

Breaking the Myth of the Nation: Proposal for Autonomous Regions

While recent negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatistas progressed little, the fallout from the uprising has led Indigenous organizations and campesinos to consider autonomous regions. In this article, we present some selections from the proposal.

In 1994, various Indigenous organizations in Mexico including the Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations of Chiapas, the Guerreran Indigenous Council, the Independent People's Front, the Union of Indigenous and Peasant Communities of Izmtmo, and the Yaqui Tribal Council met on several occasions to elaborate a proposal for the formation of autonomous regions. The proposal was aimed first at Indigenous peoples, later to be presented to the Congress of the Mexican Union.

Then, on April 9-10, 1995, a general reunion of Indigenous organizations gave rise to the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy. Under the title of "Initiative for the Creation of Autonomous Areas," the assembly proposed to change certain articles of the Mexican constitution so as to allow Indigenous peoples in different regions to govern themselves.

In the "Considering" section, the proposal states that, "The Mexican State cannot, and must not, continue

to be structured politically as though Indigenous peoples do not exist. To correct this injustice, it is necessary to abandon the project of a homogeneous state and, in turn, put forth a new national project and constitution based on a federal system in which Indigenous peoples compose an organic element...

"The Mexican nation-state was organized in ignorance, or explicit denial, of Indigenous peoples. The various indigenist strategies practiced by the government, especially throughout the 20th century, were of such ethnocentric and centralist character that they are [today] the principal cause of misery and oppression [in Mexico]...

"In the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, Yucatan, Hidalgo, and Guerrero, 78 percent of the total Indigenous population lives. In some states, the Indian population is greater than that of non-Indians, such as in Oaxaca and Yucatan; in others, the Indigenous nuclei constitute more than one third of the total population, as in

Chiapas and Quintana Roo. Out of all the municipalities of the country (2,403), one third, or 803, are municipalities with one third or more of Indigenous population. Close to 30 percent of all localities, or 44,218, have an Indigenous population, of which more than 13,000 are qualified as "eminently indigenous localities" as a consequence of having 70 percent or more of persons speaking an Indigenous language."

Antonio Hernández is a Mayan Tojolabal of Chiapas and has been Secretary General of the Central de Obreros y Campesinos Agrícolas de Chiapas (CIOAC- Central Union of Workers and Agricultural Peasants). In the last elections, he was elected as national deputy, and remains one of the most active promoters of the proposal for Autonomous Regions. In a speech in front of the Congress in November, 1994, he stated:

"We want to contribute to the foundation of a democratic and plural state... Open your minds and your hearts to the Indigenous demands for autonomy. There will not be complete democracy in our country while a decentralization allowing our self-governing is not included in the organization of the state. ☺

The next meeting will occur in Oaxaca on August 25-26, 1995

CICA: A Pan-Indigenous Organization in Central America

by Atencio López (Kuna)

On July 21, 1995, in the city of Guatemala, the Indigenous Council of Central America (CICA) was founded, which integrates indigenous representatives from Guatemala to Panama, including Belize.

The initiative to found the Council was born during a reunion in Panama held in June, 1994. There, attendants agreed on the urgent necessity for Indigenous

peoples in Central America to coordinate their efforts on a regional level to defend their rights in the face of the political and economic structural changes stemming from the democratization process.

The founding of CICA is particularly important as it occurs during a time when dialogue and pacification follow the civil wars that have impoverished our countries and impacted most strongly in Indigenous communities.

CICA will also facilitate the Regional Program for the Support of Indigenous Peoples in Central America (PAPICA) organized with the European Community which makes available approximately 8 million dollars.

CICA staff includes: Leopoldo Tzian (Maya-Guatemala), President; Mauricio Castro (Zicaque-Honduras), General Secretary; William Borregón (Emberá-Panama), Treasurer. ☺

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