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# WOMEN IN THE ZAPATISTAS



# Women's work, women's struggle in Chiapas, Mexico

The following fact sheet was compiled in July 1998 from various sources by the International Wages for Housework Campaign and circulated at the above Video Cafe

## WOMEN'S WORK, WOMEN'S STRUGGLE In Chiapas, Mexico

Between 1519 and 1552 Mexico's Indigenous population was decimated - as many as 12 million Native Mexicans died.

Mexico has the largest Indigenous population in Latin America - 40% of the estimated 40 million Native peoples. The Native population of Mexico is 8 to 12 million, or 10-14% of Mexico's 86 million. It is expected to reach its pre-Colombian 16 million early next century. There are 56 distinct cultures and 100 languages. Of Mexico's 32 states, Chiapas is one of six with a high proportion of Indigenous people. The Chiapas Indigenous population is 1.2 million. Two million Indigenous people live in Mexico City.

Chiapas produces 55% of Mexico's hydroelectric energy, 20% of Mexico's electricity. The estimated oil potential of Chiapas and bordering Guatemala combined could exceed that of Saudi Arabia. Yet 7 out of 10 homes have no electricity, and 6 out of 10 homes have no water (9 out of 10 Indigenous homes). Chiapas produces 28% of Mexico's meat supply, but 90% of Indigenous communities rarely can afford meat.

Wages are three times lower than the national average. 20% of people have no income. 40% of farmers get \$1.74 a day, half the minimum wage. 64,000 families, almost all of them Maya Indian, farm coffee which has lost 60% of its market value since 1990.

Infant mortality (66 per 1,000) is double the national average. 66.74% of the population suffers from malnutrition, one of the highest causes of death. The average life span in "Indian Mexico" is five years less than in "non-Indian Mexico".

In Las Ca'adas women have on average seven children (2.8 Chiapas average). 60% of the population is under 20. 30-40% women speak only their mother tongue and no Spanish (the official language). 60% are illiterate.

#### Women's demands

Women work a double and triple day: knitting, fetching water and firewood are vital to the economic survival of the family.

*"Women have been the most exploited . . . We get up at three in the morning to prepare corn for our husband's breakfast and we don't rest until late at night. If there is not enough food we give it to our children and our husbands first. So the women now have decided to take up arms and become Zapatistas."*

*Comandante Ramona, EZLN*

Women are about 1/3 of Zapatista fighters and 55% of its support base. (Zapata's 1910 army included battalions of women.) Women and children have been vital in challenging military occupations of villages and refugee camps and picketing police stations to get men released.

The EZLN Revolutionary Laws include the Women's Revolutionary Law. Women have the right to: participate in the revolutionary struggle, regardless of race, religion or political affiliation; work for a fair wage; decide the number of children to have and care for; participate in community affairs and hold political office; health and nutrition; education; choose their partner and not be forced into marriage; not to be beaten or physically abused by relatives or strangers - attempts to rape will be severely punished; hold military positions and ranks in the EZLN; all rights and responsibilities under the other Revolutionary Laws.

The majority of Native people live on ejidos or common land won by the 1910 Mexican revolution led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution guaranteed land and water to Indigenous and campesino people. Shortly before the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the USA, Canada and Mexico, President Salinas amended Article 27 so that people could be thrown off the land and imprisoned, and ejido land privatised and sold. The Zapatistas chose 1 January 1994, the first day of NAFTA, for their uprising.

In May 1994, Indigenous women from several communities and areas met in San Cristóbal de las Casas and drafted many demands, including the right to own land. In 1996 representatives of the 56 Indigenous groups formed the National Indigenous Congress, and presented their demands to the Zapatistas in Jan 1996. These demands were basic to the San Andrés Agreement between the government and the Zapatistas. The Agreement on Indigenous Rights to self-determination, autonomy, control of Native land and resources, and self-government, was signed in Feb 1996. The women's demands presented by Comandante Ramona included health, education, nutrition and housing - cooking stoves, refrigerators and washing machines. The Agreement has never been implemented. As a result, the Zapatistas withdrew from the talks.

