

CHIAPAS QUICK FACTS



"Nunca más un México sin nosotros"



Prologue



On January 1, 1994 (the day the **North American Free Trade Agreement** went into effect), an armed force of primarily low waged and un-waged indigenous Mayan Indians,

the **Zapatista National Liberation Army** (EZLN), came out of the jungle to occupy four large towns in Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state. Since then, images of black ski-masked soldiers and the words of their primary spokesperson, Subcommandante Marcos, have become familiar to millions of people around the world.

Declaring that NAFTA "would not bring them jobs, but a death sentence," their demands included Indigenous autonomy, democracy for all Mexicans, and economic policies that would benefit not just Mexico's elite, but all its citizens — especially its poorest.

"Zapatismo" refers to Emiliano Zapata, who is considered the father of Mexico's 1915 agrarian reforms, which returned ownership of the land to the campesinos. In 1991, in preparation for NAFTA, the Mexican government reversed this policy of communal land ownership and began a new policy of evictions.

In 1992, two years before the initiation of armed rebellion, Subcommandante Marcos wrote an essay that was not released publicly until January 27, 1994. It included many of the following facts and statistics. The rest come from the National Geographic Society, Global Exchange, *La Jornada*, the *Library of Congress Area Guide for Mexico* and various academic papers.

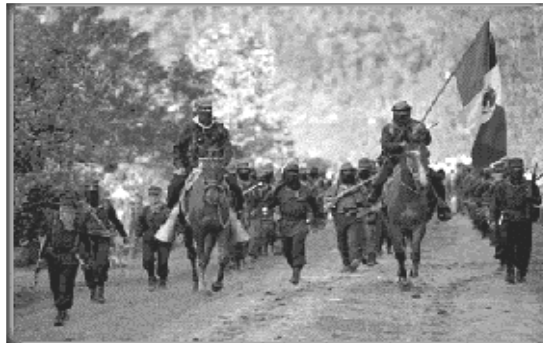
Chiapas

Of Mexico's 32 states, Chiapas is its 8th largest, most economically impoverished, yet arguably its most resource rich. Its current capitol is Tuxtla. As part of Guatemala in

Spanish colonial days, Chiapas only became a Mexican state in 1824, with its current boundaries not fixed until 1882. The human population of Chiapas numbers 3.5 million; including 1.2 million from the state's many indigenous Mayan Indian groups, whose ancestors are credited with creating the New World's most complex writing system, dating back to 2000 BC.

Also indigenous to the Chiapan rainforests and jungle highlands are 40% of Mexico's plant varieties, 36% of its mammal species, 34% of its reptiles and amphibians, 66% of its bird species and 80% of its butterfly species. Its lakes and rivers sustain an abundance of aquatic life, including 20% of Mexico's fresh-water fish. Its 1000' deep **Lake Miramar**, in the heart of the **Lacandon Rain Forest Biosphere Reserve**, is the jungle sanctuary and headquarters of the EZLN regular army.

This land of natural beauty is also home to magnificent Mayan ruins surviving an ancient empire that continues to captivate the imaginations of scholars worldwide:



- The temples of **Bonampak**, whose walls and vaulted ceilings have survived 1200 years, are adorned with magnificent murals depicting the Mayan dynasty that once flourished in this city of thousands.
- The **San Cristòbal Caves** compete for tourist currency with the **Temple of the Sun at Palenque**, who's opening in 1952 marked one of the greatest discoveries of Mayan Indian archeology.



