

## Letter to Civil Society about the Red Alert

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Translated by irlandesa

Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Mexico.

June 21, 2005.

To National and International Civil Society:

Señora, señorita, señor, young person, boy, girl:

This is not a letter of farewell. At times it is going to seem as if it is, that it is a farewell, but it is not. It is a letter of explanation. Well, that is what we shall attempt. This was originally going to go out as a communiqué, but we have chosen this form because, for good or for bad, when we have spoken with you we have almost always done so in this most personal tone.

We are the men, women, children and old ones of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Perhaps you remember us - we rose up in arms on January 1, 1994, and ever since then we have kept up our war against the forgetting, and we have resisted the war of extermination which the different governments have waged, unsuccessfully, against us. We live in the furthest corner of this country which is called Mexico. In that corner which is called "Indian Peoples." Yes, like that, plural. Because, for reasons we shall not give here, the plural is used in this corner for everything: we suffer, we die, we fight, we resist.

Now, as you know quite well, it so happens that, ever since that dawn of the beginning of '94, we have dedicated our struggle - first with fire and then with the word - our efforts, our life and our death, exclusively to the Indian peoples of Mexico for the recognition of their rights and their culture. It was natural - we Zapatistas are overwhelmingly indigenous. Mayan indigenous, to be more precise. But, in addition, the indigenous in this country - despite having been the foundation of this Nation's great transformations - are still the social group which has been the most attacked and the most exploited. If they have shown no mercy against anyone with their military wars and the wars disguised as "political", the wars of usurpation, of conquest, of annihilation, of marginalization, of ignorance - it has been against the indigenous. The war against us has been so intense and brutal that it has become routine to think that the indigenous will only be able to escape from their conditions of marginalization and poverty if they stop being indigenous...or if they are dead. We have been fighting to not die and to not cease being indigenous. We have fought to be - alive and indigenous - part of this nation which has been lifted up over our backs. The Nation for whom we have been the feet (almost always unshod) with which it has walked in its decisive moments. The Nation for whom we have been the arms and hands which have made the earth bear fruit and which have erected the large buildings, edifices, churches and palaces that those who have everything take such pride in. The Nation of which - through word, look and manner, that is, through culture - we are the root.

Are we raining insult upon injury? Perhaps it's because we are in June, the sixth month of the year. Well, we just wanted to point out that the beginning of our uprising was not just a "Here we are", shouted to a Nation that was deaf and dumb because of the authoritarianism above. It was also a "This is what we are and shall continue to be...but now with dignity, with democracy, with justice, with liberty." You know this quite well, because, among other things, you have been accompanying us since then.

Unfortunately, after more than 7 years committed to that path, in April of 2001, politicians from all the parties (primarily the PRI, PAN and PRD) and the self-styled "three branches of the Union" (the presidency, the congress and the courts) formed an alliance in order to deny the Indian peoples of Mexico the constitutional recognition of their rights and culture. And they did so without caring about the great national and international movement which had arisen and joined together for that purpose. The great majority, including the media, were in agreement that that debt should be settled. But the politicians don't

care about anything that doesn't get them money, and they rejected the same proposal that they had approved years before when the San Andrés Accords were signed and the Cocopa drafted a proposal for constitutional reform. They did so because they thought that, after a little time had passed, everyone would forget. And perhaps many people forgot, but we did not. We have memory, and it was they: the PRI, the PAN, the PRD, the President of the Republic, the deputies and senators and the justices of the Supreme Court of the Nation.

Yes, the Indian peoples continue today in the underbelly of this Nation, and they continue to suffer the same racism they have for 500 years. It doesn't matter what they are saying now, when they are preparing for the elections (in other words, to secure positions that will make them profits): they are not going to do anything for the good of the majority, nor are they going to listen to anything that isn't money.

If we Zapatistas pride ourselves on anything it's honoring the word, the honest and principled word. All this time we have been telling you that we will try the path of dialogue and negotiation in order to achieve our demands. We told you that we would make great efforts in the peaceful struggle. We told you that we would focus on the indigenous struggle. And so it has been. We have not deceived you.

