

From Wikipedia.org (1/31/07)

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN) is an armed revolutionary group based in Chiapas, one of the poorest states of Mexico. Their social base is mostly indigenous but they have supporters in urban areas as well as an international web of support. Their most visible voice, although not their leader, is Subcomandante Marcos (currently a.k.a. Delegate Zero in relation to the "Other Campaign"). Unlike the Zapatista comandantes, Subcomandante Marcos is not an indigenous Mayan. The group takes its name from the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata; they see themselves as his ideological heirs, and heirs to five hundred years of indigenous resistance against imperialism. Some consider the Zapatista movement the first "post-modern" revolution: an armed, yet non-violent (despite an uprising in the early 1990s) revolutionary group that incorporates modern technologies like satellite telephones and the internet as a way to obtain domestic and foreign support. They consider themselves part of the wider alter-globalization, anti-neoliberalism social movement.

The Zapatistas went public on January 1, 1994, the day that the NAFTA agreement went into effect. The goal of the EZLN was not necessarily to overthrow the Mexican Government, but to call the world's attention to the large wealth distribution disparity of Chiapas and to protest the signing of NAFTA, which the EZLN felt would only intensify the gap between the rich and the poor in Chiapas. EZLN did not demand independence from Mexico, but rather greater autonomy, asking (among other things) that the natural resources that are extracted from Chiapas benefit more directly the people of Chiapas. For example, over 90% of Mexico's potable water supply comes from Chiapas, yet many communities in Chiapas suffer because they have no access to a fresh water supply. It was these kinds of injustices that the EZLN intended to address.

Since December 1994, the Zapatistas had been gradually forming several autonomous municipalities, independent of the Mexican government. By August 2003 these municipalities had evolved into local government "juntas", implementing communitarian food-producing programs, health and school systems, supported in part by NGOs. Then several "Juntas of Good Government" formed by representatives of the autonomous municipalities and overseen by the EZLN were created as an upper level of government under the motto *mandar obedeciendo* (to command obeying). These renegade municipalities had been tolerated by the government despite being a state within the state. Although they do not tax the inhabitants, the Zapatistas decide, through assemblies, to work in communitarian projects; when someone does not participate in these communitarian efforts it is discussed and sometimes it is decided to not consider the person a Zapatista. This for example implies that the person has to pay for medicine in Zapatista pharmacies (although not for medical care). Membership in the Juntas rotates continuously, so that all members of the community have an opportunity to serve the community and also to prevent people in power to become addicted to it or become corrupted.

Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, June 2005  
Excerpts from Part II: Where We Are Now

...Fine, we then began encouraging the autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities - which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves - in order to make themselves stronger. This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the zapatistas' own experience. It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how, and, if they do not obey, they are removed. If the one who governs does not obey the people, they pursue them, they are removed from authority, and another comes in.

...Fine, what we then did about this problem was to begin separating the political-military from the autonomous and democratic aspects of organization in the zapatista communities. And so, actions and decisions which had previously been made and taken by the EZLN were being passed, little by little, to the democratically elected authorities in the villages....That was how the Good Government Juntas were born, in August of 2003, and, through them, self-learning and the exercise of "govern obeying" has continued....

...From that time and until the middle of 2005, the EZLN leadership has no longer involved itself in giving orders in civil matters, but it has accompanied and helped the authorities who are democratically elected by the peoples...

...The EZLN, during these 4 years, also handed over to the Good Government Juntas and the Autonomous Municipalities the aid and contacts which they had attained throughout Mexico and the world during these years of war and resistance. The EZLN had also, during that time, been building economic and political support which allowed the zapatista communities to make progress with fewer difficulties in the building of their autonomy and in improving their living conditions. It is not much, but it is far better than what they had prior to the beginning of the uprising in January of 1994. If you look at one of those studies the governments make, you will see that the only indigenous communities which have improved their living conditions - whether in health, education, food or housing - were those which are in zapatista territory, which is what we call where our villages are. And all of that has been possible because of the progress made by the zapatista villages and because of the very large support which has been received from good and noble persons, whom we call "civil societies," and from their organizations throughout the world. As if all of these people have made "another world is possible" a reality, but through actions, not just words.