THE FIRE & THE WORD
A History of the Zapatista Movement
Gloria Muñoz Ramírez
IN 1983, a small group of Mexicans traveled to the Lacandón Jungle in Mexico’s southern state of Chiapas, with the dream of organizing a national revolution. For the next ten years they lived with the indigenous Mayan communities there, listening, learning and blending with them. This was the beginning of the Zapatista movement, which made its dramatic public debut on January 1, 1994, when thousands of armed indigenous people occupied seven Chiapas towns and declared war on the Mexican government. Their demands—not just for the oppressed and poverty-stricken indigenous communities, but for all Mexicans—were clear: equality, democracy, liberty, justice, independence, employment, land, food, housing, health, education and peace.

The Fire and the Word tells the story of the Zapatista movement, from its clandestine birth in the jungle of Chiapas, to its impact on Mexico and its ongoing influence around the world. Gloria Muñoz lived for years in remote Mayan villages and interviewed some of the group’s original organizers. Their first-person accounts are woven throughout the text, along with reportage and contextual history. The result is a story composed of “the little pieces of mirrors and crystals that make up the various moments” (Subcomandante Marcos) of the Zapatistas’ years of open struggle, the reflections of a history that is still being made, one which continues to inform and inspire activists and intellectuals around the globe.

Beautifully illustrated with a collection of the most emblematic photographs from Zapatista history, The Fire and the Word is an inspiring testimony of resistance and hope.

GLORIA MUÑOZ RAMÍREZ was born in Mexico City. From 1994 to 1996, she worked for the Mexican newspaper Punto, for the German news agency DPA, for the U.S. newspaper La Opinión, and for the Mexican daily La Jornada. In 1997, she left her work, her family, and her friends to live in the Zapatista communities, where she remained for seven years. Today, she writes for La Jornada and is a member of the editorial board of its supplement on indigenous issues, Ojarasca. She is also a member of the editorial board of the magazine Rebeldía.
On November 17, 1983, a small group of indigenous people and mestizos set up camp in the Lacandón Jungle. Under cover of a black flag with a five-pointed red star, they formally founded the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. And they began an unlikely adventure.

Ten years later, on January 1, 1994, thousands of armed indigenous people took over seven municipal seats and declared war on the Mexican government. Their demands: employment, food, housing, health, education, independence, justice, liberty, democracy, peace, culture and the right to information.

What happened in Southeast Mexico between November 17, 1983, and January 1, 1994? It is still not possible to fully gauge the history. Not because it’s clandestine, not because these people are ashamed of it, but because, as they put it, “it was a really big thing we did.”

Twenty years after its founding, three indigenous members of the original villages that made up the Zapatista Army of National Liberation speak
out. Representing the thousands of indigenous people who made the dream possible, they talk about how they met the first guerrilla fighters, how they organized in the villages, how they prepared for war and how the organization spread. These testimonies help to imagine those first ten years—how the organizing capacity developed, and the determination and courage that made the 1994 armed uprising and moved the entire world.

**COMPANERO RAÚL**

**Regional representative of the Zapatista villages**

The time to tell about our clandestine history has come. I am from a village called Chico and my name is Raúl. I was recruited by my brother. He said, “Do you want to go somewhere to listen to what they have to tell you,” and I went to that place and they asked me if I had decided to listen to the politics of the organization. They just said this, and I said yes.

At that time, the only security we had was the night. We went to the meetings at ten and returned at midnight or one in the morning, so that no one would hear us getting home. Later they invited me to another place they knew of, where we met with the insurgents, and there I met a captain and a lieutenant. They were wearing Pemex uniforms, like oil said they were teachers, so no one figured they were doing political work for the organization.

Well, later they told me to go to the camp called “Fogón.” I got there and there were only seven insurgent compañeros, among them Moisés. We stayed in the camp for seven days and they taught us what to do in the villages. When we were leaving the camp, they gave us instructions to understand the exploitation by the government. Later, when we understood what it was all about, we began recruiting in our villages, little by little, until the whole town was recruited and the work got much easier.

When we went to leave supplies at the camps, we had to leave at three in the morning so that by dawn we'd already be way up in the mountains. That's the way we did it. The most important thing was security. What you knew, you held in your heart. No one else knew. Just other compañeros, and anyone who wasn't, no.

When the whole village was already recruited and there were lots of villages like that, then some people decided to be recruits for insurgents. Many left, and so the guerrilla forces began to grow. While some went to the mountains, in the villages we were preparing the militia, first in squads, then platoons. Then the time came when we had five or six militia platoons in each village that received training and everything. That's how the organization developed.

When the insurgents arrived in a village, it was because the whole village had already been recruited, the whole village was compa. Then we had to look for a local supervisor and then a regional supervisor, because there were already a lot of villages.