At the 1996 National Indigenous Congress in Mexico City attended by 680 delegates from 135 Indigenous communities, women raised again their autonomous demands: the right to and protection of the land and the resources of their environment.

#### Women and children - military prey

Mexico's military is the second largest in Latin America (behind Brazil) - 175,000 troops.

Women and children are the main victims of war. 90% of people killed or wounded in armed conflicts worldwide are women and children compared to

5% during the world wars. (UN figures, Olira Otunno, Children in Armed Conflict, Reforma 4 April 1998 p.2)

Most of the 45 people massacred by government para-militaries at Acteal, Chiapas, on 22 Dec 1997, were women and children - 22 women, 14 children and 9 manily older men. The women couldn't run fast enough, they were carrying small children!

Women and children are 80% of refugees worldwide. Over 100,000 people fleeing genocide in bordering Guatemala took refuge in Chiapas in the 80's. Since 1994, over 18,000 Native Chiapans have been displaced within Chiapas by paramilitary and army raids on their villages.

Since 1994, there are 684 documented assaults on women and girls, including over 300 rapes mainly by government forces. "Before the massacre at Acteal those who organize the Priistas [government forces] told us: 'The daughters of Zapatistas will be raped. First the wives, then the daughters.'" The whole community of Taniperlas has been threatened with rape if the men who escaped military attack do not return.

Violence is not confined to Chiapas: 115 women have been murdered since 1994 in the border town Ciudad Juarez, most of them maquiladoras (sweatshop garment workers). No one has been arrested. CJ is one of the most militarized areas outside of Chiapas.

On 24 Jan 1998 the 1,000 Women For Peace Caravan left Mexico City for Chiapas in support of: Implementation of the San Andrés Agreement. Demilitarization of Chiapas and return of soldiers to their barracks. Dismantling and disarming para-militaries; investigation of crimes committed by them and punishment of the guilty. Bringing to trial ex-governor Ruiz Ferro for his responsibility for the Acteal massacre. Safety measures enabling women and men refugees to return to their homes. Stop war crimes against women.

"Cuando una mujer avanza, no hay hombre que retroceda." When women go forward, no man goes backward. (1,000 Women Caravan)

## EZLN Communique on International Women's Day

To the people of Mexico:

To the peoples and governments of the world:

To the national and international press:

Brothers and sisters:

Today, March 8, International Women's Day is celebrated. We, the Zapatista men and women, celebrate the day of the woman who struggles, of the woman with dignity. In the world in which we are forced to live and die, there is no place for dignity. The powerful want dignity to be kept in oblivion, in silence, in jail, and in the tomb. In the long chain of humiliations that the powerful construct to make itself powerful, the humiliation of women is repeated in all parts of society.

Doubly humiliated, as women and as workers, the Mexican indigenous women are also humiliated because of their color, their language, their culture, their past. A triple nightmare that forces the Zapatista women to take a weapon and add their "Enough is Enough!" to those of their male companeros. A triple nightmare that forces a triple rebellion.

Our companeras Zapatista soldiers, insurgents and militia members, and our companeras in the base communities of the EZLN have demonstrated that dignity has a special place among women.

But not only the women of the EZLN have given lessons on dignity. Thousands of women in Mexico and the world say and say again their "Enough is Enough"! to a system of domination that corners them as things to be used and thrown away, that names them according to their possessor, and which curtails in deeds what is recognized as rights.

The women Zapatistas, soldiers and non-military members, struggle for their own rights as women. They also confront the macho culture that the Zapatista men act out in various ways. The women Zapatistas are not free by the fact that they are Zapatistas; they still have a lot for which to struggle and gain. We understand that this struggle is not against men, but it is also for the rights of women. We understand that this struggle is not against the Ladinos nor the Mestizos, but it is also for the rights of the indigenous women.

