child-care facilities in all communities;
- c) Sufficient food for all children in rural communities including: milk, corn flour, rice, corn, soy, oil, beans, cheese, eggs, sugar, soup, oats etc;
- d) Fully-equipped popular kitchens for children in the communities;
- e) Community grinding mills and tortilla presses depending on the number of families in each community;
- f) Poultry, rabbit, sheep and pig farms;
- g) We demand projects for baked goods;
- h) Artisan workshops well equipped with machinery and primary materials;
- i) Markets in which to sell our crafts at fair prices;
- j) Technical training schools for women;
- k) Preschools and maternal schools;
- l) Adequate means of transportation.

Discrimination and Repression

The proposal also called for an end to discrimination of all kinds, respect for dignity of Indigenous cultures and languages, and bilingual education in the schools. Finally, the EZLN demanded that federal security forces be barred from entering their communities, reform of the state penal code to permit free political expression, release of political and poor prisoners "who are being held unjustly in Mexican jails", and an end to expulsions of dissidents from Indigenous communities. Importantly, they also called for "political trials" for former state officials Patrocino Gonzalez Blanco Garrido, Absalon Castellanos Dominguez and Elmar Setzer M.--all accused of abuse of power, corruption and more serious crimes such as murder while in office. The EZLN proposal states that all accords should be enforced by a National Commission for Peace with Justice and Dignity. 🐦