When we took supplies to the camp, we'd take tortillas, pinole, or if we had a little money we'd take cigarettes for the compas. When we arrived they were happy to see us and we'd have a little party there. If there was a guitar, well, we'd dance, since there were little party there. So they began to trust us compañeras there we could dance with them. And we them. We would stay ten or fifteen days in the camp.

At the very first, the war name of my village was “Fright,” because when we didn’t know anything about the organization, an insurgent compañero passed through and went into a field and we thought it was weird compañero passed through and went into a field and we thought it was weird that he went into the field. We went to look for him but we never found that he went into the field.

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1. *Compa* short for *companion* or comrade, in this case member of the organization.
2. Pinole is a typical drink prepared with a cornmeal base.
him. Then when we knew about the organization we remembered that and named the village "Fright."

In the camp called "Maleficio" in 1985, I met compañero Subcomandante Marcos. He was very young and very thin, I guess from really high and he would climb them. There we met him and also Subcomandante Pedro, who also arrived.

When the town is all compa then the insurgents visit the village. All and a dance. The village gives food, coffee, and we organize a party. There is a lot of political talk that orients us about the situation. They tell us how to organize and how to prepare for the struggle.

That's what times were like when we began...
When we had recruited a good group of compañeros in the village, we saw the need to go on to the next village. We went to Sinai and later we organized the entire region. I was 18 years old.

The compañeros were working to make the tostadas that we'd take to the mountains and the men also helped. We distributed bags to gather pinole to carry it in the night. When we moved around at night we had to invent a story in case we met anybody, because above all we had to be discreet to take the things. When you met somebody on the road you had to tell a story about where you were going. I could say I was visiting my family or something else. Everything was for security, to deliver the supplies. At this time there were still people who didn't know anything.

I saw Subcomandante Marcos and Subcomandante Pedro come through my village. They arrived at the house and then Tomás told us that we had to let these compas go through, guide them. So we went with them. The departure was at midnight. We had to go through the other villages at night and be in the mountains by daylight. When we got to where the camp was, we returned and left those two there.

The first camp I went to was called "Zapata" and then they took us to another camp called "Puma." Soon after we went to other camps with them, we arrived and lived there with the compas and then left to go back to our villages. Captain Marcos—he wasn't yet a Subcomandante—talked to us about how it is in the mountains and how the camps operate. When we visited him he told us where to get drinking water and how security was set up, how to respect others and where to go to the bathroom. All this was organized and Captain Marcos told us that if we wanted to live there, we being there, we had to go out and work in the villages.

As we progressed and began to grow, the forces began to get organized. More insurgents came down to the villages to live with the people and talk to them. We threw parties with them, organized cultural programs and all that. That's how we developed in a year. Between 1985 and 1986 the entire village joined the struggle. We no longer had to keep secrets among us, just from those outside that still weren't compas.

When we were new in the organization we searched for ways for the compas to travel safely. They would sometimes say that they were doctors, teachers, oil workers, all these things. When they were carrying cargo they said it was canned goods for the store in wherever.

The compas told us in class that someday we would have to use arms to end the system. We had already tried peaceful ways but nobody paid attention to us. Then we saw that there was no other option but to enter the armed struggle, so we organized to get stronger and stronger. When we went to the camp, when we arrived on a visit, we did exercises and trainings. The compañeros gave us talks on how to use the arms, what each one is called and what power it has. So the work developed and we got bigger and bigger. From one village it went to another, and from a few regions it went to other regions.

When we had formed the regions we started to do work there, for example, a clinic was built, a hospital, called "Posh." There I met a few compañeros, and that's when we realized that the organization was already big, that it had advanced a lot. By this time it was almost 1994 and that's when the villages were asked how they felt, if they felt good enough to screw the government. The people were fed up and said it was time. They began to make decisions and draw up documents, and the villages signed the documents and then we went to war.

**Compañero Gerardo**

Of the first Zapatista villages

My name is Gerardo, from the village of Israel. Some compañeros know me. We'll talk about what we know, about when this all began.
We saw the very beginning of the work of the organization of the Zapatista Army in the villages. In the first place, we learned security measures, because without security you can't do anything. Then with the measures we could advance and that's what we did. As we learned about the struggle and we grew more, we adopted more measures because the work was developing. So we learned to read and write. The camps were. I went to four camps during that time, from 1984. The first camp I went to was called “La Rosita.” The other was “Agua Fria,” the other I can't remember its name... that's what we learned during those years that we worked carrying tostadas, pinole, to the insurgents and helping them. We helped each other because what we didn’t know, they knew. We needed to know things and so we started to do the tasks.

As the work grew, we had to have even more security. Our friend was the night, because only in the night could we walk around. In the day we couldn't, in the day we slept and at nine, ten, eleven at night you go out with your twenty-five kites to walk for three or four days. We left the house at this hour to where the food had to be delivered.

On days when we went to the camps the insurgents helped us with some little chores that we didn't know how to do. We saw how the work gained force.

