

# **A Story to Try to Understand**

Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional

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To the national and international Sixth:  
To those who sympathize with and support the struggle of originary peoples:  
To those who are anticapitalists:  
*Compañeras, compañeros, compañeros:*

Brothers and sisters:

We wrote this extensive text together, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés, spokesperson and current head of the EZLN, and I, consulting on certain details with some of the *Comandantas* and *Comandantes* of the Zapatista delegation that attended the first phase of the Fifth Congress of the National Indigenous Congress.

Although now, as on other occasions, the task of actually writing it down falls to me, it is Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés who reads, adds or subtracts, approves or rejects not just this text, but all those published as authentic writings by the EZLN. Not infrequently through these writings, I will use the first person singular pronoun. The reason for this will be understood later on. Although the primary audience of the following lines is the Sixth, we have decided to extend it to those who, without being with us or one of us, have identical concerns and similar work. Here goes:

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## **...Neither Our Nightmares**

Some years ago, the creativity and ingenuity of some collective of the Sixth produced a phrase which, with the passage of time, was attributed to Zapatismo. As you know, we are against copyright, but we don't usually claim words or actions that are not ours. However, although not of our authorship, the statement does in part reflect our feelings as Zapatistas.

Put forward by the Sixth, which was attacked with crude blackmail and threats (as is the case once again) for their skepticism toward the "power" of the institutional electoral ballot boxes, the phrase reaches further and defines what is lacking and limited in one form of struggle, the electoral one:

*"Our dreams don't fit in your ballot boxes,"* it was and is said.

As Zapatistas, we subscribed to this statement then...and now. It has the virtue of saying a lot in few words (now a forgotten art). But, from this side of the ski mask, from who we are, we add: *"and neither do our nightmares."*

Sure, we could have said "and neither do our dead," but it turns out that, in these fateful times, pain has extended even further. It is no longer just natural death that is responsible for separating us from those we miss today. In our case, for example, this includes Insurgent Infantry Sublieutenant Hernán Omar (one of our own since before the uprising, snatched from our side and that of his *compañera* and son by cancer; we send them a special embrace on this first birthday without him). Now this separation is increasingly caused by murder, disappearances, prisons, and kidnappings.

If you are poor, you're vulnerable; if you are a woman, you're even more vulnerable. It is as if the system wasn't satisfied with attacking you for what you are, and gave itself the macabre task of eliminating you altogether. That is, you aren't just the object of sexual assault and violence. What has happened in this system that makes "natural" and even "logical" ("yes, they were asking

for it,” society says) not only rape, but also kidnapping, disappearance, and murder of women? Yes, women. The democratization of gender-based hatred equalizes ages, races, colors, heights, weights, creeds, ideologies, and activism or its absence. All differences, except that of class, are diluted in one major flaw: being a woman.

Sure, go ahead and add more possibilities according to your difference: color, stature, weight, indigenous, afro-descendent, little girl, little boy, elder, young person, gay, lesbian, transgender, your particular way of being, whatever it might be. Yes, this is a system now devoted not just to segregating and disregarding differences, but determined to eliminate them completely. And not just to exterminate them, but to do so with all of the cruelty that modernity is capable of. Death keeps killing, but now more sadistically.

So, what we want to say is that we’re not just missing the dead, but also the disappeared [*l@s desaparecid@s*] (and with the @ symbol we include not just the masculine and feminine, but also all those who transcend the false gender dichotomy), the kidnapped [*l@s secuestr@das*], the imprisoned [*l@s encarcelad@s*].

How many of the missing from Ayotzinapa fit in how many ballot boxes? In which political party project can they be found? Which institutional logo incorporates those who we’re missing?

And what if we’re not even sure that they died? What if it’s not just their absence which hurts, but also the added uncertainty and anguish? (*Has he eaten? Is he cold? Is he sick? Has he slept enough? Is anyone comforting him? Does he know I’m still looking for him, that I’ll always be looking for him?*)?

The women who have been assaulted, disappeared, murdered across the entire ideological spectrum—in the aspiration for what office, position, or government do they fit?

How many ballots are equal to the children murdered by the PAN [National Action Party] in the ABC Daycare?

Those across the vast expanse of the geographies and calendars of Mexico below who have been exterminated by the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] and its poorly-concealed replicas—whom should they vote for?

In which vote count do those persecuted by the PRD [Party of the Democratic Revolution], accused of the crime of being young people, fit?

Which political party represents the sexual differences, persecuted in public and in private, who are sentenced to a hell on earth and in death as well?

Which logos and slogans of the institutional political parties stain the walls that thousands of migrants—men, women and children—must crawl over only in order to fall into the hands of politicians/criminals/business people responsible for human trafficking?

One could find examples in chronicles, blogs, news reports, press releases, opinion pieces, hashtags, etc., but the certainty always remains that there are many more criminal deeds that get no public mention at all.

Where are the polling place where we denounce the exploitation, repression, displacement and contempt for originary peoples?

In which ballot box should we deposit the pain and rage of the...

Yaqui, Mame,  
 Kumiai, Huave,  
 Mayo, Tepehuano,  
 Cucapá, Matlatzinca,  
 Tohono O'odham Chichimeca,  
 Raramuri, Guarijío,  
 Kikapú, Chuj,  
 Pame, Jacalteco,  
 Totonaca, Lacandón,  
 Popoluca, Comca'ac,  
 Nahua, Wixárika,  
 Maya Peninsular, Kanjobal  
 Binizáa, Chontal  
 Mixteco, Chocho,  
 Hñähñü, Tacuate,  
 Totonaca, Ocuilteco,  
 Mazateco, Kekchí,  
 Purépecha, Ixcateco,  
 Mixe, Motocintleco,  
 Chinanteco, Quiché,  
 Mazahua, Kakchiquel,  
 Me'phaa, Paipai,  
 Téenek, Pápago,  
 Rarámuri, Cochimí,  
 Chontal, Ixil,  
 Amuzgo, Kiliwa,  
 Ópata, Aguacateco,  
 Solteco, Mame,  
 Chatino, Chol,  
 Papabuco, Tzotzil,  
 Triqui, Zoque,  
 Cora, Tojolabal  
 Cuicateco, Tzeltal?

Where does all that fit?

When did the dictatorship of terror and its perverse logic obtain legal status to invade everything and readjust the criteria?

*I was lucky, says any man or woman assaulted in the street, at home, at work, on public transportation, they didn't shoot/stab me.*

*I was lucky, says the woman who has been beaten and raped, they didn't kidnap me.*

*I was lucky, says the child subjected to prostitution, they didn't burn me alive.*

*I was lucky, says the gay, lesbian, trans, other [loa otroa] whose bones were broken and skin lacerated, they didn't kill me.*

*I was lucky, says the laborer, the employee, the worker subjected to more work hours and a lower salary, they didn't fire me.*

*I was lucky, says the tortured social leader, they didn't disappear me.*

*I was lucky, says the young student murdered and thrown in the street, my family won't have to look for me.*

*I was lucky, says the displaced indigenous community, they didn't exterminate me.*

And more:

What poll takes into account the destruction of the Earth? Who do the contaminated waters, the animal species cornered into extinction, the infertile earth, the dirty air, vote for? Where should we deposit the ballot of a dying world?

So it's true: "our dreams don't fit in your ballot boxes."

But neither do our nightmares.

Everyone can be responsible for their own dreams. What remains is to hold accountable those who are responsible for our nightmares. What remains is yet to come...

## One "Yes," Various "Nos"

Yes, the initial and original proposal is ours, from the *eezeelen*. We introduced it to the delegates of the Fifth Congress of the National Indigenous Congress [CNI]. This happened October 9, 10, 11 and 13 of the year 2016, at CIDECI-Unitierra in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. On these dates there were delegates from the originary peoples, collectives, organizations, *barrios*, tribes, and nations from the *Amuzgo, Binni-zaá, Chinanteco, Chol, Coca, Náyeri, Cuicateco, Kumiai, Lacandón, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Nahuatl, Nāhñu, Nāthô, Popoluca, Purépecha, Rarámuri, Tlapaneco, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Wixárika, Yaqui, Zoque, and Chontal* languages. On October 13, 2016, the plenary of this Fifth Congress of the CNI decided to adopt the proposal and submit it to a consultation among its members. On October 14, 2016, in the morning hours, the CNI and EZLN made this decision public in the document called, "**Let the Earth Tremble at its Core.**"

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No, neither the EZLN as an organization nor any of its members will run for a "popularly elected office" in the 2018 elections.