Today we want to salute our sisters who have fallen in the two years of the military encirclement, to our dead.

Today we want to salute also all of the women who have helped us so that our voice is heard.

Today we want to salute all of the women who have seen in the Zapatistas a mirror of their own dignity and rebellion.

Today we want to salute all the women who struggle everywhere, so that nowhere is being a woman a shame, a nightmare or an adornment.

Today we want to salute all women who have dignity and who struggle.

Health, women in struggle!  
Health, women with dignity!

Democracy!  
Liberty!  
Justice!

From the mountains of the Mexican southeast  
Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee  
—General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

Mexico, March 1996

La Jornada, March 9, 1996

The EZLN celebrates the woman with dignity, the one who struggles

## 5,000 Zapatista women march in San Cristobal

**In one of the largest concentrations of indigenous women that has ever been done in the state, in which nearly 5000 Zapatistas from the jungle, the highlands, and the border area of Chiapas participated, the demands were for the demilitarization of the regions occupied by Army troops, which have been present for more than a year, and the elimination of the white guards in the state.**

After a journey of days and hours from their communities, the thousands of indigenous women, with ski-masks and bandannas over their faces, marched through the main streets of the Royal City, to celebrate International Women's Day, and to denounce the racism that "the government never has admitted".

Barefoot or in sandals, in boots or tennis shoes, with their children wrapped in shawls at their breast to feed them, the Zapatista indigenous women also protested against the oblivion created by the government and the society.

"We struggle so that in Mexico there is justice, that our rights be respected, that we live as human beings and not as animals, that we be recognized as the peoples that we are and as citizens", they demanded while gathering in the plaza in front of the San Cristobal Cathedral, in whose center a seven meter high (21 foot) wooden cross was raised. Some of those who came to the former Jovel had never before left their communities, hidden in the Lacandon jungle or set back in the mountains of the Highlands. The opportunity to participate in the march was also an opportunity to get to know the city, to leave their communities, where no one knows they exist.

"..Nothing is said about the indigenous as peoples, and even less about the indigenous women; we do not appear in any law that the government makes because for it we do not exist", said of the women who, for the first time, spoke before thousands of her own people united in one place.

The cold of the city and the light rain that slowly soaked through were the reception for the indigenous Zapatista women who conducted the largest march ever of Tojobal, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Chol women, sympathizers and soldiers of the EZLN.

Some traveled by truck for several hours, others came to the city early. Silently they put on their ski-masks and walked through this city, famous for the racism of its inhabitants, the "authentic coletos", in honor of the Spaniards who founded the Royal City, who wore their hair tied up, in "a pony tail".

In a disciplined manner, they gathered in the Main Square of San Cristobal, and there they listened to the message which Subcomandante Marcos sent them through a communique: "doubly humiliated, as women and as workers, the Mexican indigenous women are also humiliated for the color of their skin, their language, their culture, their past. A triple nightmare that forces Zapatista women to take up a weapon and add her "Enough is Enough!" to those of their male companeros. A triple nightmare that forces a triple rebellion".

But in the face of the idea that the struggle for the dignity of women is against the man, Marcos stated: "we understand that this struggle is not against men, but is also for the rights of women. We understand that this struggle is not against Ladinos nor Mestizos, but is also for the rights of the indigenous women".

Later, an indigenous woman read a long communique from the Women for Dignity from the Zapatista Front for National Liberation. In broken Spanish, she said that the Zapatista indigenous women rose up with their companeros "because we were tired of the many injustices that the bad governments had submitted us to".

We are, they said, the product of 503 years of slavery, injustice, misery, exploitation, discrimination, and lack of rights. But now "we have begun our struggle to make ourselves valued, to make ourselves heard, to fulfill the

demands that have never been met".