At first, twenty years ago, a militia member came out of a village, work advanced. If there were five militia members then maybe an insur- place step by step, not fast. Keeping up the struggle, helping the struggle, building up strength, we saw it and that we were a hell of a lot of people, to talk to me. Then we started almost at the same time, like I didn't even give him, after just one or two talks I said yes, I'll join, that if not now, when?

First we listened to the explanations of the struggle. We found out about simple things, because later they'd tell us there's this and that, because the recruiter also had security measures and couldn't say everything at once. Now, when you decide to do the work then you can travel and learn from that, but you have to do your part to begin to learn.

My village was one of the first that helped the organization. It was 1984 when we joined. We weren't everybody in the village at first, but later we organized everybody and we were the first to come to our community and felt protected. That's how we prepared for war...

II
Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro

On February 21, 2000, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos wrote a letter to the recently deceased Mexican writer Fernando Benitez. The letter contained a story “to try to remember today those who aren't with us, but who were before and made possible what we are today.” El Sup referred then to Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro, killed in combat the dawn of January 1, 1994.

In the story that the military chief of the EZLN told, Subcomandante Pedro appeared in the first person, telling his own story from the other side, from the dead:

“I remember that day. The sun wasn't moving straight, but a little sideways. I mean, it did go from here to there, but kind of on its side. It was cold. The wind was strong. I remember what was called but without climbing to that point that I can't remember what it's called but without climbing to that point. That's when the sun reaches the highest point, 'zenith' or something like that, it's when the sun reaches the highest point. But not this day. It just seemed to fall over to the side. We were advancing. But not this day. It just seemed to fall over to the side. We were advancing. ...
something pending and so they can’t be still. That’s where they say I was born. I think it’s called Michoacán, but I can’t remember well. I also don’t remember very well but I think I’m called Pedro or Manuel or I don’t know what. I think it doesn’t matter now what a dead person is called because he’s dead. Maybe when one is alive it’s important what they call you, but dead—who cares?

“Well, the thing is that the people, after running, came up to see what all of us dead people were saying. And then we talked, just like the dead talk, like a little chat, not much noise, like if you were talking to someone who wasn’t dead but alive. No, I don’t remember what words we said. Well, I do remember a little. It had to do with the fact that we were dead and at war.

“At dawn we had taken the city. By noon we were preparing everything for the next one. I was already laid out by noon, that’s why I saw so clearly that the sun wasn’t moving in a straight line and I saw that it was cold. I saw but I didn’t feel, because the dead don’t feel but they do see. I saw that it was cold because the sun was kind of like turned off, very pale, as if it were cold. We all wandered around from one side to the other. Not me, I stayed lying belly up, watching the sun and trying to remember what El Sup said it was called when it’s way up in the sky, when it stops climbing and starts to slide down the other side. Like the sun gets embarrassed and goes and hides behind that hill. When the sun had already gone to hide I didn’t notice. The way I was, I couldn’t turn my head; just look straight up and without turning see a little bit on one side and the other. That’s why I saw that the sun wasn’t moving straight, but that it was other. That’s why I saw that the sun wasn’t moving straight, but that it was or go around scaring people by not talking. I remember that where I was born they said that the dead still walk around because they have
clouds and the sun was kind of pale. That is, it was cold. And then I remembered that day when the dead like us began this war to speak. Yes, to speak. Why else would the dead wage war?

"I was saying that through this slit I could see the sky. Helicopters and airplanes were flying across it. They would come and go, daily, sometimes well into the night. They did not know but I saw them, I saw them and watched them. I also laughed. Yes, because in the end, those airplanes and helicopters come here because they're afraid. Yes, I already know that the dead always cause fear, but these airplanes and helicopters are afraid that we dead are going to walk again. I don't know why they make so much fuss, since they can't do anything about it since we're already dead. They can't kill us. Maybe because they want to find out first and advise their commanders. I don't know. But I do know that fear can be smelled and the smell of fear of the powerful is like a machine, like gasoline and oil and metal and gunpowder and noise and... and... and fear. Yes, if fear smells like fear, then those airplanes and helicopters smell like fear. The air that comes from above smells like fear. Not the air below. The air below smells nice, like things that are changing, like everything is getting better and more beautiful. Like hope, that's what the air below smells like to me. We are from below. Us and many like us. Yes, that's the thing then: on this day the dead smell like hope.

"All this I see through the slit and all this I hear. I think, and my neighbors agree (I know because they told me so) that it's not OK for the sun to move sideways and that it has to straighten up. It can't go on moving sideways like this, all pale and chilly. After all, the sun's job is to give heat, not be cold.

"And if you push me, I'll even be a political analyst. Look, I say that the problem in this country is that it's full of contradictions. There you have it: a cold sun, people who are alive don't do anything as if they were dead, and the criminal is the judge, and the victim is in jail, and the liar is government, and the truth is persecuted like a sickness, and the stu-

dents are locked up, and the thieves are free, and the ignorant give classes, and the wise are ignored, and the lazy are rich, and the workers have nothing, and the least rules and the greatest obeys, and he who has the most gets more, and he who has the least has nothing, and the evil are rewarded, and the good are punished.