No, the EZLN will not become a political party.

No, the EZLN will not present an indigenous Zapatista woman as a candidate for the presidency of the Republic in the year 2018.

No, the EZLN has not "altered its course" to any degree, nor has it reoriented its struggle to the institutional electoral path.

*So, the EZLN won't be running an indigenous Zapatista woman for president of the Republic? They won't participate directly in the elections of 2018?*

No.

*Why not? Because of their weapons?*

No. Those who think that are categorically incorrect: we Zapatistas took up arms to make use of them, not to be enslaved to them.

*So then, is it because the institutional electoral political system is corrupt, unfair, fraudulent and illegitimate?*

No. Even if it were transparent, equitable, just and legitimate, we Zapatistas would not participate in order to gain and exercise Power through holding political office, position, or institutional appointment.

*But, in certain circumstances, for strategic and/or tactical reasons, would you participate directly in order to be able to execute a particular job post?*

No. Not even if “the masses” demand it of us; not even if this “historical juncture” needs our “participation”; not for “the Homeland,” “the Nation,” “the People,” “the Proletariat” (ok, that one is already really outdated), or whatever other abstract or concrete concept is hoisted up as a pretense (disguising, or not, some personal, family, group or class ambition); and despite the moment, the convergence of the stars, the prophecies, the stock market, the manual of historical materialism, the Popol Vuh, the polls, the esoteric, “the concrete analysis of concrete reality,” and the convenient etcetera.

*Then why?*

Because the EZLN does not struggle in order to take Power.

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You think they didn’t offer us this and more before? That they haven’t offered us [political] office, perks, positions, embassies, consulates, “all-inclusive” foreign travel, in addition to the budgets that go with them? You think they didn’t offer to convert us into an institutional political party, or incorporate us into one of the already existing ones or the ones that will form in order to “enjoy the privileges of the law” (as they say)?

Did we accept? No.

We weren’t offended; we understand that ambition, or lack of imagination, or short-sightedness, or the lack of knowledge (as well as, of course, not knowing how to read) have led some to the imperative to join an institutional political party, then leave it and move on to another, then leave it and form another, and then onto whatever follows. We understand that the excuse of “changing the system from within” still works for some. For us, it does not.

But, in the case of the Zapatista leadership and troops, our negation isn’t only in the face of institutional Power, but also in the face of the autonomous forms and processes that the communities create and intensify day after day.

For example, no *insurgente* or *insurgenta*, whether from the commanding ranks or the troops, and no *commandanta* or *comandante* from the CCRI [Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee] can be authorities at the community level, or in the autonomous municipality, or in the different bodies of autonomous organization. They cannot be autonomous advisors, or *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* [Good Government Councils], or hold commission duties, or any of the responsibilities designated by assembly, created or yet to be created in the construction of our autonomy—that is, our freedom.

Our work, our task as the *eezeelen* is to serve our communities, accompany them, support them, not rule them. Support them, yes—sometimes we achieve that. And yes, true, sometimes we get in the way, but then it’s the Zapatista communities who give us a smack (or several, depending), so that we correct ourselves.

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All this would not need to be clarified and reaffirmed if there had been a close reading of the text titled “*Let the Earth Tremble at its Core*,” made public the morning of October 14, 2016.

No, we did not participate in the writing of that declaration. The text was written by the provisional commission named by the CNI assembly and then passed on to us. We didn’t add or take out even a single comma or period. We made it our own exactly as the delegates of the CNI wrote it.

But, as we have seen, functional illiteracy does not respect ideological borders nor political party symbols: expressions, evaluations, and opinions which vacillate between racism and stupidity have emerged from across the political spectrum. Yes, we’ve seen part of the institutional (and marginal) left intelligentsia coincide with that *panista* [PAN party supporter] defender of “feminism,” “honor,” “honesty,” “inclusion,” “tolerance”: Diego Fernández de Cevallos, who now dedicates himself, along with Antonio Lozano Gracia (the esoteric version of “Law and Order”) to hiding ex-governors on the run.<sup>1</sup> Has anyone forgotten *La Calderona*<sup>2</sup> applauding furiously when the aforementioned Fernández de Cevallos, as 1994 presidential candidate, referred to women with the “affectionate” term of “*viejerío*” and to *campesinos* as “*calzonudos*”?<sup>3</sup> Is *La Calderona* the symbol of the empowerment for women up above, or simply a front for a dissatisfied psychopath? Is anyone fooled by the fact that she still uses her “maiden” name?

As we will tell you later on, the CNI delegates to the Fifth Congress warned that the deep-seated racism in Mexican society was an obstacle to moving the initiative forward.

We told them it wasn’t just racism, but that in the Mexican political class, there is also a deep disrespect. For that class, originary peoples aren’t even a hindrance anymore, just an old piece of furniture that should be tossed to the past adorned with quotes from the Popol Vuh, multi-colored embroideries and second-hand dolls. Politics above sees through indigenous people, as if they were the forgotten glass beads of some conquistador, or the anachronistic remains of a past trapped in “magisterial” codices, books, and conferences. For institutional politics, originary peoples do not exist, and when they “reappear” (as they say above), then it’s the dirty maneuvering of some perverse and all-powerful mind. After 524 years, they only conceive of indigenous people as incompetent, stupid, and ignorant. If the originary peoples do something, it’s because they’re being manipulated; if they think something, it’s because someone is misleading them. For the politicians above, across the political spectrum, there will always be a “foreign enemy” behind indigenous peoples.

The world of institutional politics is not only incredibly closed-off and compact—no. It is also where “popularity” reigns over rationality, beastliness over intelligence, and shamelessness over a minimum of decency.

The fact that the paid media tamper with information in order to convert it into a commodity is common knowledge. In any case, reporters have to eat somehow, and it’s understandable that for them, the “news report” that the EZLN will run a Zapatista woman in the elections will sell more than telling the truth—that it’s the CNI who will decide whether or not to participate with one of their own delegates, and in that case, she can count on the support of Zapatismo.

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to Veracruz governor Javier Duarte currently on the run from the law after a warrant was issued for his arrest on charges of links to organized crime and money laundering.

<sup>2</sup> A reference to Margarita Zavala, the wife of ex-president Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) and likely PAN candidate for the presidency in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Viejerío* is a derogatory term that could be translated as something like “a gaggle of broads.” *Calzonudos* is a pejorative term used against Indigenous peoples whose traditional style of pants were mocked by the Spanish and



We understand that the lack of information is also a commodity. Reporters and editors earned their daily bread, okay (yes, you're welcome colleagues, no, no need to thank us, no really, I'll pass).

But for those who claim to be educated and thinking people who supposedly know how to read and write and who have access to a minimum of information, teach in centers of higher education, have emeritus status, collect their grants and salaries without fail, and travel around selling "knowledge"—for them not to read what the document "Let the earth tremble at its core" clearly states, and then go say and write all kinds of foolishness, well that...how do I put this gently?...that makes them shameless charlatans.

It's as if the 140 characters and the sealed glass house of the media have become a wall that negates reality, that expels it and declares it illegal. Whatever doesn't fit in a tweet doesn't exist, they confer and agree among themselves. And the paid media know it: "*no one will read a 6-page document closely, so we'll write a summary of whatever and the 'opinion leaders' on social media will accept it as truth.*" Thus follows a whole string of nonsense which hastens a hysterical purging which may provoke the collapse of the immense kingdom of the blue bird.

Imagine the contempt these people hold for the originary peoples whose existence they do not even recognize. Despite the fact that the text clearly states "***an indigenous woman delegate of the CNI,***" the magic of stupidity erases "of the CNI" and replaces it with "of the EZLN."

