

# **“We Won’t Back Down,” Assert Zapatistas In Response To A Series Of Aggressions**

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Exactly nine years ago, in August 2003, EZLN’s support bases announced the organization of 38 autonomous municipalities in rebellion. The process of the new geography of the Zapatista territory had gotten started 10 years ago, on December 19, 1994, the date on which they broke the military siege, launched a new political offensive and made the autonomous boundaries of their territory known. Since then, 213 months have passed, four –almost five–presidents of the Republic, and seven governors, and not once have the communities that dared to challenge the State by demanding liberty, democracy and justice for all of Mexico, allowed themselves to be assaulted, whether by the military or by paramilitary groups, by counter-insurgent government programs or by organizations protected by the State.

Last month the attacks increased, as they do at the end of every six-year presidential term and state government term. The land the Zapatistas recuperated with the armed uprising in 1994 has been placed in dispute, prompted and sponsored by the government; they buy loyalties, they offer territory that doesn’t belong to them, and they sow discord from positions of power. Nothing is new for these communities that will be in resistance for 19 years, but in spite of this the everyday hostilities against their life plan have not stopped being serious and alarming.

Far from giving up or being intimidated, the Zapatistas have responded through recent reports by autonomous authorities, that although “they have assaulted us without reason, and they think that because of this we are going to give up or sell ourselves to be among their ranks of thieves, criminals and traitors headed by them. If they think this, they are wrong because these injustices they do to us, far from leading us to think about giving up, fill us with anger and indignation.”

“Enough with so many provocations and injustices against us,” add the authorities of the autonomous governments. “We are letting you know that we will not back down, and we warn you that if you do not stop provoking us, we will take more serious measures,” stated the Board of Good Government with headquarters in La Realidad.

## **Bullets and threats run into the Zapatista resistance in Moisés Gandhi**

The recent aggressions run from armed attacks to the threat of land dispossession as well as the removal and robbery of their facilities. In the cooperative Moisés Gandhi, of the autonomous municipality Lucio Cabañas, belonging to the *caracol* of Morelia, members of the Regional Organization of Coffee Growers of Ocosingo (ORCAO), attacked 59 people in the EZLN support bases with assault weapons with the aim of dispossessing them of their land.

The Board of Good Government of the region recounts that on August 2 twenty members of the ORCAO, four of them armed, entered the recuperated lands in El Carmen and fired from a 60 meter distance, accompanying the shots with threatening cries, arguing that "the land is theirs and that they don't want ranchers because our comrades have livestock from the collective, that has served us in our resistance."

The Zapatistas recount that before the gunshots and threats with weapons "the 59 comrades began to withdraw," and afterward members of the ORCAO went as well. Subsequently, August 6, "the 59 comrades went to work again at the same work site and arrived at seven in the morning to clean the pasture of the collective livestock." Two hours later three ORCAO groups, coordinated by Tomas López Santiz, principal deacon; Pedro Velásquez Hernández, ex-chief of the church zone in Abasolo; Manuel Santiz Hernández, minister of the church in Abasolo; Antonio Gómez López, ORCAO militant in Abasolo; Adolfo López Jiménez, Cesar López Jiménez, Alonso López Gómez, ex-chief of the church zone in Abasolo and member of the property Los Limares; Sebastián López Gómez, Abasolo church choir, and Pedro López Gómez, all of those mentioned, as reported, "came armed, coordinating the 91 ORCAO bases."

The aggressors carried caliber 22 arms, sprinkler bombs, and 68 people carried weapons. They initiated fire at a distance of 100 meters at 50 shots, for which reason "the comrades withdrew from the work site while the ORCAO began to fumigate a fourth of the pasture with herbicides and those armed were positioned in the tree trunks, making sure that our comrades did not return."

On August 7, the charges follow, the 59 Zapatistas returned to the land "because they were not afraid of these threats and they will not be afraid because we have recovered the land by the blood of our fallen comrades in 1994, in the armed uprising." And a day later they were attacked once again by ORCAO.