The rebel women spoke of the lack of services in their communities, of the absence of clinics and medicines to combat curable diseases, from which their children die, of the scarcity of schools and decent housing, potable water and electricity, and the lack of resources to make a land productive which is increasingly sterile.

They stated that they had risen up in arms in order to "struggle for our independence, so that the wealth of our country no longer be pillaged by foreign monopolies, so that our country no longer be run by a select few". Wrapped in their shawls, "chujes" and sweaters, the Zapatista women lifted up their bandannas with the demand that "the federal army leave our communities". Along these lines, in the communique, they denounced the fact that soldiers, police and economic bosses have fomented alcoholism and prostitution in the indigenous communities.

They described the situations created by the military presence since February of last year: "Our homes are used as warehouses, the few classrooms for our children are occupied by the soldiers; the sports fields are used as parking space for tanks, helicopters and armed cars of the bad government".

Before leaving the plaza, which was guarded by dozens of soldiers and plainclothes police, some of whom were posted in the balcony of the city hall, the Zapatista indigenous women demanded to be taken into account in the agrarian laws, in order to have rights to the land; they demanded new labor laws to protect them; a national fund to support economic projects; special laws to punish the constant violations to which they are subjected; and that all forms of discrimination be considered crimes.

La Jornada, March 9, 1996

Jose Gil Olmos, writer,

Elio Hernandez, correspondent,

San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, March 8

## Interview with Major Ana Maria of the EZLN

This text was transcribed from an interview with Major Ana Mari'a of the EZLN, taped inside of the Cathedral at San Cristo'bal during the Feb. 94 dialogue.

February 28, 1994

Q: ...With Major Ana Mari'a of the Zapatista movement, today is February 28...

AM: Yes, well, the thing is that we are interested in getting information about our struggle published at a national and international level. We want the whole world to understand what we are. Until now, the Mexican government has not wanted to recognize us a real force. They think that we are a little group, as they have called it, of "transgressors of the law" or "delinquents." But we know that we are not. We are a people that is organized and wants to be heard, wants its demands to be met. This is something that has not been done for many years. We have been struggling as human beings, as Mexicans. So far, the government thinks that we are a group of foreigners, that we are from other countries, and they think that it is only a small group tricking the people, pulling the people into an armed struggle like this. That is what the government thinks. But we say: But who is it then, if we are all the people who are here? Right now, for example, the Committee is here. They are those who command, those who give orders. Well, not those who give orders but those who lead us, the leadership. It is the people, the campesinos, the Indigenous people who are here.

There are some ladinos who are here. They are those who are helping the ones who understand. For example, Subcommander Marcos is a ladino. But they are not foreigners. We know where he is from. We are not being fooled by anyone. It is us, the campesinos and the Indigenous people who think that

this needs to be done, what we did in January. It was already necessary, because we could not find any other way out of this situation. We had spent years struggling peacefully, we held marches, we had meetings, we went to the municipal palaces and the Government Palace, and we went to Mexico [City] to the National Palace of Mexico to shout, to ask, to agitate in front of the government. They never paid attention to us. They always gave us papers full of promises. Then, what good is a piece of paper, filled with promises, to us? And we would look at that paper when we went back to our towns. We would read the papers and the promises and nothing ever came. Or, with that Pronasol they sent some things, they ordered a clinic built, but they left it half-built. They left buildings with no medicine, no doctors. What good is a building, a house like that, to us? Or, for example, we asked for schools. The only thing they did, that work of Solidaridad, was that they sent paint and they painted the school, and they painted "Solidaridad" on the wall. But they did nothing else. They didn't send teachers, they didn't send materials, which are necessary, teaching materials necessary for the studies. None of that came. They were nothing but promises.

So then we got together, the campesinos and the Indigenous people...

Q: When did you begin to get together?