And then? Well, next comes a cascade of positioning, commentaries, opinions, critiques, condemnations, likes and dislikes, thumbs up and down, and more than a few raised middle fingers.

When someone who did take the trouble to read the original text timidly indicates that the possible candidate would be from the CNI and not the EZLN and that, ergo, it's not the EZLN who will participate in the elections, everybody comes down on them: "*nah, it's all a crude manipulation by the sockhead.*"<sup>4</sup>

Then there were those who demanded, almost immediately, that we first "liberate" Chiapas (yes, that's what they wrote). Of course, since in Chiapas one can find the territories of the *Yaqui*, *Kumiai*, *Rarámuri*, *Nahua*, *Zapoteco*, *Mixteco*, *Chinanteco*, *Totonaco*, *Popoluca*, *Peninsular Maya*, *Wixaritari*, just to name a few. When they were mocked they tried to correct their error and at least consulted google as to who the hell were these other indigenous people "manipulated by the sockhead," realizing then that these people don't live in Chiapas (which, by the way, would imply that the manipulative abilities of the deceased one exceed the boundaries of the "mountains of the Mexican southeast").

After consulting with *compa* lawyers, I asked Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés, and [the answer was] no. On our behalf there would be no lawsuits taken to the CONAPRED (National Commission to Prevent Discrimination) for violation of the first article of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico and the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination, nor against the tribunals for disclosing "inexact or false" information which causes "a grievance, whether political, economic, of honor, private life and/or image."

No, we do not know whether the National Indigenous Congress (which has in its ranks more than a few specialists in jurisprudence) will conduct any suits in that respect.

We also do not know if the students, readers, followers and those who pay their salaries and grants will proceed judicially against them for fraud (fraud: deception, giving the appearance of

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their descendants for supposedly resembling underwear.

<sup>4</sup> "*Cara de trapo*" or "*sockhead*" is a derogatory term used by critics to deride members of the EZLN (and their

truth to that which is false), according to Article 386 of the Federal Penal Code: “A person who deceives someone or takes advantage of a mistaken belief in order to illegally obtain something or achieve undeserved profit, is committing fraud.”

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However, there have been, are, and will be legitimate and rational doubts and questions (the great majority but not all from *compas* of the Sixth). In this text we will try to answer these doubts and questions to the extent we can. Our words will almost surely not be sufficient. But we will take into account all of the critiques, from across the political and ideological spectrum, made with a minimum of rationality, respect, and accurate information that correspond to us.

Here it is necessary to make one thing clear to everyone: the proposal is no longer in the hands of Zapatismo. As of October 13, 2016, the proposal ceased to be only ours and became a joint one shared by the Fifth Congress of the CNI.

What’s more, as of the day that the CNI consultation began, the acceptance, rejection, and/or modification of the proposal corresponds strictly and exclusively to the originary peoples, collectives, organization, *barrios*, tribes, and nations organized in the National Indigenous Congress. Not to the EZLN. The result of this consultation and the corresponding decisions, if there are any, will be made known during the second phase of the Fifth Congress, December 29, 30, and 31 of 2016 and January 1 of 2017, in Chiapas, Mexico, or before if the CNI so decides.

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Of course, you might be asking why we made this proposal, if we continue to think the way we have said we do since the beginning of our struggle, and that we have once again ratified today. Well, that’s what I’m going to tell you now.

When Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés told me that it was my job to explain this to the Sixth, I asked him how I should do it. “*It’s simple,*” he answered, “*just tell them what happened.*” So that’s what I’ll do...

## **A Small, Short Genealogy**

We haven’t been able to determine the exact date. The two of us agree that it was in the years 2013–2014. Although the deceased SupMarcos wasn’t dead yet, his death had already been decided and Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés was already the head of the EZLN and the first sightings of the Hydra began to emerge more clearly.

I don’t know how it is out there, but here ideas don’t arise in any particular moment, nor do they have a precise author. They are born and later they gain shape, sometimes managing to achieve the form of a proposal, later an initiative. Others, the majority, remain as just ideas. It takes months, years, sometimes decades to cross over from idea to proposal. And if this occurs, it is enough for the idea to become concretized in words in order to begin its stumbling path.

The idea also did not come from a formal meeting. If you pressured me, I’d say it began in the wee hours of the morning amid coffee and tobacco. We were analyzing what the various sentinel

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use of masks) and in this instance refers specifically to Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano.

posts detected, and the profound changes that, although in existence for a while already, were now becoming manifest in the Zapatista communities.

I'd say that Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés initiated the idea. I'm almost sure something so hare-brained and absurd would not have come from me.

But whatever the case, it wasn't until SubMoy said it out loud that we began to think about it seriously, through the famous Zapatista method of turning the idea over and over until we get to where we want to be, that is, the "day after."

Let's begin at the beginning, that is, with the difficulties and obstacles. If these are big enough to qualify as a challenge, then the idea goes to the second phase: what it has going against it. After that, and only after that, we analyze what it has going for it, the pros. That is, we don't decide whether to take it forward until we know if it's worthwhile. So first is the question of what, then the cons and the pros of the how, then the where and the when (the calendar and the geography), and at the end of the beginning, the who.

All of this doesn't come from one person, but rather moves into larger and larger collectives. That is how, through questions, it gets rounded out, first by consulting the "elders" who are *comités* [CCRI] (we refer here to those of greatest seniority who know our history first hand), then consulting those who have been incorporated into the work of the organizational leadership, then those who are "*suplentes*" (that is, those who will replace the top ranks), then finally, those who are still training, the "*candidat@s*" (that is, those who are preparing to start doing this work). I'm talking here about hundreds of heads, of thoughts, of comings and goings of the word, of listening ears; I'm talking about a collective heart that begins to grow, becoming bigger and bigger.

The next step has to do with the answer to the question, "*Who will do it?*" If this corresponds to the autonomous authorities, then the consultation goes on to them; if it corresponds to the communities, then there is a general consultation, which includes everyone. If it doesn't correspond to either of these entities, then we have to ask who it does involve, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. If that "who" answers in the affirmative, then we have to consult with everyone to determine if we support this initiative or not.

We were in this process for at least 2–3 years. That is, the idea came and went, never going further. A while later, I was told to feel it out with people close to us. I did so.

Another while later, at the dawn of this year of 2016, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés called me and said: "There's work at hand, we have to talk about it."

His tone unsettled me: the last time I heard that tone I ended up dead and reborn in a single day, just a little over two years ago. Nevertheless, I went to the meeting.

It must have been the first of January of this year, 2016, the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the uprising. There wasn't anyone else in the hut of the General Command of the EZLN, which SubMoy has occupied as of over three years ago. The coffee was cold but there was sufficient tobacco. He explained to me in broad strokes, as he tends to do, as if he was thinking out loud. He explained the cons, the pros, and then he waited. I understood that it was my turn. The idea, as I already explained, had already been maturing for a while, so I limited myself to refining the cons and adding question marks to the pros. The "who" was beyond us, and everything that doesn't have to do directly with us is an enigma. When SubMoy responded to my question of "who" with a laconic "*the one with the birthday*" (that is, the CNI, which turned 20), the uncertainty lessened: we had known each other for two decades and the National Indigenous Congress was the most solid initiative that had arisen since we emerged into public. The CNI had remained, with ups

and downs, faithful to its roots, and although its pain was far from media coverage, it represented the sector most battered by the Hydra. Even so, this only heightened our doubt.