- Not far from San Cristòbal de Las Casas, the old colonial capitol, sits the populated community of **Chiapa de Corzo**, discovery site of stone fragments containing the earliest recorded date yet discovered in the New World. Reconstructed and deciphered by archeologists, the glyphs

carved in this stone by the Mayan ancestors of the area's indigenous Indian population read "**December 9, 36 BC.**"

Health

- Though 7% of Mexico's rain falls in Chiapas, half of its inhabitants have no access to **potable water**.
- Two-thirds have no **sewage service**.
- One-and-a-half million people have no access to any **medical services**.
- While there are seven hotel rooms in Chiapas for every 1,000 tourists, there are only 0.2 clinics and 0.3 hospital beds for every 1,000 inhabitants, one-fifth of the national average.
- Though many deaths in its marginalized zones go unreported, Chiapas still tallies the highest **mortality** rate in Mexico—many from curable diseases such as respiratory infection, enteritis, parasites, amoebas, measles, salmonella, malaria, scabies, dengue, pulmonary tuberculosis, trachoma, typhus and cholera.
- **Infant mortality** among the Maya is 50.4 per 1,000 live births, 10 times as high as the national average.
- Fifty-four percent of the population suffers from **malnutrition** and in the highlands and forests this percentage increases to 80%.



While most Chiapanecos suffer from **gross malnutrition**:

- Chiapas continues to be one of Mexico's largest producers of **corn**.
- Its people grow two-thirds of Mexico's **avocados**.
- Annually tens of thousands of beehives produce thousands of tons of **honey** for export, earning revenue local workers never see.
- Chiapanecos also help produce millions of head of **cattle**, to be resold by middlemen for up to 10 times the price paid for them.

Resources

The fertile soil of Chiapas not only yields 69% of Mexico's cacao and 35% of its **coffee** (one of Mexico's largest exports) but hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of prized **woods** for export, generating billions of pesos annually. Trees fall and dynamite explodes on land where campesinos are not allowed to cut down trees for

farmland or construction. Each tree they cut costs them a jail sentence and an extremely oppressive fine.

This same soil is also tenaciously mined for **gold, silver, uranium** and other precious **minerals**. And daily, global enterprise sucks out over 100,000 barrels of **petroleum** and over a half billion cubic feet of **natural gas**. (Over 80% of PEMEX's petrochemical plants are in the Southeast and in 1990 two-thirds of public investment in the region was in energy.)

While 55% of Mexico's **hydroelectric power** and 20% of its total electricity comes from Chiapas, only one-third of homes there have electricity.

Education

With the worst educational system in Mexico, half the state's Indians are illiterate. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don't finish the first grade. More than half of the schools offer only a third grade education and have only one teacher for all the courses offered. Of Mexico's 16,058 classrooms in 1989, only 96 were in Indigenous zones.

Many children are forced by poverty to drop out of school and enter the local system of labor exploitation. In any Indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn and wood, cooking, or washing clothes during school hours.

Others may work 10-hour days in amber mines, eating salt and pozole to keep from dehydrating. Because of their small size, children between 9 and 14 years constitute the majority of the mines' workforce, digging 2-3 ft high tunnels into the mountains. Early in life, most have developed deep coughs caused by years of working in the smoke and dust -- all for about \$2 a day.

Transportation

Both the Pan-American Highway and Inter-American Railway cross Chiapas, facilitating the plunder of its resources. Yet only two-thirds of its municipal seats have paved-road access and most communities have no means of transport or communication other than mountain trails carved with machetes by campesinos that have been evicted from their land.

“Since the days of Porfirio Diaz, the railroad lines have serviced capitalism rather than the people. They take away petroleum and gas, and in exchange leave behind ecological destruction, agricultural plunder, hyperinflation, alcoholism, prostitution, and poverty.... This is what capitalism leaves as payment for everything that it takes away.”

Subcommandante Marcos

Zapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution

January 27, 1994

The Uprising



Mexico's rural indigenous peoples have periodically risen to protest poverty and the assault on their traditional lands and culture by large farmers, ranchers, and other commercial interests. The most serious uprising to date occurred on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación

Nacional—EZLN) captured four of the largest municipalities in Chiapas.

Some of the rebels (believed to number about 1,600) were armed with modern assault rifles, whereas others were armed only with sticks and wooden bayonets. At least 12,000 government troops were transported to the scene. There was indiscriminate strafing of hamlets and many disappearances reported. Five rebels were reported executed while bound and other deaths may have resulted from extra judicial executions.

Government officials announced a body count of 120, while Church officials countered that the actual death toll was 400. Eleven days later, on January 11, 1994, both sides agreed to a cease-fire.