The explanation for this series of aggression is the following: "The anger of the three levels of bad

government is because they do not want their bad habits to spread, which is why they organize ignorant people to inject their death projects in our autonomous territories formed by our communities, where we are governed by our own ways as we see fit. We will continue fighting and resisting the threats for our land although we know that behind this intimidation are the three levels of bad government. We do not fight out of obligation or because of manipulation by a few important figures, like these local and regional representatives and ORCAO consultants and the supposed federal, state and municipal leaders who pressure and threaten poor, ignorant people, requiring them to accept miserable projects and forcing them to taunt.”

The Zapatistas make it clear that ORCAO members are only “assistants because the true intellectual actors are named Felipe Calderón and Juan Sabines Guerrero, because they are the ones executing the war death projects that they impose on our territories for millions of pesos,” they state.

Zapatista authorities recall that for years “they have executed millions of pesos wanting to destroy us to give them our land, to put an end to our customs, our language, but so the world can see, as Zapatistas here we keep fighting and resisting at all costs.”

The government strategy that has not ceased for even one minute over 19 years despite its flagrant failure is to offer projects to other communities “to demoralize the Zapatistas.” However, as they state in their most recent communiqué, “They’re wrong, perhaps they mock us when we don’t return their provocations; we just know that we are building life, not death like the bad governments...Not even with their millions of pesos have they been able to eliminate us, much less with a small organization like ORCAO. We as Zapatistas are fighters of humble and simple heart, builders of a just peace, creating the best way to live on our Mexican lands, where we do not seek personal well-being. We are not agitators, aggressors, paramilitary groups or criminal gangs; we are hard-working, peaceful people,” they affirm.

Finally, they state, “We know how to govern ourselves and that’s why we say we are willing to defend our rights at all costs.”

**Projects to divide communities: “What a shame that some brothers allow themselves to be fooled”**

The second complaint in August refers to the plan to seize a coffee warehouse in the community of Veracruz, annexed to the collective San Carlos, autonomous municipality of San Pedro de

Michoacán, (and official of Las Margaritas), very close to La Realidad, headquarters of the Board of Good Government of the region.

Since before the armed uprising of 1994, a 30 x 14 meter warehouse was built in the Veracruz annex to buy and store coffee, as part of a project of the Union of Rainforest Collectives. This warehouse was recovered by the Zapatistas on January 1, 1994, and was emblematic of the resistance of these communities as one of the first projects created through the union of four autonomous municipalities: San Pedro de Michoacán, Tierra y Libertad, Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas and General Emiliano Zapata, as the preamble to what would later be known as autonomous regions.

Now they are being threatened with removal in order to promote government projects as part of the politics of counter-insurgency that the different governments have applied to divide the indigenous Zapatista communities. Luis H. Álvarez, head of the counter-insurgent politics and for whom whichever indigenous person in Chiapas is a Zapatista susceptible to being bought, (when he neither had nor has any idea about the territory in rebellion, about its structure and reach), even dared to write a manual presented and praised by Felipe Calderón.

The Board of Good Government "Toward Hope," belonging to the border rainforest zone, with headquarters in La Realidad, explained that the warehouse in question is part of an autonomous project in which merchandise is sold wholesale and retail, and that "we have been using it for many years because without a doubt this warehouse corresponds to us as Zapatistas."

The problem here is the same as it is in Luis H. Álvarez's manual: "It turns out that a group of people who live in this annex, impelled by their authorities and other people have been organizing with the aim of taking it away from us. This group has nothing to do with this construction and what they are doing is to provoke us without right or reason because we are not taking anything away from anyone, much less from them." It turns out, the autonomous authorities explain, that now "they want to occupy the warehouse because they will benefit from two projects the bad government will propose to them...and as the authorities of the Board of Good Government told them, they will not be allowed to occupy the warehouse and that they should speak with those who will offer them the project; therefore, they were warned that they should not provoke us as Zapatistas because of these crumbs given to them by the bad government."