AM: About 10 years ago. We started slowly, to get together, to talk and to understand: Why is the situation like this? Why does the government not resolve our problems? And when we wanted to do something, when we go and we take farms, for example, because the land is there, where we live. It is like our mother that takes care of us and feeds us. Without the land, we can't live, we would die. But since they never give us lands, they never have, we started to organize legally, without arms or anything, peacefully, and they went and took a farm, an abandoned farm. Since not all of the farmers live there, some leave them. We are told that that land belongs to so-and-so, and we don't even know them. But we see, there is the land, and we work on it. If the owner is not there, we work on it. We went in there, the campesinos went in there, to work the land. They built their houses there and took the land. It's been called an invasion; we invaded the land. And then they sent the Public

Security, since that is what the government does, send its Public Security forces, to burn the houses that had been built, to evict the people with canes and beat the people. They took our leaders. They put them in jail. They dragged them with horses to torture them. That is how they responded.

Q: Then all of this has been happening for the last 10 years?

AM: Yes, over the last 10 years all of this has been happening. And so we took up arms. We cannot do this peacefully. The government has its Army. It is not true that the Army has military autonomy. That it's job is to defend the Mexican people, defend the nation; this is not true. They are in favor of a few. It is not just. It is not just that the Army massacres its own people, its own race, the same people as they are. So we said, "No, to defend ourselves we have to take up arms, as well." If not, how? They will continue killing us like that. They kill us with hunger. And if we struggle to survive, we look for land that is not being used, they order us killed by the Public Security, who are the ones that come the most often. So this people said, "We have to unite. Unite and get arms and fight, too... If the government does not pay attention to us peacefully, then we will make them pay attention to us with force."

Q: I heard that there is something written called the Women's Law. How did you put this together?...

AM: Right now we could not bring anything. We do not have it here. But if you have patience to wait for the next one, because we know that this time the dialogue will not be completed because there are many things that the government will not approve of that are on that paper now. As they have always done, they give you a ton of paper, which is what they have done until now. The government has committed itself to meeting 50% of the demands that we have. But they are leaving off the most difficult ones, like the last one, which is about democracy and justice and land, for example. So there are still some points left there. And more than that, about democracy, because they tell us that we cannot, that this problem cannot be fixed at a state level. It has to be looked at at a national level. So that is where we are up to now.

And we think that if they do not accept our demands, as we ask them to, the dialogue will not be completed this time. We will have to go, consult with the people, ask the people if they agree with what the government commits to, and come back again, to say "yes" or "no."

Q: Are you also part of a group of women?

AM: Yes. I am part of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Within the EZLN there are insurgents, and I am an insurgent, a military person. Then there are a group of militias, which are our companeros who live in their towns. But when it is necessary for them to prepare with their arms, then they prepare with their weapons and they go and fight when they are needed...

Q: Women?

AM: No, I was speaking in general. Then I will speak to you of the women, how the Women's Law came about. So that is the make-up of the Zapatista Army. Then there are other people as well. They are what we call bases, bases that support the combatants, give us food. So with all of that, we form the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

About the Women's Law, well there are many women within the Zapatista Army; there are insurgents, who dedicate ourselves to military life, we prepare ourselves with weapons...

Q: But do any of you have families? For example, do you have children?

AM: No, I don't.

Q: But you are married. I can see the ring.

AM: [laughs] Yes.

Q: You're young?

AM: Of course.

Q: How old are you?

AM: I am 25 years old. When I was very young, I joined the Zapatista Army. I saw almost the whole process of this organization, of how it moved forward. I was one of the first women who was part of the ranks of the Army. We were a few compañeros, men and women, and we began to work, and then we began to go out to the towns, to the communities, and explain our struggle. And also to see what they thought, what they felt needed to be done. We saw that the life that we were living there was too unjust...