*"The truth is," I told him, "We can't really know what will happen. This idea is going to unravel various knots and what will result is totally unknown. We don't know if the National Indigenous Congress will accept, much less if the Sixth will understand. And well, since those above don't think but rather react from the gut, they're going to break things that it may be impossible to put back together. It is very risky. Right now, watching and analyzing what is going on out there, I think it's more likely that it turns out badly than that it turns out well."*

SubMoy set his coffee cup aside and lit a cigarette. *"Indeed, that is where you come in. You know well that our style is to prepare for things to turn out badly—remember the uprising and everything that followed. So, if things go badly, then we will need..."*

I got ahead of myself and interrupted him: *"An alternate plan?"*

He laughed heartily and said, *"No, we need someone to blame for it turning out badly."*

In broad strokes, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés recalled bits of the film *"La Ley de Herodes,"* and when I thought that he was going to linger on the final speech of Representative Vargas (the history of a mediocre man who becomes a criminal and later a governing official, sound familiar?) he referred instead to the part about *"There's good news and there's bad news."*

(Superfluous note: *"La Ley de Herodes"* is a film by Luis Estrada, with Martín Torres as directing assistant; story and screen play by Jaime Sampietro, Fernando León, Vicente Leñero, and Luis Estrada himself; photography by Norman Christianson; music by Santiago Ojeda; makeup by Alfredo Mora and Felipe Salazar. Along with *"El Infierno,"* also by Luis Estrada, with the great Joaquín Cosío in the cast in the role of *"Cochiloco,"* these are the only films that have managed to displace those of Jean Claude Van Damme from the top of the movie fan list in the Zapatista communities and encampments).

Later he added: *"We have to plan first how to deal with the bad news."*

It didn't take much to guess that the bad news was the failure of the initiative. And I'm not referring to its lack of success per se, but rather that it could be rejected by the CNI, who, if they accepted it, would become the indisputable protagonist of something that would astonish Mexico and the world.

Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés continued with the details.

*"Look, the first thing that will worry the CNI is that they will be accused of betraying their word, that they will be stepping into shit, that they will be straying from their path, that they will be giving in. That they will be accused of letting themselves be convinced by the system and wanting money, that is, Power, to rule, to be like everybody else. They will be accused of surrendering, selling out. They will most certainly hear these critiques, but I am sure that they have the clear-headedness and thinking to respond adequately. But the problems is who will listen to them. They will be attacked harshly and won't be given the opportunity to defend themselves."*

*But that is where we can help out. If we, that is, you, put yourself forward to receive the critiques and attacks, then the CNI will be able to see not only those who emerge to say something, but also the points in favor or against that they couldn't make out until the proposal became public. All of this is going to help them decide yes or no."*

He continued on. He created something like a spoken portrait of exactly what has happened over the last 4 weeks. He said who would say what, who would be against and why, what the Ruler would think, who would be confused, who would be hopeful, who would extend their

vulture's wings, and who would support the whole process because they knew exactly what was at stake.

After several hours of questions and answers, I said, *"But for this I don't need to be present. A few communiques, maybe an interview would be sufficient. That's how the media is, they will think that nothing has changed, that they can do the same as always. Those above, well, they are so predictable it's boring. They'll come out with their accusations of protagonism, manipulation, division. You're right about one thing, they'll definitely concentrate on one person. But, I repeat, none of that requires that I be in attendance. What's more, they're so predictable that even if I don't say anything at all they'll come out against me."*

"No," said SubMoy, *"you have to present the proposal. Not only because when they see you there they're going to say it's all your sleight of hand and the cons we expected will play out just as we expected, but also because the compas of the CNI will understand that it isn't something that only has to do with the indigenous peoples. It's bigger, much bigger."*

He lit another cigarette and continued:

*"As big, or bigger, than January 1, 1994."*

That was no small claim, given who it was coming from. Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés is not only a war veteran, but came to the EZLN long before the beginning of the war. On January 1, 1994, he was responsible for commanding the regiment that took the plaza of the municipal seat of Las Margaritas, while carrying the already lifeless body of Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro. Years later, he would become responsible for the Zapatista communities. On October 26, 2010, he was promoted to the rank of Subcomandante Insurgente, the highest rank in the EZLN's military hierarchy. In 2012, "the day of the end of the world," he was the one who organized and coordinated the silent mobilization of more than 40,000 men, women, children, and elder Zapatistas who, on that date, surprised the world. On February 14, 2013, he became Zapatista spokesperson and chief. Since then, all of our public words and any national or international initiative we make must have his approval.

He was and is right: the task is so, so terrible and marvelous that it could be bigger than that January 1, 1994 that marked us so indelibly.

*"Even if the CNI rejects the proposal, just the act of thinking about it, discussing it, the dialogue itself will mean that they are no longer the same, because they will move from the "this is being done to us," to "we are going to do something," and this will take them to a new manner of thinking,"* Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés continued.

*"And they won't be alone,"* he said almost at the end, *"in addition to us, they will have at their side the arts and the sciences."*

Before leaving, I asked him why the National Indigenous Congress. Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés got up to accompany me to the door and answered:

*"Because they are the only ones who can do what we can't."*

Later on what happened, happened. The democratic teachers' organizations reaffirmed their rebellion; the ordinary peoples continued to suffer attacks, displacements, disrespect; the Hydra continued devouring worlds; and the *CompArte* exploded in colors, sounds, shapes, and movements that were merely the prelude to what was to come: a terrible and marvelous earthquake.

Still on the eve of the events, I asked Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés if there were any changes. *"What we said before, prepare yourself to head out,"* he answered me without adding anything else.

We arrived at CIDECI on October 9, when the afternoon was already hanging its stained clothes on the trees and houses. Later, when the night became master of calendar and geography, the CNI delegations began arriving. The road they had to travel to arrive was not a short one.

We had followed closely each and every process of the CNI, their public and private words. The CNI is the only space where the originary peoples can be heard. We knew that soon, to the number of murdered, disappeared, imprisoned, and beaten, would be added the cadavers of entire territories.

*“When the territory of an originary people, nation, tribe, or barrio is displaced or destroyed,”* our Tata Grande Juan Chávez Alonso used to say, indigenous Purépecha who was master and guide of the CNI and the EZLN, *“the originary peoples who have their roots and home in it die with it. And when an originary people dies, a world is extinguished.”*

We knew already at that point that in the work sessions and minutes of this Congress there would be fewer worlds. More than a few had arrived to say goodbye, although they did not know it yet.

*“We have to start, now,”* Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés told me, *“we have to share the load...”*

## **A Proposal Is Born**

On October 9, 2016, it was already nighttime when we asked to have some initial meetings with those who were arriving. We met in one corner of the CIDECI-Unitierra facilities. The Zapatista delegation sat across from the arriving CNI delegates. Let me tell you a little about the Zapatista delegation: there were 34 people, 17 women and 17 men. Of those, only 7 were “the elders”; the other 27 were *comandantas* and *comandantes* who had been children or youth when we rose up on the f January 1, 1994.

We greeted one another with a handshake. Everyone sat down except for Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and me. He gave me a signal. I started to speak, trying to remember everything that we had previously discussed, explaining what, more or less, would have to be repeated the next day, October 10, in the closed plenary, and then again in the open plenary on October 13:

*“We think that we must make a decision as the CNI and the EZLN. We have to decide if this Fifth Congress is like other meetings where we speak of our suffering, discuss our resistances, complain, curse the system, declare that we won’t give up, and then each of us goes back to our land to continue to keep track of the aggressions, displacements, injustices, and deaths.*

*Our pain reaches less and less people. Our dead don’t find the same echo that they once did. And this isn’t because people from the outside have become cynical or apathetic. It’s that the war that we have been enduring for a long time as originary peoples has now reached them too, it is in their streets, in their houses, in their schools, in their workplaces. Our suffering is now one among many others. Yet despite the fact that this pain now extends further and deeper, we are more alone than ever. There will increasingly be fewer of us.*

*Soon the CNI will not even be able to meet because they will not be able to leave their territories, either because of a lack of money, because of the bad government, because of the corporations, because of crime, or because of death that comes naturally or is imposed. A little further down the road we will only be talking amongst ourselves, knowing in advance what we are going to say.*

*You, delegates to the CNI, are here because you were sent here, because your peoples, nations, tribes, and barrios seek help, they seek words and listening ears to relieve and comfort them. You come to speak and listen. Your responsibility is to your people, not to anyone else. Everything is very bad and, you and we both know, it's going to get worse. We have to do something."*

I told them an anecdote about something that happened to the deceased SupMarcos during the Other Campaign 10 years ago.

He explained that, in an originary nation in the Northwest of Mexico, he met with an indigenous leader. As in other situations, the deceased was criticized because that leader had previously received representatives of the institutional government. The deceased said that he had not been sent to judge, condemn, or absolve this man, but to listen because one day he would be needed. The indigenous leader met with him, separately and in private.