"And not only that, but here the dead speak and walk and do weird things, like trying to straighten up a sun that's cold, and—just look at it—moves sideways, without getting up to the point that I can't remember what it's called but El Sup told us once. I think that I'll remember some day." (Letter from Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, February 21, 2000)

In the mountains of Southeast Mexico Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro is not just a legend, he still lives, exists and remains in memory all the time. The insurgents talk about Subcomandante Pedro and get a knot in their throats. "I still can't talk about him, it's really painful," says Major Insurgente Moisés, who took over the command of the zone minutes after the fall of Subcomandante Pedro.

He was a man who liked to walk at night, who smoked Alas, who always demanded his coffee, who danced to El Caballo Blanco, who recited the Tecún Umán, who took care of his troops, who was the consummate military man and very strict in questions of security, who joked around with Subcomandante Marcos and was his second in command. The insurgents who lived with him and saw him fall along with the rest who died in full combat on the first dawn of 1994 still talk with the people of the villages also testify as to how he lived with about him. The people of the villages also testify as to how he lived with about him. The people of the villages also testify as to how he taught them to struggle, how he prepared them for nearly ten years, how he taught them to struggle, how he prepared them for the day when they would rise up in arms in search of a better life.

Today, ten years since his death, it's clear that the path of the EZLN cannot be understood without the history of people like Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro.
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clandestine and no one could know anything about our army. He was also strict in the handling of arms, and in the explorations that had to be done to get to know the terrain. He was always tough about that, and when there was a problem he got even more tough. But it's also true that he was very cheerful, there are lots of stories you can tell about him, anecdotes and that kind of thing. . .

I didn't meet him in the mountains; I met him in the city, in a safe house where I was taken. I'm talking about December of 1983, when they took me to the city. I didn't think they were going to take me to the city; I thought they were taking me to the mountains, because I really liked what I heard on Radio Venceremos, of the Frente Farabundo Martí in El Salvador. But before going to the mountains they took me to the city and there I met Subcomandante Pedro. He had already been in the mountains, with the founders of the EZLN, but he had to come down to the city because he had gotten Leishmaniasis, what we call chicle fly, and was recovering in the city and I got to meet him there.

At the time I couldn't speak Spanish like I can now, back then it was difficult. The indigenous of Chiapas speak Spanish as a second language. Their primary language is one of many Mayan dialects in the region. I didn't want him to come near me, because he talked to me about things I didn't understand. . . One thing that happened to me at this time is I didn't even know how to use the stove or anything, and then Subcomandante Pedro (who didn't have that rank yet) saw me doing the work and asked me "What are you doing?" and I told him "I'm frying chicken." And he said to me, "but you're going to blow up the stove." I asked him why, and he explained that because I had covered it with oil. Then he got mad and went and woke up the person responsible and scolded him for not showing me how to do the work. And then I saw that he was strict, very tough in questions that had to do with teaching. He said that once someone
had been taught how to do it, then you could leave them to do the work, but not before.

In 1985 I went to the mountains and I met him again there, but he was already a sublieutenant. He was a very dedicated member, he didn’t care if he didn’t know the mountains, because no one from the city knows the mountains, just like when a person from the mountains goes to the city and doesn’t know how to get around. But that didn’t matter to him, he always made an effort and he prepared us. We worked a long time in preparation, you can do the calculation, we’re talking about how I met him again in the mountains in 1985 and the training went on until the last days, practically to the morning of 1994.

We can say all the words of the revolutionary, rebel or militant, or whatever, like a lot of people from outside do, but he didn’t just say the words—he did what he said, and took it to the ultimate consequences. When you organize, you orient, you lead, you have to go to carry it out to its consequences, even in a peaceful mobilization. If you say you have to struggle, you have to go through to the end.

And in this case, for us as the EZLN, Subcomandante Pedro showed us that it’s not just saying it, you have to be willing to go where he showed us. I don’t mean to say that peaceful struggles are no good, of course they are, but you have to understand that there too you can fall in many ways, whether they put you in jail, you “disappear,” whether they kill you in torture and no one ever finds out where your body is. In this case, we know where Subcomandante Pedro is, we do know that.

What he showed us, his word, we keep before us every one of us, and every one of us now has the responsibility of showing that we too can carry out our duty like he did.

There will be another time to say more, I have a lot of stories about him. In the last months of 1993 he told me, “If something happens, you take charge, whatever happens, you take charge.” I didn’t believe him, I said, “It’s up to you,” and it turns out that when we were already fighting we lost communication and there was no communication with him. I sent a messenger to headquarters to find out how he was and there was no communication until we had to take the municipal building.