However, August 6, they allege, a group of 45 people from the Ecologist Green Party and the

Democratic Revolution Party, " headed by Rafael Méndez López, municipal official; Iván Méndez Domínguez, alternate municipal official; Alfredo Méndez Rodríguez, Fidel Méndez Santis, Francisco Santis Méndez, Nemías Santis Rodríguez, Ernesto Grene Hernández, Joel Hernández Méndez, Hugo Albores Trujillo, Gilberto Méndez Méndez and Marín Méndez Santis made their way to the warehouse and fenced it off with barbed wire," blocking the entrance to prevent entry. They did not achieve this because the Zapatistas re-opened the entrance.

Several days later on August 11, a group of 45 people cut the electric energy of the warehouse as well as that of a house on the Zapatista support base. The peaceful response by the autonomous government was to re-install the electricity. "We know perfectly well that these brothers are not our enemies, but unfortunately, because they don't understand and don't think, they get involved in things (provocations) without analyzing if it will turn out well or not, and without measuring the consequences that this act can bring," they point out.

The Board of Good Government, as well as that of Morelia, understands clearly where the enemy lies: "It's a shame that these brothers allow themselves to be fooled, to be manipulated by a few people who are also being manipulated and advised by their bad governments. It's unjust that the people who organize to provoke, subject those who refuse to participate to sanctions and threats because we know there are brothers who know how to think and to analyze, but they comply out of fear and that's how they have become accomplices to those organizing these actions."

They add: "It's a strategy of the corrupt governments, who are the intellectual actors, causing these problems by offering their programs to divide the people and create problems among us indigenous farmers, or intimidate our comrade through these provocative actions so that he gives up; but what we tell these corrupt authorities and this group of people that has organized to execute these bad actions, as well as the authorities of the three levels of government: to Felipe de Jesús Ruiz Moreno, municipal president of Las Margaritas; to Juan Sabines Guerrero and Felip Calderón Hinojosa, that we are never going to permit these provocations, we are going to defend ourselves as we are provoked by all projects that affect our comrades and our Zapatista comrades."

### **San Marcos Avilés, in the eye of dispossession**

Constant aggression, robbery and threats of expulsion are what the Zapatista support bases must deal with daily in the community of San Marcos Avilés, municipality of Sitalá, in the tzeltal zone, a situation for which at this time a national and international solidarity campaign is being carried

out.

“Everything we cultivate is exploited by political parties. The current situation of families in resistance has come to be because what we are demanding is of no importance to authorities of the governments of Felipe Calderón and Juan Sabines Guerrero. They’ve even begun to enter our houses. Some of us had horses, livestock, we had all that before the arrival of our suffering. Some had cement, tin roof sheets, rods to build houses, stores, cars. They took everything. Furthermore, we cannot enjoy the fruits of our labor with our children because those from the political parties are the ones who consume it all,” explained the Zapatistas in a video.

It was the opening of a school in this community that motivated the recent aggressions and threats of dispossession: “We place a lot of importance in this school. We want there to be quality teaching for our children, quality learning, a good example. We see that the government has its schools, but it’s not a quality education, they don’t even teach our children well, and what they teach has nothing to do with us. That’s why we opened our own school. This established a pretext for the officials to attack Zapatista families and to expel them in 2010 after classes began August 16 that year.”

“A few days later a comrade who lives down there was summoned by the authorities. When he went to the government office with a fellow comrade, the authorities gave them a document and tried to have them sign so that there would no longer be EZLN support bases here. Our comrades refused. The authorities and aggressors had them locked up and later wanted to send them to jail.”

“We are not committing any crime. We have the right to fight so that they take us into consideration. Liberty, justice and peace, that’s what we’re asking for. We are not afraid because we know clearly what we are looking for and how we want to live. We are men, women, youth and children in the struggle. So we want to make the crimes of the bad government here in San Marcos known,” declared the indigenous people in rebellion.

### **Political prison for Zapatistas**

Aggressions on the EZLN support bases include political prison. Those who have been arrested since 1994 are not few, and they have obtained their freedom first of all because they haven’t committed any crime; secondly, because their imprisonment has stirred up significant

international condemnation.