The leader said to the deceased: *"I know very well that they didn't want you to meet with me, that they have put pressure on you to not be here. They have also pressured me not to meet with you. I don't know why you are here. I imagine that those who sent you here told you to come and see and listen. I don't know. But I will tell you why I am meeting with you. I have met with the different government representatives. All of the different colors and sizes have shown up here. They come, they get their picture taken, they say a few words, they go, and they don't come back. I have received them here because those that came before me told me that my duty was to make sure that my people, my community, does not die, to make sure that we survive. That is why I met with them, and that is why I am meeting with you. I don't believe that you bring me advice or lessons, although it is good that you are not trying to get a picture and you listen instead of talking. I met with them because I think that doing so will allow my people to survive for a while longer, and not to die. That is why I am meeting with you, because I believe that you will see something of what we are, and that gaze, even if just for a little while, will help my people survive."* The deceased wrote all of this down in his notebook, that is why he had the exact words of the indigenous leader.

After saying these words, the leader was quiet. The deceased then asked for permission to speak. The leader granted him the right to speak. The deceased said, more or less (he didn't write it in his notebook because he couldn't speak and write at the same time): *"Thank you for meeting with me. I only have one question: are you not worried that you have been wrong, that by meeting with the government or with me you have not helped to stop your people from dying and that you will be judged as a bad leader?"*

The indigenous leader waited to see if that was the entire question, and then responded: *"The only ones who can judge me are my own people. If my people condemn me for what I have done and what I do, that would mean that I wasn't wrong. Because in order for them to judge and condemn me, my people will have to have survived. And that would mean that I have carried out my duty, and I can show the dead that I have done so, even if the living condemn me."*

That is the end of the deceased's anecdote.

I continued speaking:

*"That is why you have to be very clear about who you are accountable to. You don't owe anything to the EZLN. Nor to the Sixth. Nor to anyone but your own people, who you represent. You have to do something, because soon, for many people there will be nothing left and it will be too late."*

We told them that they had to do something, that their duty was to their originary peoples, barrios, tribes, and nations, to their collectives and organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), is the party founded by Andrés Manuel López Obrador

We told them to do something, anything; to join, if they thought it necessary, Morena<sup>5</sup> (this is in the recordings and the attending delegates can confirm it. That was the only time that, for our part, we mentioned the person who would later, before anyone else, delegitimize and condemn the proposal, demonstrating stupidity, racism, intolerance, disrespect, and frank schizophrenia.<sup>6</sup> Yes, the first option that Zapatismo presented to the CNI was to support the political party Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional) [Morena]. Or to join any other political party. Or to make their own political party.

We said that we would not follow them in this, but we would understand why they did it and that they would not hear judgement or condemnation from us.

We said that if the Sixth got in their way, to leave it behind.

That if the EZLN held them back, to cut off relations with us.

We don't need to tell you that, in response to each of these options, the delegates gestured as if they were swatting away impertinent flies. They all remained quiet. I continued:

*“Do something, be it this or something else.”*

Here I looked back at Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés. He gestured that I should continue:

*“We came to propose something else to you: we are battered, with deaths, disappearances, kidnappings, incarcerations, displacements, injustices, entire territories destroyed and others on their way to extinction. We are cornered, without hope, without strength, without support, weak and agonizing. For the politicians and the media, even those on the left or progressives, we don't exist.*

*That is why we Zapatistas think that it is time to go on the offensive. The time has come to counterattack. And we have to begin by striking one of the hearts of the system: politics from above.*

*That is why we propose that the CNI form an Indigenous Governing Junta (that is what we called it in our original proposal; in assembly, as proposed by a Magonist indigenous delegation from Oaxaca, it became “Indigenous Governing Council”), a collective made up of delegates from the CNI which aspires to govern the country. It should compete in the 2018 presidential elections running an indigenous woman from the CNI as an independent candidate.”*

No, in response to this proposal the delegates didn't act as if they were swatting away an annoying insect. Rather, they got openly angry. Some were really annoyed (well, more precisely, they were pissed). Others said that it was a very bad joke, that it didn't make them laugh and instead gave them a stomachache. But the majority waited in silence.

I should tell you that, for originary peoples, silence does not mean agreement, persuasion, or a lack of argument. It means listening, and—take note—thinking and analyzing before speaking (yes, it would do others well to follow this method).

Why did they listen to us? Because they consider us brothers and sisters. The mutual respect that we have for one another made them hear us out until the end.

And they understood that it wasn't a passing thought, but an idea that could become a proposal. So they started to think about it.

After a long silence, someone began to speak, saying something like: *“I'm thinking that this could be how we reconstruct the CNI, that this initiative could give visibility to the indigenous people once again. Because compas, we have to be honest, we don't exist for the political class. They no longer even talk about us anymore as an object of charity. I think that with this proposal we could*

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(AMLO) and acolytes after leaving the PRD in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to comments made by López Obrador in response to the CNI communique “Let the Earth Tremble at its Core.”



*encounter not only other indigenous people, but we also many people from below who are screwed. There is much discontent all over the country, and there is no alternative for indigenous people, nor for those who are not indigenous. Of course, the proposal has many things going against it that we must analyze seriously.”*

Someone else took up the word and mentioned two things working against the proposal: the racism that exists in Mexican society; and that they would be criticized and attacked for seeking Power. Both points against were repeated in later assessments as well. But no, not in this meeting nor in the ones to follow, did anyone mention as a point against the proposal that they would be accused of wanting to “divide the left.”

That is how the idea stopped being only our idea. That is how the CNI began to think about it and make it their own. The word spread far and wide. Soon, all of the delegations were thinking, offering opinions, and evaluating the proposal. The absurd idea began to be transformed into a collective proposal.

Words came and went during the closed plenary assembly on October 10 during the work sessions on October 11. Without failing to comply with the mandate the delegations had, the central theme of the meeting ceased to be denunciation. The possibility of going on the offensive became the most important thing. During the work sessions (there were 4) in which observers could attend, whenever the topic came up, some of the *compas* of the Sixth would move nervously in their seats, looking at one another (they weren’t allowed to speak, only to listen), turning to look at the Zapatista delegation (we had divided ourselves across the four work sessions in order to be able to have a complete account of all of the denunciations and experiences of the CNI delegations). More than one of them left, their irritation apparent.

A feverish movement ran through the meetings, large and small. Whoever was able to do so called their communities, explaining to them what was being discussed and asking for their opinions and feedback. The pros and cons were analyzed and discussed. They made lists of each. They weighed them. They sought an answer to the question, “Will it be worth it?”

The idea had already ceased to be the EZLN’s. It now belonged to the National Indigenous Congress. In the collective heart of the originary peoples, the echo grew of the initial words spoken by Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés, in the name of all of the Zapatista men and women:

*“Now is the time of the National Indigenous Congress. With its step, let the earth tremble at its core. With its dreams, let cynicism and apathy be vanquished. In its words, let those without voice be lifted up. With its gaze, let darkness be illuminated. In its ear, let the pain of those who think they are alone find a home. In its heart, let desperation find comfort and hope. In its challenge, let the world be seen anew.”* But what was missing was yet to come.

Beyond evaluating the pros and cons, it had to be clear for the CNI what the role of Zapatismo was in this initiative.

Far in advance, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee had organized a small party to celebrate the birthday of the National Indigenous Congress which commemorated, on October 12, 2016, 20 years of being home, ear, word, and echo of the originary peoples of Mexico.

The place? The *caracol* of Oventik, in the mountains of southeastern Mexico.

The delegations of the CNI were received according to the Zapatista protocols for special invitees. Of course, there was an extra effort made to honor these visitors. It isn’t every day that we receive our closest relatives, those who share with the Zapatista peoples blood, pain, rage, resistance, and rebellion—that is, history.

At first I didn't understand why Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés had arranged the positions of the delegations the way he did: the CNI delegations were seated on the main stage, and in front of them he put a small wooden platform for the Zapatista leadership, which he led himself.

