

In recent years, many of us have learned all about the EZLN's initial uprising on January 1st, 1994 when 3,000 indigenous *campesinos* (farmer and rural peoples) rose up in arms to decry “*Ya Basta!*” – enough! exploitation and inaction. We’ve all learned that they had been gathering their forces for ten years before their first public *levantamiento* (uprising) – where an army of those *desde abajo* (from below), the people of Chiapas, decided to fight for their right to live with dignity. That day, their forces liberated cities, town centers, and about 500 ranches. That same New Year’s Day, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. The agreement lifted internal protective tariffs and sanctions. This devastated Mexican *campesinos* who could not compete against the heavily subsidized corn and beans which flooded the country upon the agreement’s enactment. Two years earlier, in 1992, then president Salinas

de Gortari had ‘reformed’ Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, allowing for the privatization of *ejidos* (collective communal lands). After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Constitution was amended to ensure that all *ejidos* were protected from private purchase so that the lands could not be accumulated by wealthy land-owners. That was a major victory of the *campesino* revolutionaries against the *hacendados* (landlords), who had inherited their wealth and their *campesino* workforces from a legacy of colonial domination and ethnocide. The mutilation of Article 27 by Salinas resulted in large-scale theft of previously collectively-held lands by rich ranchers, disposing massive numbers of *campesinos* of their land base. The people of Chiapas and Mexico were devastated, and faced all-time high poverty. However, many of us have known that these changes were the most recent form of centuries of **colonial domination**:

“But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.” – *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*

After their armed uprising, the Zapatistas catalyzed a global wave of **solidarity** that awakened a new generation of activists to organize for justice. Their actions have inspired all faces of the Earth: from demonstrations against global capitalism – such as the anarchist black bloc protests in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization – to the Occupy Wall Street and “We Are the 99%” movements after 2008, to the Purepecha municipality of Cherán in the Mexican state of Michoacán which rose up and proclaimed autonomy in 2011, to present-day Latino/Chicano anarchist and autonomous collectives. Perhaps most importantly, the EZLN offers one answer to the question of what a better kind of society might look like after the end of the Cold War. The EZLN movement is an impressive, living

example of the possibilities we can reach by refusing to engage with government. Zapatista communities adopted the strategy of building ***autonomy*** (independence and self-sufficiency), not of taking over authority or institutions. They organize themselves without the Mexican (narco) government. They have their own systems of justice, health, education, and production. Independent studies of the quality of life for people in Zapatista territory have shown the following: people opt for local justice systems, higher levels of primary education completion and literacy, increased positive health outcomes, and near elimination of maternal mortality rates and of hunger (Alvaro Reyes & Mara Kaufman, 2015). As the Zapatistas would say: “there is a time to ask power to change, a time to demand change from power, and a time to ***exercise power***.” The EZLN’s autonomy stems from their successful strategy of actively taking

territory back from government and landlord control, directly acquiring resources into the hands of indigenous peoples in Chiapas, and **self-management** of their communities. The EZLN prove that it is possible to create a new world: ***a world in which many worlds may fit***. Subcomandante Marcos put it simply:

“We Zapatistas say: ‘I am as I am and you are as you are. Let’s build a world where I can be, and not have to cease being me, where you can be, and not have to cease being you, and where neither I nor you will force another to be like either me or you.’ So when we Zapatistas say, ‘A world where many worlds fit,’ they are saying, more or less, ‘Everyone do your own thing.’”

The EZLN’s project of indigenous autonomy is a product of the Zapatistas’ high level of intentional organization. They envisioned a world of **justice and dignity**, and then set out to transform their dreams into reality.

They built it all from scratch, and were not held back by the unlikelihood of success.

At the same time, the EZLN have demonstrated humility in knowing that they do not have all the answers – rather, they pose the question of “*how do we live our lives*” to all the peoples of the Earth, for them to begin to answer this for themselves. As the EZLN would say, the journey of a million miles begins with one step, ***preguntando-caminando*** (walking we ask and learn). They invite you to honor and walk your sacred path. May our commitment to dignity end the siege of colonization on our lives. ***Surrender does not exist in the language of truth:***

“In the committee, we debated all afternoon. We searched for the word in the tongue to say SURRENDER, and we did not find it. It has no translation in Tzotzil and Tzeltal. Nobody remembers that the word exists in Tojolabal or Chol.”