At this time Francisco López Sántiz, shopkeeper and tzeltal farmer from the support base of Tenejapa, is in the San Cristóbal de las Casas jail, accused of a murder that has been proven he did not commit.

Detained since December 4 of last year, he was notified that he would be released on March 22, "but just as he was a few meters from leaving the jail," report the autonomous Zapatista authorities, "the communication machines (cell phones) of those who were supposed to set him free rang to receive the news that Francisco could not leave because he had another more serious federal crime: 'carrying a firearm of exclusive military use,' and that impeded his release."

"Our comrade Francisco was falsely accused and unjustly detained; he has nothing to do with what happened in Banavil because he was neither there nor did he participate in the acts of which he is accused. Francisco is not an assassin, and he does not have a weapon, only because the people from the PRI have falsely accused him of this," the Board of Good Government in Oventik indicated at that time.

Governor Sabines, soon to complete his term, refuses to respond to the human rights violations committed during his governance and continues to hold Francisco as well as the teacher Alberto Patishtán as political hostages at the end of his six-year term.

"The government does not want to liberate him because it's an EZLN support base. We know he has not committed a crime. We already presented witnesses (of his innocence), but the government is after him because of the struggle for justice, democracy and liberty," stated Francisco's family members.

### **Solidarity and national and international support**

Since 1994 the Zapatistas have organized not only support and solidarity with their cause and the rejection of aggressions against them, but also the construction of a new common project that confronts and questions power from below.

More than 18 years after the uprising now with the recent aggressions, various calls are circulating for solidarity with EZLN, their communities, and a life project that they share with the

world from autonomy and the right to decide their own destiny.

This past August 12 the Brigade of Observation and Solidarity with the Zapatista Communities, initiative of the Network Against Repression and For Solidarity, began a tour of the territory in rebellion "to contribute our small grain of sand that helps to document the advances of Zapatista autonomy and that permits the echo of the charges brought by the rebel communities against the bad governments and all of the political parties, particularly the nongovernor of the state, Juan Sabines Guerrero and the Democratic Revolution Party."

Members of The Other Campaign and activists from Chile, Brazil, the Spanish State and Germany spread out among the *caracoles* of La Realidad, La Garrucha, Morelia and Roberto Barrios, under the principle that "if they touch the Zapatistas, they touch all of us...We support the right to self-determination that our comrades carry out through the Boards of Good Government; we support their struggle for the defense of their territories and the creation of autonomy. The anger that they transmit to us is far from a call to surrender; on the contrary, their indignation, which actually a large portion of the global population "suffers," reflects the need to learn from different experiences of struggle, from history, and from the possible creation of solidarity bridges so that acts like the ones they are resisting do not go unpunished and that they feel our support, we who are below and on the left, creating that other possible world together, needed more now than ever," declared the Network at the beginning of its tour through the rainforest, Los Altos and the north of Chiapas.

From New York, the Movement for Justice in the Barrio launched a campaign "World Echo in Support of the Zapatistas: Justice and Liberty for San Marcos Avilés and Sántiz López," with the call to create committees of The True Word, for the promotion and diffusion of what is occurring in the rebel communities of Chiapas.

"The first stage," as explained in the call to action, "will last the entire month of August and has as its principal objective the intense promotion of the campaign and wide spreading of information among our communities, barrios, collectives, networks and respective countries about the current situation of absolute injustice that they are confronting in San Marcos Avilés and the case of unjust imprisonment of Francisco Sántiz López."

"Under the leadership of the community of San Marcos Avliés and the Board of Good Government, the goal of this first stage is to fill the hearts of as many people as possible with consciousness and to raise awareness of the constant violence perpetuated by the bad government as well as the



resistance of the honorable communities. After this intense stage of popular education will follow a stage of more direct action,” explain the activists, who have already received responses from Mexico, India, Portugal, England, Turkey, Panama, South Africa, Colombia, Germany, Italy, Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Canada, Uruguay, the Spanish State, Argentina, France, Chile and the United States.

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