So, then in our work, since I was a woman, an Indigenous woman, a campesino. Even though I have light skin, but it is a family thing... But just for that we do not stop being campesinos, or Indians. They saw that I was a woman, and they saw that women can also do things. That women can organize themselves, and that they can do things other than what they do in their houses and their homes. Women have the capability of doing other kinds of work as well. And then women started to enter into the Army. Women started to get together and organize themselves, and they started to join the ranks of the Army. And then other women did not join, but organized themselves into women's groups, women alone. They organized themselves. They formed ranches of pigs. They did collective projects such as baking and sewing, and that is how they started to organize themselves as women's groups. And also many, many women started entering our organization. For example, for each family, for each man that entered into the struggle, and said, "Yes, I agree with the struggle and I want to struggle," many people came to look for us alone. And we would accept them, help them, because that is what we were there for. They would join with all of their family, and within the families were women: women, children, old people, everyone. We integrated them all into the Army. And that is another way that women entered the struggle. And some went to be insurgents, others stayed in their towns as civilians doing political work, organized in women's groups. Then, when we were many people, a very large organization, we said, "We

now have the necessary force to fight. Now we will make the government know what we are, to see if this way, with arms, they will pay attention to us."

Q: Where do the arms come from?

AM: That I do not know. Only our command knows that. But I can tell you that these arms were obtained by the people with their own efforts. They took their little money...

Q: You saved your money to buy them? This was your own....

AM: Yes, their own effort. Where they got them? That I don't know.

Q: There are rumors that you bought them from the federal forces that took arms from the drug traffickers [mispronounced in Spanish]...

AM: Drug traffickers [laughs]. Yes you can see the corruption...

Q: Yes that, and they thought that you would sell them again to the drug traffickers. But instead of this you kept them. I don't know if this is a rumor, or whether it has been written, but this is what they told me. Taking advantage of corruption...

AM: Yes. That is how we went gathering arms, but it was with the sacrifice of the people. Little by little, it took many, many years, that sacrifice. And now they tell us: "Hand over your guns." And we say, "No. No, because it is ours, it is something that belongs to us." How can they say that? It would be a humiliation to hand in what is ours, what was gotten through so much sacrifice. So now we say, "No, we will not hand in our arms until we see our demands being met, and all of what we need, which is what we ask for. All of our principal demands, and also the demand of the Mexican people for democracy." So now we say, "No, we cannot hand in our arms."

So, that is how the people started to get together. That is also how the

women got organized. So now there are women who represent the women as well. And not just women, but we represent all of our people as well, women, children, everyone..

Q: There are many rumors. I heard that there was, in the group of women, in one of the manifestations, the women said that they would be in charge. "We will pick our partners, we won't stand for the abuse any more."

AM: This is part of the Women's Law, something that I was going to tell you about. The Women's Law was born when we had already started to think: "There are now many of us, and we are armed. We have enough weapons, and now we are going to vote to see if people are agreed that now is the time." We asked all of the people, but the people were demanding, "It is time to fight, we need to fight, because we can't stand this situation any longer." And they were demanding this of us. And so what we did was find out the opinion of everyone. And everyone said that they agreed and that they thought it was important to make our laws. And so we decided that we should make our laws. Let's put on paper what we want to demand of the government. A general law was made, but there was no women's law. And so we protested, and said that there has to be a women's law when we make our demands. We also want the government to recognize us as women. The right to have equality, equality of men and women. And that they respect and recognize what we are. And so there was a law where we ask that they give us the right to freely choose our husbands, without being obligated to, because within Indigenous life we are obligated to get married even when we don't want to. Another is to have children, the number of children you want to have, but not to have to have so many children that your hormones run out. We have to choose, to decide. That is the petition that we made.

Q: This interests me, and this explains a lot. In other underdeveloped countries as well, and in traditional cultures, it is also true that women don't have any rights. Their fathers can order them, and can even choose who [they marry]... Was this the same for you, before?