All the help which you have so generously contributed to this noble cause and through those means has been for that and for nothing else. We have used nothing for anything else. All the humanitarian help and aid which we have received from Mexico and from throughout the world has been used only for improving the living conditions of the Zapatista indigenous communities and in peaceful initiatives for the recognition of indigenous rights and culture. Nothing of what was received has been used for the acquisition of arms or for any war preparations. Not only because we haven't needed it (the EZLN has maintained its military capacity intact since 1994), but above all because it wouldn't have been honest to tell you that your help was for one thing and to use it for another. Not one centavo of the help received for peace with justice and dignity has been used for war. We have not needed help for making war. For peace, yes.

We have, of course, used our word to refer to (and in some cases to express our solidarity with) other struggles in Mexico and the world, but just that far. And many times, knowing that we could do more, we had to contain ourselves, because our efforts - as we had told you - were exclusively by and for the indigenous.

It has not been easy. Do you remember the March of the 1,111? The *Consulta* of 5000 in 1999? The March of the Color of the Earth in 2001? Well, imagine then what we felt when we saw and heard the injustices and the hatred directed against *campesinos*, workers, students, teachers, working persons, homosexuals and lesbians, young people, women, old ones, children. Imagine what our heart felt.

We were touched by a pain, a fury, an indignation which we already knew because it has been, and is, ours. But now we were touched by it in the other. And we heard the "we" which inspires us wanting to become larger, to make itself more collective, more national. But no, we had said just the indigenous, and we had to honor that. I believe it's because of our way - in other words, that we would prefer to die before we would betray our word.

Now we are consulting with our heart in order to see if we are going to say and do something else. If the majority says yes, then we are going to do everything possible to honor it. Everything, even dying if it's necessary. We do not want to appear dramatic. We are only saying it in order to make it clear how far we are willing to go. In other words, not "until they give us a position, an amount of money, a promise, a candidacy."

Perhaps some may remember how, six months ago, we started with the "what is missing is missing." Then fine, as is obvious, the hour has arrived to decide whether we are going to proceed to find what is missing. Not to find, to build. Yes, to build "something else."

In some of the comunicués of the past few days, we let you know that we have entered into an internal *consulta*. We shall soon have the results, and we will inform you of them. Meanwhile then, we are taking

the opportunity to write you. We have always spoken to you with sincerity, and also to those who are our heart and guardian, our Votan Zapata, the Zapatista communities, our collective command.

It will be a difficult and hard decision, just as our life and our struggle have been. For four years we have been preparing the conditions in order to present our peoples with doors and windows so that, when the moment comes, everyone had all the ingredients in place for choosing which window to peer through and which door to open. And that is our way. In other words, the EZLN leadership does not lead, rather it seeks paths, steps, company, direction, pace, destination. Several. And then they present the peoples with those paths, and they analyze with them what would happen if we follow one or the other course. Because, depending on the path we travel, there are things which will be good and things which will be bad. And then they - the Zapatista communities - speak their thoughts and decide, after discussing and by majority, where we are all going. And then they give the order, and then the EZLN leadership has to organize the work or prepare what is needed to walk that path. Of course the EZLN leadership doesn't just look at what happens only to them, but they have to be bound to the peoples and to touch their hearts and to make themselves, as they say, the same thing. Then it becomes all our gazes, all our ears, all our thoughts, all our hearts. But what if, for whatever reason, the leadership does not look, or hear, or think, or feel like all of us. Or some parts aren't seen or something else isn't heard or other thoughts aren't thought or felt. Well, then, that is why everyone is consulted. That is why everyone is asked. That is why agreement is taken among everyone. If the majority says no, then the leadership has to seek another way, and to present another way to the peoples in order to propose until we collectively reach a decision. In other words, the people govern.

Now the collective which we are will make a decision. They are weighing the pros and cons. They are carefully making the calculations, what is lost and what is gained. And, seeing that there is not a little to be lost, it will be decided whether it is worth it.

Perhaps, in some people's scales, there will be much weight given to what we have achieved. Perhaps, in other people's scales, there will be more weight given to the indignation and shame caused by seeing our earth and skies destroyed by the stupid avarice of Power. In any event, we cannot remain passive, just contemplating, as a gang of ruffians strips our Patria of everything that gives it and everyone existence: dignity.

Ah, well, many turns now. We are writing you for what may be the last time in order to give you back your promised word of support. It is not little that we have achieved in the indigenous struggle, and that has been - as we have told you in public and in private - because of your help. We believe you can be proud, without any shame, of all the good that we Zapatistas, along with you, have built up to this point. And know that it has been an honor, undeserved in any light, that people like you have walked at our side.