*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos.*

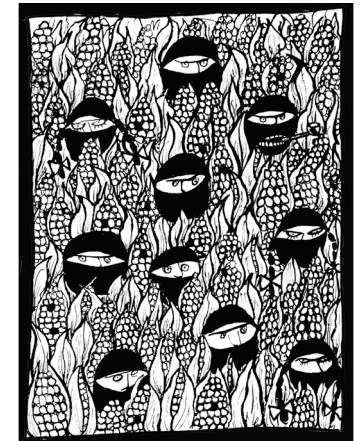


**“We were born of the night. We live in the night. We will die in her. But the light will be tomorrow for others, for those who have been denied the day, for those who are denied life. The light will be for all of them. For everyone, everything. For us, nothing.”**

The EZLN, is without a doubt, the present-day liberators of Mexico. *The Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (Zapatista Army for National Liberation) is named after Emiliano Zapata, a hero of the Mexican Revolution, and has taken up the call of *Tierra y Libertad* (land and freedom). They are fighting for a free world, beyond this world of injustice – a world in which many worlds, including yours, may fit. Their struggle is relevant to all who resist to live.



**HOY DECIMOS  
¡BASTA!**



**THE STORY & LESSONS OF THE EZLN  
ZAPATISTA ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION**



# HOW TO LIVE WITHOUT GOVERNMENT: LESSONS FROM THE EZLN

Self-governance is the idea that the people are capable of organizing their lives outside of a state system. The 7 principles of *mandar obedeciendo* (leading-by-obeying) is a method of autonomy that was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather comes from several centuries of indigenous communal self-organization. This is a set of timeless, ancestral practices that escape the bounds of politics as framed by the institutions and colonialism of government. Simply put, no one from outside comes to govern: the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how. These principles are adaptable to daily life, too:

1. *Mandar obedeciendo*
2. *Representar y no suplantar*
3. *Bajar y no subir*
4. *Servir y no servirse*
5. *Proponer y no imponer*
6. *Construir y no destruir*
7. *Convencer y no vencer*

1. **Obey, don't command**
2. **Represent, don't replace**
3. **Go below, don't go above**
4. **Serve others first, not yourself**
5. **Propose, don't impose**
6. **Build up, not tear down**
7. **Convince, don't conquer**

“Zapatismo is not a new political ideology, or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing, it does not exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side, to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side, to the other. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules, or slogans. There is only a desire – to build a better world, that is, a new world.”

“This system of assemblies and governing councils demonstrates that the only way to avoid the division of society into the oppressive dichotomy of rulers and ruled is to invent structures where all rule; everyone at some point governs, just as everyone after governing, returns to the cornfield or to the kitchen to continue the daily work of the community.”  
– *Beyond Resistance: Everything, An Interview with Subcomandante Marcos* by El Kilombo Intergalatico (2007)

// learn armed self-defense //  
dismantle patriarchy // uproot  
oppressive traditions // resist  
authoritarian doctrines // utilize  
clandestine organization // liberate  
the territory from institutional and  
government control // push away  
sell-outs // organize unity projects  
// build community cooperatives,  
restorative justice systems,  
autonomous education systems, food  
sovereignty, land collectives, self-run  
health systems // create encounters at  
the family, neighborhood, workplace,  
regional and international levels  
// search for new kinds of social  
weapons // resist by any means  
necessary

## ZAPATISMO IN THE U.S.



How can we support the vision and struggle of the Zapatistas from the U.S.? Organize in your territory! The downfall of American imperialism can help to liberate Mexico and the rest of the world from the hold of capitalist colonialism, by defeating it at the source. On the other hand, we can heed their call to live revolution in our daily life by practicing autonomy in our communities.

Question is, how can we practice something like Zapatista autonomy here in the U.S.? As the EZLN would say, the new world was ushered in when they shouted: “*Ya Basta!* Enough!” We may not have authority or capital, but we have something greater: the power to reject everything that is imposed on us. To defy all norms, roles, and hierarchies. Authority can never be able to deprive us of the possibility of saying “*Ya Basta!*” We must say “Enough!” to our dependence on this Earth-destroying system for survival. Like the Zapatistas, we must make moves to become completely self-sufficient. Direct access to your own means of existence is something no one can take away from you, *and you can stop them if they try.*

*Profound transformations don't start at the top or with epic and monumental events, but through movements, small in their shapes, that seem irrelevant for the politicians and the analysts at the top. Historical transformations don't start in the plazas or with enraged crowds but in the organized conscience of groups and collectives that know each other and are mutually acknowledged, down and to the left, and construct another politics.* — **SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS**

## LEARN MORE:

Zapatista Documentary:  
“A Place Called Chiapas”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBGMkCsHXNc>

“Ashanti Alston on the  
Black Panthers and the  
Zapatistas”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYQ8N6sit2E>



## SUPPORT THE EZLN!

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