AM: In Indigenous campesino life... A young man comes who wants to

get married, wants to ask permission to marry someone. He comes, but he asks the father, he doesn't ask the opinion of the young woman. And then what happens is that the father accepts, many of them accept without asking the opinion of the young woman, whether she likes him or doesn't like him. And so they sell her.

Q: They sell her?

AM: Yes, that is, in exchange for the young woman marrying the young man he has to pay some money... Women do not like this. Many times they do not even know the man, what he's like. They cannot live with him because there is no time spent as partners, nothing like that. They ask for you, the father gives you, and when the time comes to get married, you get married. Many women go crying, because they don't want to. That is why this came out in the law, that they give us, that we should have the right to choose, that they can not sell us like the land. That they can not obligate us to get married, to have many children. This is very difficult, very difficult for women. We think that women suffer more than men. Of course, they suffer the same exploitation, and the children as well, the same exploitation, the same misery, the same injustice. But in addition to that, women are also dominated. This is by the same ideology that we have, that all of us have. Of course, we do not place all of the blame on men. It is from the same ideology, the same condition that we live in in our country. There is mistreatment of women.

In addition to this, suffering this injustice, suffering this misery, they suffer to see their children die of hunger, of curable diseases. And this is why this law was born. And another thing is that in the Women's Law we demand that there be respect for women. We demand respect. Many times, they don't respect us. They think that women are something worthless. So this is also why this law came out, demanding respect, demanding that we be respected. And it demands punishment for men that rape, that grab by force. This has happened many times, and more among Indigenous women, campesin women. They see her all fucked up, and all of that, that she'll let them, and they grab her. Here in San Cristo'bal, for example, many women have been raped. They just grab them. Servants and all of the women that work in the

houses of the ladies, they grab them and rape them. Many times these rapes are not publicly known, they are not published, they are not told of, they do not accuse them of all that happens.

And another of the demands in the law is that women do have the capacity, if they are taught to do other kinds of work, not just grind the corn, make the tortillas and the food, take care of the children, sweep the house, go get firewood when the husband is not home. This is the work of Indigenous women in the home. But it is not taken into account that if women are given studies, education, they can do others kinds of work. We realized this when we started to enter this struggle. That if we are going to do many of the thing that men are doing, we can study, we can be leaders. I am the leader of a unit. And that we can be representative of something big. For example, Ramona, a companera who represents several women and who is a leader of a group of women. But before, this did not exist. Because people always thought that women couldn't do anything.

Q: For how many years have women been in positions of power? You said that you have been struggling for over 10 years. Can you calculate for me how many years women have been leaders?

AM: Yes, since we started to enter into this struggle. Since we started to form part of the struggle. Yes, we had opportunity to participate...

Q: There are Indigenous people in the [Federal] Army. There may be a point at which people say, "Enough, that is enough..."

AM: We know that not all of the [Federal] Army is so stupid as to do all of that massacre, like they did in Ocosingo, for example. We know that many of the soldiers do not like to do that, because they are Indigenous people, too, of the same campesinos. We know that there is a lot of discontent in the Army. They are not happy that they are ordered to kill, because they are killing their own race.

Q: Have there been any soldiers that left the Army?

AM: Yes.

Q: Did you know them? Did you speak with them?

AM: No, others told us about them. There were some...

Q: Rumors...

AM: No, they are not rumors. They are real. Because we have people who tell us what is happening with that. These are real things. Several soldiers who deserted got to one town and said that they were not in agreement with what was being done. They send the new troops in front and they send them with 30 bullets! According to that report, they send them with 30 bullets. In other words, they send them like meat, so that they confront us and they are killed first so that these officials can defend themselves. We know this and we know that not all of the Army is ready to kill their own people. There are people who do have hearts. For this reason, at the beginning, when we began the war, we asked them to surrender. We also know that many people [in the Army] are Indigenous people, were campesinos. We asked for their surrender so we would not fight against them....

Q: How do you feel, as a woman, learning how to handle a rifle and then feeling the capability of killing... Do you understand my question? You do not appear to me to be a violent person. Well, you speak very quietly....