I could see everything because I was moving from side to side, trying to convince the *compañeras* and *compañeros* of the CNI to stand up on the benches to see better. "But I have mud on my shoes and I'm going to get the bench dirty," argued a delegate. "*Compañera*" I said, "*here if there is one thing that we have plenty of, its mud. Don't worry about it.*"

The CNI named an indigenous woman to speak in the ceremony. Comandante David gave the welcome. Then the *compañera* from the National Indigenous Congress spoke. She spoke as one does among family: with her heart in her hand. I won't repeat her words, nor the ones that Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés shared on our behalf. The *compañera* from the CNI was about to leave the stage when Subcomandante Insurgente Moises asked her to stay.

The *compañera* stayed there for the entire proceedings, surrounded by the indigenous Zapatista leadership, facing the delegations of the National Indigenous Congress.

And then I understood.

I was looking from off to one side, but with the visual perspective of the CNI delegations who could see how an indigenous woman just like them, from the National Indigenous Congress just like them, was accompanied by the highest authority of the EZLN who were sheltering her, protecting her, accompanying her, and supporting her, taking note of what made us different, but *compañeras* and *compañeros* all the same.

That was how, with this symbolism, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés responded to the question that had circulated through the CNI delegations from the very first day: "What role would the EZLN have in this initiative if it is approved?"

Afterwards there were dances, theatrical performances, songs, and poems.

At the end of the proceedings, a troop of Zapatista *milicianas* performed a whole communiqué without saying a single word.

And afterwards? The food: beef and turkey, with the choice of coffee or *pozol*. Everyone left soon after.

On the following day, October 13, was the general resolution assembly...

## Why?

October 13<sup>th</sup> started off auspiciously: one of the work sessions hadn't finished yet and the plenary assembly was delayed. When it did begin, it started with a reading of the minutes from each work session. And yes, one of the sessions hadn't finished transcribing yet. There was further delay, as there should be for any important decision. Oh, I know. It's pointless to say it; we ourselves are the constant and ongoing update of the software "*la rebelión de los colgados.*"<sup>7</sup>

On Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés' orders, the Zapatista delegation sat in the back of the auditorium at CIDECI-Unitierra during the three plenary assemblies (the closed assembly, the inauguration, and the final plenary). That was to make clear what this was about: it was the hour of the National Indigenous Congress.

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<sup>7</sup> *Rebellion of the Hanged*, the fifth in B. Traven's six-volume series of novels set in the lead up to and dawn of the Mexican Revolution.

When we finally got to the topic of “Proposals to strengthen the CNI,” Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés asked for the floor on behalf of the Zapatista delegation. It was granted him and he went to the front of the auditorium. He began more or less like this:

*“I’ve heard about a movie, I think it’s called “La Ley de Herodes” (general laughter, and a grimace from me because I knew what was coming). So in this movie they told me about there’s a part where Vargas says, ‘I’ve got good news and bad news (more general laughter, more personal grimaces). So we have to see what we’re going to do about the bad news. In other words, we have to see who we’re going to blame if this turns out badly. That said, I’m going to ask SupGaleano to come explain the proposal (more general laughter, now no grimaces from me).*

I went to the front of the auditorium. After clarifying that I was happy to do my duty as “punching bag,” or “alternative plan,” and that being the target of critique and insults was a powerful aphrodisiac for me (well, I used more mundane terms, but that was the idea), I said what I was charged with saying. I will repeat it here in summary form, as this text is already several pages long and if you’ve gotten this far, you deserve special consideration. What’s more, now you will know why the *eezeelen* made this proposal and why we made it to the CNI.

First we insisted that the original proposal was for an indigenous woman, a CNI delegate, who spoke her indigenous language and knew her culture. We started there because the designation that it be “a woman” had been diluted in conversation and throughout the work sessions. First people began to say “the *candidata* or *candidato*,” later “the *candidato* or *candidata*,” and then just “the *candidato*.”

Then we reminded everyone that they could not make a decision there, in that Fifth Congress, because the National Indigenous Congress, as of their formation as such, had made a commitment to consult their peoples on proposals made in their meetings. The seven principles obligate the CNI to consult its own bases, each group according to its own ways.

Then we said what we believed with respect to the initiative:

That the Indigenous Governing Council should be composed of delegates (men and women) from all of the originary peoples, collectives, organizations, *barrios*, tribes, and nations that make up the National Indigenous Congress.

That they wouldn’t win, because the electoral system in Mexico is made to benefit the political parties, not the citizens.

That if they did win, the victory wouldn’t be recognized because fraud is not an anomaly in the Mexican electoral system, but rather its backbone and essence.

That if they won and were recognized, they wouldn’t be able to do much at all, because up there above there is nothing that can be done. The fundamental issues of the battered Mexican nation will not be solved by the executive power, nor the legislative powers, nor the judicial power. The Ruler has no visible post and operates in the catacombs of international financial Power.

And not in spite of all of the above, but precisely because of it, they could and should carry out the proposal.

This is because their action would imply not just a statement of their disagreement, but a challenge that would find echo in the many *belows* of Mexico and the world. It could generate a process of combative reorganization not just for the originary peoples, but also for workers, *campesinos*, employees, poor city dwellers, teachers, students, in effect, all of the people whose silence and immobility is not a synonym of apathy, but rather because they haven’t been convoked.

In response to what had been said about the initiative being impossible, that it had too much going against it, that they wouldn't win, we answered that if we had gotten together on December 31, 1993, and told them that in just a few hours we were going to rise up in arms, declare war on the bad government, and attack the barracks of the police and the army, they would also have said that such a thing was impossible, that there was a lot going against us, that we weren't going to win.

We told them that it didn't matter if they won the presidency of the Republic or not, that what mattered was the challenge, the irreverence, the revolt, the total rupture with the image of the indigenous as object of pity and charity (an image deeply rooted in the right and, who would have thought, also in the institutional left of "true change"<sup>8</sup> and its organic intellectuals, addicted to the opium of the social networks). What mattered was that their audacity would shake the entire political system and that they would hear echoes of hope not from one but from many of the *Mexicos below...* and the *belows* of the world.

We told them that the initiative allowed time for them to decide, with total freedom and responsibility, where and how far they wanted to take it.

We told them that they could decide in any given moment what they would do, because it was their pace and path, and that the destiny they charted would rupture every existing schema, above all those represented by those who believe themselves to be the vanguard of change and revolution.

We told them that if they were willing to challenge a racist society, they should go further and challenge a patriarchal and *machista* one as well (which isn't the same thing, as those in the feminist struggle can tell you).

We told them that the Zapatista *comandantas* had said that they would be responsible for setting up support for the *compañeras* who became part of the Indigenous Governing Council and the *compañera* who became spokesperson and candidate, caring for their children in Zapatista communities. They said they would take good care of the children, as if they were their own. That the children would go to the autonomous schools so they didn't get behind in their studies, and the solidarity doctors would watch over their health. That if they had pets, they'd take care of those too. They said the *compañeras* of the CNI could do their work without worry if that was the mandate of the agreement the CNI came to.

We told them not to worry if they didn't know how to speak Spanish very well. Peña Nieto doesn't either and there he is.

We told them that we would reorient the savings we keep for our resistance and make a call to individuals, collectives, and organizations in Mexico and the world to raise money for them to go wherever they needed to go. That way they would have the freedom to refuse the institutional economic resources that the system gives to independent candidates.

We told them that we thought they could not only govern our country of Mexico, but the entire world.

We told them to take this opportunity to speak and listen to other ordinary peoples, and to others who aren't indigenous but are suffering without hope or alternatives all the same.

We told them that there are things that we as Zapatistas can do that the CNI can't. And that there are things the CNI can do that we as Zapatistas can't.

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<sup>8</sup> MORENA's campaign slogan.

We told them that they, the collective that is the National Indigenous Congress, could do what nobody else (including Zapatismo) could do: unite. Because a legitimate movement like that of the originary peoples can and should be a point of unity among many different people with a common resolve.