When I received the sign that Subcomandante Pedro had fallen, then I said, “Darn, now it’s what he told me, now!” And at that moment you forget that you too can be attacked. At that moment I didn’t care, I had to go on to the next street and there was Subcomandante Pedro. I talked to him but there was no movement in him. So I ordered him taken to the where the health workers were... and that was something really hard for the compañeros, for some militia and some insurgents that saw him... Some started to say, “How is it possible that a commanding officer goes down, he’s prepared,” and all these things as if it weren’t possible for a commanding officer to be killed. Then I had to assume the responsibility, I had to control this, well, fear, this demoralization. I told them, “Bullets show no respect, it doesn’t matter who it is, but we have to go on.”

I think that if we’re going to be revolutionaries we have to be revolutionary to the last, because if one doesn’t accept the full consequences or abandons the people and all that, it’s no good. We who struggle, the other brothers and sisters of other states, of this same country Mexico and of the world, need to accept this.

One thing that’s interesting is how Subcomandante Pedro and Subcomandante Marcos met. I met both subcomandantes together, when they met. I remember one time, and I think it was the last or one of the they met. I remember one time, and I think it was the last or one of the last times they met, in a community called Zacatal. I was there, we were seated all three of us in a triangle, and I listened to the instructions from Subcomandante Marcos to Subcomandante Pedro: “You have to take care of yourself.” Subcomandante Marcos told him, “We have to take care of ourselves, because you’re the first comandante.” Subcomandante Pedro was saying. And then Subcomandante Marcos said “Yes, but I’m telling
you that as second in command you have to take care of yourself because you're my second and whatever happens to me you're next.” Then Subcomandante Pedro said, “We have to take care of each other, but both of us.” Both understood that both of them had to be careful, but both wanted to go out and fight. They understood each other. Subcomandante Pedro always respected it when they told him things very clearly.

As a relationship of comandante to comandante, I saw that they respected each other and loved each other. Sometimes they were talking and I listened to those serious voices, and a moment later they were joking around, teasing each other. That's the way that one understands, comprehends what needs to be corrected, or what should be learned.

On another occasion we'll talk more about Subcomandante Pedro. Now it's hard to go on because it hurts...

**Insurgent First Infantry Captain FEDERICO**

I met compañero Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro when I first joined the insurgent ranks. From the first I saw his qualities as a combatant. He was a good compañerito in struggle and he was with us until his death.

When his time came I was with him in his unit, as subcomandante he was my commanding officer. He always undertook plans with strong conviction, you could tell, he was very tough in questions of security, we talked about the importance of security and in military questions we learned a lot from him.

He got very close to the people, he lived with them, shared what the people ate, whether it was pozol, beans or bitter coffee, he never put it down. You could tell he was a very committed compañerito in the struggle of the people. Another thing about him is that he always supervised the work he gave us to do. I remember a day I went out with him and he told me: “Prepare yourself for tomorrow because we're going to reconnoiter the peak,” and we walked and I said, “Subcomandante, we already walked a lot and there isn't anything,” and he told me, “We have to go on.” And we walked and walked and kept on walking and I said again, “There isn't anything, we've already walked a lot” and we walked and walked and he told me, “Just a little more, there it is,” and at last we arrived and he said that I was right, because I was just learning how to walk, to endure better physical conditions. And then I realized that he was in top physical condition, that he could walk for miles and endure all kinds of terrain and conditions.

The compañero really appreciated the insurgent compañeritas and also the members of the base communities, the women, children and old people.

To get ready for 1994, he ordered me to advance to the front, and said that I had to take on more security with the tasks. The day we were going out to the place where we would carry out military operations on December 31, 1993, he still checked the vehicles and told me, “Lico, I’m going to try this vehicle because I’m out of practice.” I laughed because I saw that he knew how to drive the vehicle. And we went out, we marched toward the staging grounds for the operation, and the last orders that he gave were that each one of us had to go to the place we were to cover. And for me these were the last instructions that he gave us.

I remember another thing. He really liked to recite poetry, the Tecú Umán, and it made me laugh a lot, and he said, “Why are you laughing?” “It's that it's a little strange.” Then I listened to him and I realized the Tecú Umán was about Jacinto Canek, an indigenous leader.

**Insurgent First Infantry Captain NOE**

Our compañero Subcomandante Pedro... first of all, I have to say, all our respect for him. Although physically he isn't with us anymore as a member of this regiment, we still respect him... for me he isn't dead.
I also lived with him for a long time and I got to know his character and his way of living with us in the mountains. Like the other compañeros said, he was really happy when he was hanging out with the troops, he had a gift of commanding in a way that educates, he was the teacher of everyone, he oriented us about war, and he taught us well how to organize the war against the bad government.

For us he’s like a father, because there are things that we can’t do well and he helps us. He might say to you, “You didn’t do this very well and that’s why I called your attention to it, so you won’t keep doing it badly,” and so he gave us this experience of not making the same mistake that we usually made. This is how it was during the time we were with him.