Almost immediately, a formidable government offensive involving approximately 20,000 army troops ventured into Zapatista-held territory intent on capturing the rebels. However, Subcommandante Marcos and his rebel force eluded capture and by late February 1995, a second cease-fire was declared. Soon after, the Government and the rebels embarked on a second major round of peace talks, which produced *the San Andrés Peace Accords*.

The San Andrés Peace Accords

The dialogues were to center on six themes: Indigenous rights and culture; justice; welfare and development; re-conciliation in Chiapas; rights of women in Chiapas; and, finally, the cessation of hostilities. The Mexican government and the EZLN only completed negotiations in the first area. Following a prolonged consultation with the indigenous civilian population, the EZLN and the federal government signed the first set of accords in February of 1996. Six months later Mexico's military and its government-backed paramilitary groups further infiltrated the Indigenous communities of Chiapas.

On November 29, 1996, the federal Minister of the Interior again confirmed that the federal government was in agreement with the San Andrés Accords. However, only a few days later, President Zedillo vetoed the Accords, even though the proposal had come from his government's own Commission of Concordia and Pacification (COCOPA). The government's response to its own refusal to sign the San Andrés Accords was to send thousands more troops to Chiapas and present a counter proposal, which in many instances totally changed the fundamental principles of the original Accords, which are as follows:

1. Basic respect for the diversity of the Indigenous of Chiapas
2. Conservation of the natural resources within the territories used and occupied by indigenous peoples
3. Greater participation of Indigenous communities in decisions and control of public expenditures; participation in determining their own development plans; and control over their own administrative and judicial affairs
4. Autonomy of Indigenous communities and their right of self determination within the framework of the State

Military Occupation of Chiapas



Though the EZLN has never broken the cease-fire, the Mexican government has three times abandoned and then undermined the joint efforts at a negotiated solution. Instead, the government has relied on military and paramilitary forces to wage an uninterrupted campaign of terror and low intensity warfare against both the Zapatista Army and the civilian population of Chiapas.

- As a result of the Mexican army's massive presence and attacks by government supported paramilitary groups, hundreds of Chiapanecos have died, tens of thousands have fled their homes and many more have been forced to live their lives in constant fear.
- More than 70,000 troops (one-third of the entire Federal Army!) are currently stationed in Chiapas, predominantly in the northern zone, the highlands, and the eastern jungle region.



- There are five soldiers for every police officer in Chiapas.
- Throughout November and December of 1997, government backed paramilitaries drove thousands of 'The Bees' (a pacifist religious movement) from Chenalho. They burned more than 70 homes, tortured 13 people and murdered 10 others.
- On December 12th the EZLN issued a warning that the paramilitaries were planning a larger massacre in the region. On December 22nd, heeding this warning,

residents of Acteal sought refuge in a church and were slaughtered by the paramilitaries, who for several hours pillaged the community, burned houses and left 45 dead (mostly women and children). Autopsies revealed that the attackers shot their victims in the backs of their heads at point blank range with high-powered weapons and then attacked the dead bodies with knives and machetes. The attackers were later identified as the Red Mask paramilitary group whose slogan was "finish off the Zapatista seed."

- Four-and-a-half years later many of the displaced survivors are still homeless.
- Although the Mexican Government justifies its increased Federal Army presence with a need to suppress paramilitary groups, the majority of military operations since the Acteal massacre have taken place in regions with a limited history of paramilitary activity.
- Not one paramilitary group has yet been disarmed, not even Paz y Justicia, which has been linked to more than 50 deaths and hundreds more instances of terror, theft and brutality.
- The Mexican Army has entered nearly 60 communities since December 22, 1997. All of these communities are either Zapatista strongholds or sympathetic to the Zapatista movement.

Role of U.S.