But this wouldn't be to "unite" under one particular acronym, or hierarchy, a whole list of real or fake acronyms. No. We mean unite as a point of convergence, to be the footing where differences and rivalries find a common point, a place to meet. The ground, that is, the earth. And who better for that task than those who are the color of the earth.

We told them that this Council and this indigenous woman could generate a movement that could shake the entire political system.

A movement where all of the *belows* would converge.

A movement that would make the earth tremble at its cores.

Yes, cores as plural, because there are many worlds that lie within the earth and await a good shaking to be born.

We told them that perhaps, then, it wouldn't matter if they got the signatures together, if the money to be able to travel was raised or not, if they managed to meet the requirements for candidate registry, if the other candidates showed up for debate, if they participated or not in the elections, if they won or not, if their victory was recognized or not, if they could do something there above or not.

We said none of that would matter because the problems would then be different ones, the questions different ones, the answers different ones.

We told them that we would not pass on to them our phobias and philiias, that we would respect their decisions, their steps, their paths.

We told them that as Zapatistas we would be one more force among the many who would surely feel convoked by this challenge.

And we told them that the most important thing that we had come to tell them was this: that we were ready to support them with all of our strength. We told them that we would support them with everything that we have, which, although small, is what we are.

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The interventions in the conversation continued, now all of them oriented toward making the proposal theirs, as the CNI. Here and there someone requested that they decide on the spot. The great majority insisted that they had to consult.

The commission transcribing the minutes gave us a copy of the final resolution.

I instinctively grabbed a pen in order to start adding commas and periods.

Subcomandante Insurgente Moises stopped me and murmured, "*No, this is their word. And their word is big, much bigger than we are as Zapatistas. Like the deceased one used to say: we are the smallest, and it is our turn to step to the side and wait...*"

## **The Zapatista Internal Consultation**

We could just give you the results and leave it at that. But we think if we tell you about the process you might understand it, and us, better.

As of October 15, 2016, the Zapatista delegation to the Fifth Congress of the National Indigenous Congress, along with the CG-CCRI [Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee—General Command] of the EZLN began the work of organizing an internal consultation to determine the opinion and decision of the Zapatista bases of support with regard to the principal proposal.

We carried out the internal consultation in each and every Zapatista community, collective, region, and zone. We also consulted the *compañeras*, *compañeros*, brothers, and sisters from the city who participate in the various support teams for the EZLN's Sixth Commission. We did not include the Zapatista insurgent troops in the consultation because it is not our job to make those kinds of decisions.

We carried out the consultation according to our ways of doing things and following a guide that Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés developed the morning of October 14, 2016, before the text "Let the Earth Tremble at its Core" was made public.

1. Information: In each community, collective, region and zone, the first thing we did was provide information on what was said during those days of October, 2016. That information included the suffering of our brother and sister communities of the National Indigenous Congress, and all of the terrible things the capitalists do to ordinary peoples—exploitation, repression, disrespect, theft, and the killing off of entire peoples. But that wasn't all; this information also included how those peoples organize and resist that politics of death and destruction. For that task we used the information provided by the provisional commission of the CNI in the text entitled "Let the Earth Tremble at its Core," as well as the summaries made and notes taken by the Zapatista delegation during this first phase of the CNI's National Indigenous Congress.

This point is very important because it is with this information that we converted our sisters and brothers, *compañeros* and *compañeras*, into an ear and a heart for the suffering and resistance of others like us in other places. This point is very important and urgent because who will listen to us if we don't listen to each other.

2. The proposal: We stated and explained the proposal: that the National Indigenous Congress name an Indigenous Governing Council (which is like a Good Government Council, but at a national level, that is, in all of Mexico), made up of men and women who are representatives of each of the collectives, organizations, *barrios*, tribes, nations, and peoples who are organized in the National Indigenous Congress. That is, this Council would be made up of indigenous peoples who would govern the country.

This Indigenous Governing Council would be collective, that is, not with one person ruling, but rather together making agreements in order to govern. This Indigenous Governing Council wouldn't just do whatever it wanted, but rather would listen to the peoples throughout Mexico, indigenous and non-indigenous.

In other words, this Council would function on the seven principles of Rule by Obeying: to serve others, not serve oneself; to represent, not supplant; to construct, not destroy; to obey, not command; to propose, not impose; to convince, not defeat; to work from below, not seek to rise.

This Indigenous Governing Council would have as its spokesperson an indigenous woman from the CNI (not the EZLN), that is, a woman of indigenous blood, who speaks her ordinary language and knows her culture. So the spokesperson would be an indigenous woman from the CNI.

This indigenous woman from the CNI is the person who would be the candidate to the Mexican presidency in 2018. This is because it is not possible to list all of the names that compose the

Indigenous Governing Council because of the confusion that would create, so the name listed would be that of the Council spokesperson. This indigenous woman would not be part of a political party, but rather an independent candidate. That's what you call someone who is in an election but does not belong to a political party.

So this Indigenous Governing Council, alongside the Indigenous woman from the CNI, would travel through as much of Mexico and the world as possible in order to explain the situation that we are living because of the capitalist system which exploits, represses, steals, and disrespects the people from below, the poor of the countryside and the city, and that in addition is destroying nature and killing off the world in which we live.

This Indigenous Governing Council would try to speak and listen to all of the Indigenous people of Mexico in their own communities, regions, zones, and states in order to convince them to organize, not to give in, to resist and to govern themselves as we Zapatistas do, and to not let anyone tell us what we have to do or how to do it but that it be the people themselves who decide and rule.

This Indigenous Governing Council would also try to speak and listen to those who are not indigenous but who are also exploited, repressed, robbed, and disrespected in Mexico and the world. It would take them a message of organization and struggle, resistance and rebellion, to be carried out according to their own ways, calendars, and geographies.

For this indigenous woman, CNI delegate, to be recognized as a candidate by Mexican law, they would have to get almost a million signatures of people who are registered to vote. If they managed to reach that many signatures, then she would be recognized as independent candidate for the Mexican presidency and her name would appear on the ballot in 2018 when people decide if they will vote or not and for whom. So the proposal is that the Indigenous Governing Council and the indigenous spokesperson travel throughout Mexico and wherever there are Mexican people in order to acquire the necessary signatures to be able to register a candidate. Later they would again travel around to generate support and get people to vote for the CNI indigenous candidate.

As Zapatistas we think that when the Indigenous Governing Council and their spokeswoman make this journey, they will see much of the pain and rage that exist in Mexico and the world. This is the pain and rage of indigenous people but also of people who are not indigenous but suffer and resist all the same.

So that's what it's about. The goal isn't that an indigenous woman of the CNI become president, but rather that a message of struggle and organization be taken to the poor of the countryside and the cities of Mexico and the world. It's not that if we get enough signatures or win the election then everything will have turned out well. Rather, things will have gone well if those who nobody speaks to or listens to are actually addressed and heard. That is how we will know if things go well or not—if many people gather their strength and hope in order to organize themselves, resist, and rebel.

How far can this go? As far as the National Indigenous Congress decides.

3. Later we stated and explained the points the proposal has against it. For example:

- they will criticize us saying that as Zapatistas we have said that we don't struggle for Power but now we are trying to get Power.
- they will criticize us saying that we have betrayed our word that we do not want to hold office.

- they will criticize us saying that we speak badly of the political parties and now we're going to do exactly what we have been criticizing.
- they will accuse us of supporting the PRI because we would divide the votes for the left and thus allow the right to win.
- they will criticize us saying that indigenous women aren't educated and don't know how to speak Spanish.
- they will disrespect us saying that we indigenous people don't have the thinking skills to govern.
- they will mock us and speak badly of us as indigenous people.

*(Note to racists and sexists: before you began your attacks, we indigenous Zapatistas already knew what you were going to say. And you think that we are dumb and ignorant and you are intelligent and wise.)*

The *compañeras* and *compañeros* participated in the assemblies, commenting on other things that could be points going against the proposal.