I remember that he always walked at night, and he tested us to see how well we had learned to walk at night with arms, how well we could walk carefully. He was also strict about security, when there were serious things he told us, he always alerted us, so we would learn.

When we commemorated a fallen compañero or a birthday, I remember that he liked to dance a lot to music called “El Caballo Blanco.” He threw himself on the ground and started to dance. He always liked to dance, and to recite the poetry of Tecún Umán, that’s what he did to make the troops happy.

When we went out in 1994, all the time he told us, “Now’s the time, compañeros, this is the moment, we have to show the bad government that we are going to win the war because it’s pushed us too far.” So he advised us on things about war, how you have to prepare, we didn’t know the exact date but he said “train, prepare, practice” and all that. We never thought that on that First of January he would fall, but we knew that some of us would. It’s still was hard for us to understand, but we don’t have a choice, we have to go on following in his footsteps, like he taught us... That is what I respect about him, because he fulfilled his duty, he loved his people, he loved us as his troops, he taught us, and that’s why we go on learning from him, although he is no longer with us.

**Insurgent First Infantry Captain Lucio**

Well, speaking of Subcomandante Pedro, I met him in 1989. Before, in the other unit where I was, all the compañeros that came back from training with him said he was a cheerful guy, really friendly with the people. For that reason I wanted to meet him. I had met him in the commemorative acts we held, but I didn’t know him personally, and from 1989 I started to get to know him and prepare with him, and that’s when I realized that it’s true, that he was a very good guy, very self-sacrificing, but also very strict. Self-sacrificing because he liked to walk at night, walking in the mountains, in the hills. One suffers in the night, the rain, the dark, the load, the equipment...

In military issues he was strict, because the insurgent has to learn what discipline is, what unity is, the fellowship. He didn’t allow anyone to put himself above anyone else. Thanks to him we can now teach others. In military questions he taught us what we had to learn from him. In politics the same, we learned everything from him, when we went to the villages, we made plans to do the work in the communities. What I teach, he said, is what you should teach too, to others and what other communities should receive. He was also very strict about security, to go into a community first we had to ask what was there, to know what we had to confront.

Subcomandante Pedro’s teachings have served us well up to now.

Finally the moment arrived when we decided to start the war. That day, that afternoon, he asked me, at six or seven in the night, if I was ready, because at that time I carried a weapon called SKS, and he changed it, because at that time I had to have a really good one. I said, “I think I’m ready, that’s what I’m here for.” From then on, as the others explained, we set out and got close to the place where we were to stage the military operation. Missions were distributed.
We got Major Moisés as commanding officer and under his command we covered the place where the police force was and we had to carry out our mission there. Many hours went by. The Major ordered us to see what had happened to the group where Subcomandante Pedro was. I offered to go and see where he was, and unfortunately I found him, but full of bullet wounds, and I didn't check to see if he was alive. I was given another task and so I only said he was wounded. I left him and others stayed with him.

The memory that we have of him is all the teaching he left us and that still serves us.

**Insurgent First Infantry Captain CORNELIO**

I trained in the unit run by Subcomandante Pedro, that's how I know him perfectly, because he was my commanding officer in the Sixth Battalion. In his military character he was very strict about security measures, about handling arms, about all things that were dangerous, but also as a friend that has a lot of patience to teach and correct mistakes.

Always, during all the time that I was with him in the unit, he seemed to me cheerful, happy around us... he shared a lot with us. When things were going well he was content because there are moments when there are problems with the villages, problems of security, and he would just concentrate on solving the problems.

Of course, I always spent more time with him because he named me his bodyguard. When he went to meetings in the villages he took me with him, at times another compañero went, but almost always it was me. He liked to walk at night, sometimes we walked all night, and there was rain, mud, all this suffering, hunger and everything happened to us. When we arrived at a village, he never showed fatigue; he always arrived content, cheerful—and even more so when he knew the people.

Subcomandante Pedro liked coffee and cigarettes, his Alas of course, and when we'd go to a village sometimes they already had his carton of cigarettes and his mug of coffee ready. Then he'd be really content, even more cheerful, the tiredness would drop away...

When the work wasn't going well, he would call our attention to it, correct us, swear at us sometimes. That is, he was strict about that but we analyzed it and saw that he was right, because we weren't doing the work well. And the good thing is that he would analyze it too and see that he overreacted, and then he'd come and apologize to us and say that swearing at us wasn't fair. That's how he recognized that fault.

Before the war had been set, he wanted and we wanted to kick some ass... He asked us what we wanted and we told him that we wanted it to start already. When he knew that the war was going to start, he was even more content, happier...
When the moment of the war arrived, we came out of the mountains, talking as always... we were the last ones to come down from the mountains, he and I, talking about combat, that the day had come, that the time had come that we were going to kick some ass. He gave me some things to hold and to this date I have a souvenir of him, a pen I have of his...