AM: Yes, taking up a gun, that is something very, very important. I am proud to being able to do that. Of course, we do not like to kill. We kill, not out of taste, but out of need. They have obligated us to take up guns and kill to get what they have never given to us. But I, as a woman, feel good. I don't feel like a delinquent. I don't feel like a transgressor of the law, as the government has been calling us. I don't feel like that because I know I am representing a people. A people who struggle, a people who are doing something just and something necessary. Even if we do not kill, if there is no

war, it is as if there is, because day by day our people are dying. Our children are dying of hunger and of curable diseases. We cannot do anything else, because we have absolutely nothing. There are no hospitals, there are no schools, there is no food, there is nothing. Our children are dying, our people are dying. Because of this our struggle is just, it is just that we have taken up arms. And for women, it is just that women take up arms to defend themselves. That is what we have arms for, to defend ourselves. We are not delinquents. We don't like to kill. [...]

We have been attacked. The Mexican Army complains that we attacked them in Rancho Nuevo. But what happened during the past years when they came, when they attacked us in other places, when they evicted us? They don't take this into account, what they have done to us. We have been attacked. They don't say what they did when we were not even armed. When we weren't even prepared. They attacked us. But we know the history of our Mexico, our country, and we grab onto these roots. We have roots. It is the same people who have killed throughout history, that do this now. It is the same Army, the same governments of always. Even though they change, they act in the same way...

Q: I think that if I were threatened, I would be able to kill someone, too. I don't think I would like to do it. I would rather avoid any problems.

AM: That is what we are trying to do now. That is why we have sat down to dialogue. We do what the people ask. The people have asked that we try this way, and we are going to try it. We are going to try it, because we don't like to kill and we don't like to make war. Because of that, we have sat down to dialogue, to see what we can get out of it. But if things are not resolved this way, we will have to continue what we have set out for ourselves.

## Message from Comandante Ramona, to the students of University City

Message from Comandante Ramona, to the students of University City, UNAM in Mexico City on March 11th. 1997

Student compaoeras and compaoeros:

**The 8th of March the International Woman's day was celebrated. For The EZLN the womans struggle is very important. Not only through weapons, but through the political organization in the comunities. Our hope is that one day our situation will change, that women are treated with respect, justice and dignity.**

On January the 1st, 1994, the Zapatista women said that we have the right to decide the number of children that we want and can take care of; that we have the right to participate in our comunity matters and to have positions ; that we have the right to choose our couple, not being obligated to get married; that none of us can be beaten or badly treated phisically, by our family or by strangers, and that rape or intention of will be punished.

You know the farmers (campesinos) situation, the injustice and the poberty in which the indigenous women live in our country. Every day that the suprem government continues with politics in fvor of the rich, this situation becomes more dificult. We the women, are victims of the lack of education, of not having jobs, of daily violence, of health situations ever so much worse.

That is why we struggle for the autonomy of the indian pueblos. To take in our hands the control of our lives and not suffer so much.

Millions of mexican indians, men, women and children have been sacrificed since 500 years ago. Millions of our ancestors were murdered with the violence of the arms or with that of misery.

How many indians of Chiapas, guerrero, Hidalgo, Puebla, Sonora, Chihuahua, Veracruz, have been sacrificed for power of money?

On January the 1st of 1994 we shouted ∞YA BASTA! to all this. And since then we mexican indians do not duck our heads, we see power head forward and make him lower his head.

Because we have dignity and he doesn't. Because we want a Mexico for everybody and they want a Mexico for only a few. Because we want to live in peace, while for them the best indian is the dead indian.

We mexican indians know how to resist, we are not going to allow the power to continue with it's human sacrifices.

We have on our side, the justice, the reason and the historia.

We will win and are going to construct a Mexico with all of you.

**THANK YOU**

**COMANDANTE RAMONA**