- Though the U.S. and Mexico have cited the drug war as the primary reason for Mexico's military expansion, most of the militarization in Mexico is not connected to fighting drug trafficking. Personnel and equipment earmarked for counter-narcotic efforts have instead been used in counterinsurgency efforts and other campaigns entirely unrelated to drug trafficking. In one instance four people were killed in a Zapatista community when it was attacked by a military helicopter.
- Between 1996 and 1998, Mexico sent more military personnel to the U.S. for training than any country in the Western Hemisphere. Currently, Mexico ranks second only to Columbia in the scope of this dubious cultural exchange.



Zapatismo



While the Zapatistas decry the devastating impact of globalization on the fabric of local cultures, they are non-doctrinaire in their vision for change. The EZLN does not see itself as a political party, but a movement that seeks to assure a voice for all who have been excluded from Mexico's civil society. To this end, they organize local,

national and international forums on the civil and human rights of all indigenous people and encourage the formation of civilian advisory groups in their native Mexico.

Insisting that they have been ignored for too long, they mask their faces, declaring that before they did, they were "faceless" – invisible to the rest of Mexico. They will remove their masks when they can assume their rightful place on their ancestral lands.

Theirs is not a separatist movement, but a demand to be included in a civil society that accepts the equality and distinct cultures of indigenous peoples everywhere.

"If there is anyone who wants this country to be fragmented, it's this process of globalization, and they're going to do everything possible to achieve it," stressed Subcommandante Marcos in a February 2001 interview with *La Jornada*. "The great world interests would be delighted if the Zapatistas were to ask to separate from Mexico, because they would prefer to deal with banana republics, which they can control better."

2001: The Caravan and the Congress

In January of 2001, Mexico's newly elected President, ex Coca-Cola executive Vicente Fox, invited the EZLN Commandancia to Mexico City to renew its efforts at a negotiated peace.

A historic caravan, including the 23 Zapatista Commanders and Sub-commander Marcos, left Chiapas on February 25 and then traveled through nine states before reaching Mexico City on March 12. The caravan was greeted throughout the route by tens of thousands of Mexicans and was met by an estimated 500,000 in Mexico City. The following week, history was made when the Commandancia of the EZLN addressed members of congress.

The resulting talks, however, echoed those of 1996. Once again the government refused to agree to the

original San Andrés Accords and presented a counter proposal, which not only attempted to fundamentally change the original accords, but this time actually attempted to significantly weaken them.

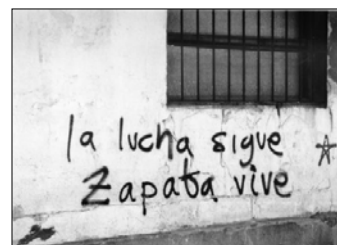
Rejecting the government's latest charade as a treacherous publicity stunt and just one more attempt to co-opt its movement, the Zapatista Commandancia returned to its jungle headquarters in the highlands of Chiapas. The EZLN continues to demand that the Mexican legislature adopt and implement the San Andrés Accords.

In April, the congress passed a diluted version of the Ley Cocopa, the legislative synthesis of the San Andrés Peace Accords. Designated "The Indian Rights Bill," its omissions and rewrites seriously undermine the very essence and intent of the San Andrés Accords.

On July 14, 2001, against a backdrop of military and paramilitary aggression targeting Zapatista communities, a regressive "Indian Rights Bill," was ratified by the last of the 17 state majority needed to pass it into law.

"This particular version of an Indigenous law, so seriously distorts what was agreed to by both parties to the conflict, that it calls into question the future of the peace process in Chiapas," cautions Lydia Brazon, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Project, an NGO with consultative status at the United Nations.

A NAFTA Postscript



A just published study by the World Bank has concluded that since NAFTA's launch in 1994, poverty and inequality in Mexico have risen 8%, with 58% percent of Mexico's 98 million people

living in poverty. The Bank also reports that in rural zones, 82% now live below the poverty level. These figures are significantly higher than the government's official estimates, which claim that only 40% of its people are poor.

The Mexican army still surrounds indigenous Indian communities; heavily armed paramilitaries still prowl the landscape; political prisoners remain in jail; and thousands of families still live as refugees. They continue to demand their right to self-determination.