When we got to the point that we had to attack the enemy, he showed us his bravery, he showed that being a vanguard is to go and attack the enemy. So that's what I remember, the courage of a really committed person. That's how we went into attack, and because attacks are always done with plans, he was assigned to be in a different place. Later we found out that he was dead.

We got there. I arrived personally to where Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro was, I lifted him and carried him to a place where other compañeros were. That's how he died in battle, but for us he isn't dead. He's still alive, for my part, he'll always be with me—that's what I can say about our compañero Subcomandante Pedro.

**Insurgent Lieutenant of Public Health Gabriela**

I met Subcomandante Pedro when I joined the ranks of the Zapatista Army. The compañero was very strict in his orders, in discipline, in fellowship, and any error that we made as troops he corrected us in a good way.

Subcomandante Pedro really loved the compañeros, compañeras, children and old people, everyone, in the base communities. He explained to them what the situation was, why we were struggling. He liked to walk at night, he didn't care if it was raining, and he took us with him, that's the way he taught us to walk at night, without light, he never used a flashlight.

I remember one day we had to go out, we went to a camp called “Tortuga” and the compañero Subcomandante Pedro dressed like a doctor, as a security measure in those days. And he told us that we had to wear civilian clothes. When we were walking we saw some animals and he

began to shoot and he told us that we had to hunt animals, because there were other compañeros who didn’t have any food and he was worried about how to feed the troops.

Afterward, he told the medical troops that we had to prepare more, prepare the first aid kits for the war. I remember that in the last moments he spoke to us and asked us if we were ready. I answered yes. When we were already in the operations terrain he told me that if there were wounded I had to tell him, but afterward I didn’t know what happened. When I began to look for him to tell him that there were wounded, they told me he wasn’t there... Major Moisés arrived to tell me that Subcomandante Pedro had fallen... I checked him, he had several wounds, I gave him a shot of adrenaline but we couldn’t do anything for him. That’s how it was, but the important thing is that he fulfilled his duty, he died in front of his troops because he was a commanding officer that did not hang behind, and he taught us many things... That’s why we remember him to today.

**Comandante Abraham**

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee

That was the life of Subcomandante Pedro. I met him many times, but I didn't live with him much. I met him in 1985 in the insurgent camps, and also in the villages. When I first met him he didn’t have a rank, later he earned a rank in the guerrilla. The memory that I learned that he had earned a rank in the guerrilla, that he clapped his hands, when we made the decision to go to war, was that he clapped his hands and danced because a majority voted to go to war. He knew that there was no other choice and he was glad that the decision of the villages was respected. That’s the memory I have of him, it almost seems like I can see him now...
And also when he spoke, when he explained something, when he told you how to solve problems, how to do a task, he spoke to you with fondness, he explained to you well. On several occasions I talked with him, he joked around, it's funny how we'd joke around. On the day of the battle I didn't go out with him because he went out with other compañeros, and we were in a different place. We have him present in our minds, we follow his example, his struggle of the compañero who died with us.

COMPAÑERO GERALDO
Of the first Zapatista villages

In the case of Subcomandante Pedro, I surely knew him and worked with him and he helped with many things, he oriented us. He was a good person, I knew him as a good person.

Compañero Subcomandante Pedro was a conscientious person. Whenever we went to meetings he was the one who gave us talks in the regions because at that time there weren't townships like today. We worked together for a long time.

Then one day it came time for the war of 1994. Up to then he still gave us talks, he instructed us on some things, he told us how to run our villages as the ones responsible, that we always had to be conscious at all times when the village people needed us. I couldn't move up in rank because I wasn't much of a reader, but he still listened to what we said. He always guided us, he told us that we had to make an effort, be patient, that that way we could achieve something.

Changes came about that we see now. And he guided us, he told us the things we had to do. When the war started, we didn't talk to him again, but we still remember what he told us.

It's as if he was still alive, it's a little painful, but we remember him and we respect him.

I met Subcomandante Pedro. He was very cheerful. I saw him in a village called Zulma. There all the insurgents were gathered, he felt right at home there, he made faces, really happy.

Subcomandante Pedro really helped in the war. When we held the meeting to decide whether to go to war, I could see that he was very happy, because the villages had made up their minds.

That's how I remember him, happy...

III
1983–2003

From the initial clandestine stage to the Good Government Boards

"T"wenty years is very little—there's more to come," say the insurgents of the EZLN, the same ones who day after day stand guard in the mountains, who keep vigil, who marched out that first dawn of 1994 willing to die without imagining the road before them.

In this part of the testimonies, the insurgents and the representatives of the villages agree that after the First of January everything took them by surprise. "We didn't even know if we were going to survive," they say, and their words make more sense after hearing them talk about Subcomandante Pedro.

Everyone agrees that they are proud of belonging to a struggle "where they don't tell us what we've gained—we see it, we live it, we make it." They never imagined the encounter with civil society, and it. They never imagined the encounter with civil society, and it. They never imagined the encounter with civil society, and it.

