

ZAPATISTA NEWS

Newsletter of the UK Zapatista Network



Repression and Resistance in Chiapas

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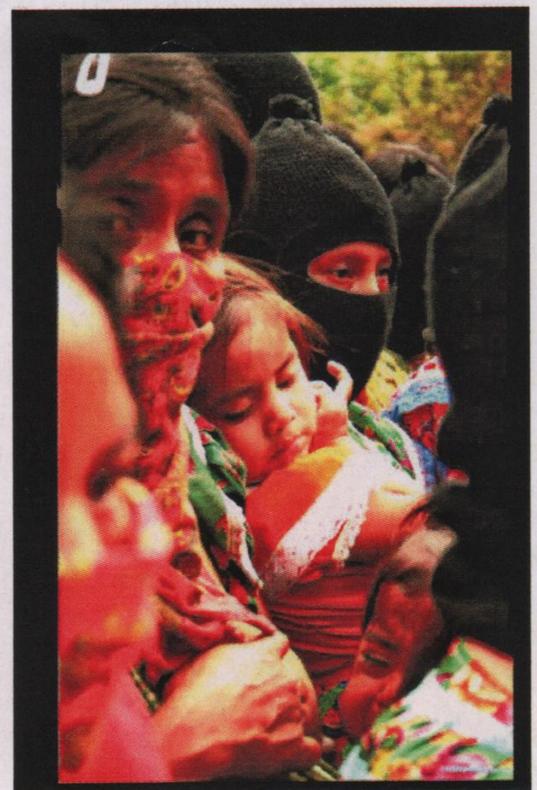
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The increase in militarisation and civil repression throughout Mexico since Felipe Calderon became president last year is reflected in Chiapas under new state governor Juan Sabines, where the federal government strategy to promote conflicts over land is fully supported by the state government. In Mexico as a whole many people believe a new 'dirty war' is under way with detentions and disappearances, while in Chiapas acts of violence, intimidation and aggression towards indigenous Zapatista support base communities have become a daily occurrence.

In September 2007 the EZLN 6th Commission took the difficult decision to suspend the second phase of the Other Campaign which was to visit the South and Central parts of the country, and instead to undertake civil and peaceful actions in defence of the Zapatista

communities. Their communiqué says:

"At this time, the state government of Chiapas and the federal government are waging a campaign against the Zapatista communities. 'Official' evictions, paramilitary attacks, invasions sponsored by officials, persecutions and threats, have become once again part of the surroundings of the indigenous communities who have set upon constructing their own destiny and improving their living conditions, always without losing their indigenous identity.... Just like in the worst times the government is attacking the poor and needy, while catering to and benefiting the powerful. ... In contrast to other occasions, these aggressions have been met by the silence of those voices that before rose to protest and demand justice.... We will do what we have to do, resist."



Forces of Repression

Paramilitary Organisations

These are 'peasant' organisations with names like OPDDIC, ARIC, URIC and UES, which are undercover paramilitary groups going under the names of agricultural organisations. These have been re-activated and armed by the state in order to provoke confrontation with the Zapatistas through land seizures and forced

evictions. Using these paramilitary groups, the state agrarian authorities have started a strategy of eviction of Zap communities from the 250,000 hectares of land in the Altos, Selva and Norte regions which were "recuperated" in 1994-5 following the uprising. The authorities are legalising these evictions with official documents making them into 'ejidos' (communal landholdings) in favour of the paramilitary organisations.

The idea is to make the Zapatistas look like invaders, and to provoke conflicts in order to destroy the movement. They attack the basis of Zapatista autonomy, which is the land. The result is communities living under constant threats of eviction and violence, enduring the destruction of their crops and livestock and the theft of their possessions, and the undermining of any security or stability in their daily lives.

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Ecological Stoves Project

In newsletter 1 we saw how Bristol-based Kiptik have helped Zapatista communities build their own water systems. The great majority of families in the communities cook on open wood fires in small smoky huts. This causes continual respiratory diseases for women and children and a large amount of fuel is wasted. Although large parts of Chiapas are still forested, due to the increasing demand for fuel and extensive logging the forest cover has reduced dramatically in recent years.

Ecological stoves are a major step forward in reducing the health problems associated with cooking on open fires. There are over 200 toxins in smoke produced from burning wet wood, and these

stoves release very little smoke into the room. They are also much more efficient, using up to 70% less wood and reducing levels of deforestation. The stoves also have a major impact on the lives of women in the communities who are almost always the ones who go out to get wood.

The stoves Kiptik helps build are made from fired clay burners that sit in a cinder block or brick base, surrounded by stones to preserve heat and maximise efficiency. Each stove takes a day to build and costs around £80 / €116. The clay parts are made by women's cooperatives in the communities and almost all the material needed to build the stoves can be sourced locally. They are simple to use and maintain and can last for up to 15 years.

Below we see an example of a double stove.



Scotland & the Zapatistas

The twinning between the Zapatista solidarity groups in Scotland and the indigenous people of Zapatista autonomous municipality "16th February", in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico means they are in direct contact with each other, and meet as often as possible.

In February 2007 a delegation from Scotland visited several villages in 16th February, and met with different collectives and groups. At the end of the visit, "16th February" presented them with a letter detailing their main needs at this time. These are:

1) Support for the Municipality's new health clinic, as seen in the



film. The clinic needs medical equipment, and more medicines. In addition the Municipality wishes to build a second phase of the clinic, with dormitories and a training room for the clinic's staff, the health promoters, and a proper kitchen to provide food for patients and staff.

2) Support for the Municipality's four autonomous primary schools, again pictured in the film. Funds are needed to enable the construction of adequate classrooms, plus furniture such as desks, and to purchase teaching materials.

3) Assistance in finding more outlets for the embroidery, textiles, and amber jewellery which the film

showed being made by the members of the handicrafts cooperatives in the municipality.

Funds are raised by benefit gigs, selling the handicrafts mentioned above and donations.

By June 2007 the Solidarity Groups in Scotland had raised over £13,500 for 16th February. This, together with donations from elsewhere, has enabled the Municipality to build the first phase of the health clinic which is now operating and treating patients.

If you can help, or would like to purchase the excellent DVD, Salud y Solidaridad, (Health and Solidarity) email edinchiapas@yahoo.co.uk, and check out www.edinchiapas.org.uk.