For example, they mentioned security, that the government could launch an attack on the National Indigenous Congress and the candidate so that they wouldn't win; that the bad governments could attack the Zapatista communities so that we wouldn't support the CNI; that the government might try to pull some dirty tricks so that the struggle of the CNI couldn't move forward, because the bad governments are indeed tricksters and traitors; that the political vultures might come around to see what kind of individual profit they could make off the struggle of the indigenous peoples; that there would be people who want to detour the struggle of the indigenous peoples to another path, and so on.

4. Then they provided the points in favor of the proposal. For example:

- it could serve to let Mexican society once again see and hear the Indian peoples of Mexico, which now they don't even mention.
- it could serve to help hear and speak to indigenous peoples throughout Mexico who are not organized and are being destroyed by the damned capitalists.
- it could serve to help the indigenous recreate a sense of pride and honor in being indigenous, in their color, their language, their culture, their art, their history.
- it could serve to help indigenous women lift their voices and organize, just as the Zapatista women have risen up and organized.
- it could serve to explain to people below the magnitude of the destruction and evil that the damned capitalists are carrying out.
- it could help others learn about the National Indigenous Congress and their ways of organizing and urge other indigenous peoples, nations, tribes, and *barrios* to join the CNI and get to know each other as indigenous people and see each other's pains and strengths.



- it could help us Zapatistas find a way to support our indigenous brothers and sisters in other places so that they can continue their struggle and live with freedom and dignity.
- it could help us as Zapatista peoples by letting more people come to know our history of struggle and how we have organized, and thus be encouraged to do so, too.
- it could serve the Zapatista peoples in helping us learn to organize not only to help each other internally, but to be organized to support others who struggle, like we did for the democratic teachers' organizations.

5. Then we went on to think about whether the proposal would serve the purposes of the National Indigenous Congress or not.

6. Then we went on to think about whether this idea would serve the Zapatistas or not.

7. Then we went on to discuss whether or not we support this proposal, and if so, how we as Zapatistas would not be able to offer support, and then how we as Zapatistas could offer support.

For example, we couldn't offer support in the form of signatures because we Zapatistas aren't registered to vote. We also couldn't be candidates because as Zapatistas we do not fight for Power. We could not vote because we don't vote by putting a piece of paper in a box, but rather by making agreements in our assemblies where everyone participates and offers their word.

But we could support in other ways, for example: we could help explain this good idea and convince those who do register to vote to use their registration to support the indigenous woman from the CNI. We could speak with people from the city who support us as Zapatistas to support the Indigenous Governing Council also. We could organize ourselves as collectives and autonomous governments to raise money to support the CNI's travels wherever they need to go. We could speak and convince people in the cities to also organize themselves to raise money for the CNI. We could explain in Mexico and the world how we govern ourselves so that people of good thinking can see that we as indigenous do know how to govern.

We also informed all of the communities about another agreement made at the Fifth Congress: that if in the Zapatista internal consultation (or that of any of the originary peoples, collectives, organizations, *barrios*, tribes, and nations) the decision is not to support the proposal, that it is a bad idea and they are not in agreement, then the National Indigenous Congress will respect that decision, even if the majority has said that they do support it. That is, that group will continue to be part of the CNI; it isn't the case that if a group disagrees then they are obligated to do what the majority decides. The autonomy and ways of each group will be respected.

We do the same thing in the Zapatista indigenous communities. We don't look badly upon or expel from being Zapatista those who think differently; rather we respect them and take them into account. That is how it is in our assemblies—just because someone's thinking goes against what the majority says doesn't mean we kick them out, they continue on as one of us.

As you can see, the internal consultation was focused on whether we would support or not the result of the CNI consultation. These are the results:

Tens of thousands of Zapatista men and women were consulted. They immense majority advocated for supporting the decision made by the CNI to the extent of our abilities. Those against supporting the decision numbered 52 *compas* (26 *compañeras* and 26 *compañeros*). Those who

said “I don’t know” or “undecided” numbered 65 *compas* (36 *compañeras* and 29 *compañeros*). The reasons given by those who were against were varied: from one *compa* who said “I’m going to vote against to see if it’s true that they’re going to respect my opinion and not expel me from being Zapatista,” to those who argued that they weren’t going to be in their community and didn’t want to make a commitment they couldn’t keep with regard to the work implied. Those who said they were undecided said, among other things, that if we didn’t even know what the CNI was going to say yet, then what if we supported the proposal and they decided not to do it.

## What Should You Expect?

*Compas:*

This is the last part. Thank you to those who got this far...wha?...yes of course, stay tuned... yes... doubts, of course...questions, of course...what? What will be the result of the CNI consultation? You want a spoiler?...okay, okay, okay, let me ask...okay...I am told to tell you the truth, so here goes:

To be sincere, we don’t have the slightest idea.

In all seriousness.

We have seen before how a proposal gets shaped by the work of the word, according to the ways of the ordinary peoples. It is as if an idea was just a shapeless lump of clay and it is collective hands that go about giving it shape, size, color, destiny.

So, just like you, we’re waiting.

Although, it’s true, we Zapatistas aren’t waiting for the same thing that you all are.

You all, we think, are waiting to see what the result of the consultation is and everything that will derive from that.

We Zapatistas are waiting for what will happen later, the day after. And we are already preparing ourselves for that calendar.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés

Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano

Mexico

November 2016

## From the Notebook of the Cat-Dog

Don’t think I haven’t prepared myself for the possibility that the result of the CNI consultation is to reject the proposal. And no, I’m not worried. I have taken the appropriate measures. For example: I have a medical certificate that says I am on the waiting list for a sex change operation, and I have an application in process for my adoption into a Zapatista indigenous family. So you can say it was all a trick so that I would be the *candidato*...okay, okay, okay, the *candidata* for the presidency of the Republic.

Oh, my perversity is sublime, is it not?

Of course, that path would wreck my correspondence with the females. Oh wait, there isn’t any correspondence anymore, not female nor otherwise. Ah, if I was on the social networks I’d create a few alternate accounts (oh please, you know you do that) and I’d give myself *likes*, *follows* and

*retweets*; I'd even troll myself to make it clear that everything was t-o-t-a-l-l-y-l-e-g-i-t. Is there a limit to how many alternative accounts one can create? Oh please, you know you've already looked this up.

Anyway, something will come to me.

Now then, if the proposal is approved, well I'll have to get to work to raise money. So I'm going to get in contact with *loas compañeros* from *Brigada Callejera* so that they hold a corner for me in La Meche. After all, the street belongs to those who work it. I'm sure my little belly will be all the rage... wha?...okay, okay, okay, my belly...huh? Oh fine, my big belly... didn't I tell you? You guys are so mean.

SupGaleano, busting out of various girdles (*fajas*).

(no, thank you, no for real, I don't need anyone to come stuff me into a girdle (*fajar*)<sup>9</sup> ...ooooooh listen to that, now we're showing our true colors, that was a total 60-something pun...ooh but hey listen, that's why the well behaved goody two-shoes don't like you, eh...huh? A reality show to raise some cash? With Trump, Macri, Temer, Putin, and Rajoy exchanging nude photos? Sonofa...you shouldn't watch TV anymore... better to watch TV series acquired through alternative production...yes, the vendors on Eje Central [avenue in Mexico City] already have the new season of Game of Thrones...yup, turns out that Tyrion and Snow are relatives of Daenerys...however you say it... yes, a dragon for everybody, a message of equity...yes, united on the new shield are the lion, the wolf, and the dragon ...well yes, some version of the Hydra... yes, as if you united big financial capital with industrial and commercial capital...yes, the system recomposes itself and everybody above is happy and everybody below is fucked...yes, but you are watching an alternative ending... yes, while everybody is grabbing their glass to celebrate who knows what, an indigenous woman shows up, shits on the iron throne and melts it with a blowtorch ... well okay, they're considering taking out the blowtorch out and giving her a box of matches, so it takes a little longer, for suspense you know... yup, maybe even another season, depends on how many matches she's got...yup, that's where it ends... well because of the Brexit thing, costs were going through the roof. And now with Trump, well, even worse...What? I should quit with the spoilers? Well jeez, why do you invite me then, you know how I am).

I testify.

Meow-woof

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<sup>9</sup> Technically *fajar* means swaddle or wrap up, but as slang means to grope or feel up.

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