Now we shall decide whether we are going to do something else, and we will make the results public at the proper time. We are now making clear - in order to end the speculations - that this "other thing" does not entail any offensive military action on our part. We are not, on our part, planning nor discussing reinitiating offensive military combat. Ever since February-March of 1994 our entire military presence has been, and is, defensive. The government should say whether, on its part, there are any offensive war preparations, whether by the federal forces or by their paramilitaries. And the PRI and the PRD should say if they are planning any attack against us with the paramilitaries they are supporting in Chiapas.

If it is the decision of the Zapatista majority, those who have helped us up to now in the exclusively indigenous struggle can, without any shame or regret, distance themselves from the "other thing" to which Comandante Tacho referred in the San Cristóbal de Las Casas plaza in January of 2003, two and a half years ago. In addition, there is a communiqué which establishes, from here out, that release and which can be presented in a job application, curriculum vitae, coffee klatch, editorial office, roundtable, grandstand, forum, stage, book jacket, footnote, colloquium, candidacy, book of regrets or newspaper column and which, in addition, has the advantage of being able to be exhibited as defense evidence in any court (don't laugh, there's a precedent: in 1994, some indigenous detained by the bad government - and who weren't Zapatistas - were released by a judge, validating a letter from the CCRI-CG in which it released those persons from what the EZLN had done. In other words, as the lawyers say, "there is legal precedent").

But those who find in their heart an echo, even if it is small, of our new word and who feel themselves called by the path, step, pace, company and destination which we have chosen, may perhaps decide to renew their help (or to participate directly)...knowing that it will be "another thing". Like that, without tricks, without deceit, without hypocrisy, without lies.

We thank the women. All the girls, teenagers, young women, *señoritas*, *señoras* and old ones (and those who were changing from one to the other of those calendars throughout these 12 years) who helped us, who accompanied us and who, not a few times, made our pain and our steps their own. To all of them, Mexicans and from other countries, who helped us and who walked with us. In everything we did you were the huge majority. Perhaps because we share along with you, although each in their own way and place, discrimination, contempt...and death.

We thank the national indigenous movement, which did not sell itself for government posts, for travel allowances, for the flattery that the powerful classify as "fit for indigenous and animals." The one which listened to our word and gave us theirs. The one which opened its heart, its home, to us. The one which resisted and resists with dignity, raising very high the color we are of the earth.

We thank the young men and women of Mexico and of the world. Those who were little boys and girls or teenagers that '94 and who nobly grew up without holding back their eyes or their ears. Those who reached youth or, despite the pages torn from the calendar, remained there, extending the hand of their rebellion to our dark hand. Those who chose to come and share days, weeks, months, years, our dignified poverty, our struggle, our hope and our foolish endeavor.

We thank the homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals, transgender persons and "everyone in their own way." Those who shared with us their struggle for respect for difference, knowing that it is not a defect to be hidden. Those who demonstrated that courage has nothing to do with testosterone and who, time and again, gave us some of the most beautiful lessons of dignity and nobility we have received.

We thank the intellectuals, artists and scientists, from Mexico and the world, who helped us in the struggle for the indigenous. Few movements or organizations can pride themselves on having had the backing (always critical, and we thank them for that) of so much intelligence, ingenuity and creativity. You already know that we always listened to you with respect and attention, even when we didn't share your points of view and that something of the light you shone helped to illuminate our dark paths.

We thank the honest workers of the press and the decent media who showed, truthfully and to the entire world, what they saw and heard, and who respected, without distorting, our voice and path. We extend you our solidarity in these hard moments you are going through in the exercise of your profession, where you are risking your lives, you are attacked and, like us, you find no justice.

And, so that no one is missed, we thank everyone who, honestly and sincerely, helped us.

I said, at the beginning of this letter, that it was not a farewell. Well, it so happens that for some people it is. Although for others it will be what is, in reality, a promise... Because what is missing can now be seen...

*Vale. Salud* and, from heart to heart, thank you for everything.

In the name of all the Zapatistas of the EZLN.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Mexico, in the sixth month of the year 2005.

PS - You can see now that we aren't thinking about playing football. Or not thinking only about that. Because some day we will play against the Internazionale of Milan. We, or what is left of us.