"Our way—they say—is that first we build the practice and then..."
the theory,” and that explains the organization of autonomy, the current phase of the struggle.

Regarding the government? “You can’t expect anything, we know that,” they all agree separately. What follows, they claim, is to resist, organize and keep on being rebels. “We’ll always be that...”

**Major Infantry Insurgent Moisés**

An evaluation of these twenty and ten years? First I’m going to talk about the first ten years when we organized the villages and formed the insurgents and militias, from 1983 to 1993. The organization found the way of getting to know the people in those years. Our EZLN learned how to adapt itself to our indigenous peoples, that is, that the organization knew how to make the changes necessary to be able to grow. We recruited by becoming political commissaries... The compañeros had a way of life, and by understanding that, we could go much further in the work of organizing the villages.

When we began there were problems of land, for example, in the Lacandón area in Montes Azules, in the prices of the products, in marketing, and all these problems led the compañeros to understand a movement like the Zapatista Army. We talked to them about the struggles of Lucio Cabañas, of Zapata, of Genaro Vázquez.

Our organization began to organize itself better. When we explained why we were fighting back we began to make it more clear what we want in this struggle, and why. I always did the work of political commissary, that is, I was the one who had to explain our struggle to groups of families in each village. I explained why we struggled in the EZLN, I invited them to participate in the struggle and they were told how to be careful because everything was underground. They were told that we were against the government, that we struggled against the system that was screwing us. We explained each point of why we were fighting back. When we described our struggle the problem was that, for example, when we told them about health, and they thought that right away there would be good health and good education. Then comes the explanation that the struggle is long, that one day there will have to be a war to bring about these ends, that the government doesn’t understand any other way because the government isn’t interested or concerned about indigenous peoples. We explained to them what they experience on a daily basis and they understand what their own situation is, and they ask us what they have to do. And we explain the struggles of Villa, of Zapata, of Hidalgo, and how things have been won; we explain to them that thanks to these movements we won some things but that it’s not enough.

Then we explain our dream. And we tell them that we struggle for good education, good health, good housing and all the other things. With time, the organization began to show itself and grow. Battalions of insurgents and militias came first. Clinics were built in each region, these clinics were organized by insurgents and that’s how the EZLN began to provide services to the people and to organize with them. All this was a big sacrifice, but in this way the villages began to participate more and they themselves helped to build their clinics.

As insurgents it was a big step forward when we got the support of the villages. The result of the political work was that the villages were now maintaining their army. Before it wasn’t like that. Food for the insurgents in the mountains was brought from the city. As the political work advanced, the sustenance of the troops became the job of the communities. When they begin to form structures like an organization, the two ties. When they begin to form structures like an organization, the two ties. When they begin to form structures like an organization, the two ties. When they begin to form structures like an organization, the two ties. When they begin to form structures like an organization, the two ties.
The organization grew so much that we had to create new mechanisms for communication. Earlier, it took several days to contact us because messages were carried on foot, but later the organization was so big that we began to use radios so there was communication between us and those in the mountains.

In the regional meetings the compañeros began to feel the strength of the organization, because each representative knew how many insurgents and how many militia there were, and there were a fucking lot of us. In addition to seeing the strength, they saw that the situation was more and more difficult, that we were getting more and more screwed over, and they started wanting to break out. They already knew that they could organize, they knew how many insurgents and militias there were, how many villages we controlled, and from there the idea was born that the people need autonomy.

The villages realized that the projects the government were giving the communities were never decided on by the people the government never asked the people what they wanted. The government doesn’t want to address the needs of the villages; it only wants to maintain itself. And from there the idea was born that we have to be autonomous, that we have to impose our will, that we should be respected, and that we have to do something so that what the people want will be taken into account.

The government treats us like we can’t think.

Then, little by little, the decision took form that it was almost time to rise up in arms. That decision was reached in 1992.

There were already so many thousands of us that it was getting hard to control security. Can you imagine trying to keep everything underground with so many thousands of compañeros?

How were we going to get good health, good education, good housing for all of Mexico? It was too great a commitment. And that’s how we saw it. In those first ten years we acquired many skills, experiences, ideas and ways of organizing. And we wondered how the Mexican people were going to receive us (we didn’t call it civil society at that time). And we thought they were going to receive us with joy because we would be fighting and dying for them, because we want freedom, democracy and justice for all. But at the same time, we thought, what will it be like? Will they really accept us?

During the last ten years—from the last hours of 1993 and the first minutes of 1994 to now—we have seen that the people have already known who we are, what we seek and for whom. After the first days of January 1994 what we saw was huge demonstrations of the Mexican people. They, the people, came out to defend us, they hit the streets to demand that the war end... I still ask myself how it was possible that thousands and thousands of people, without yet knowing who we were, came out to the streets to support us. I think that they saw that we were willing to die for what we seek, and that there was no other option.
After that the Mexican people obliged us to seek ways other than arms. After ten years of public struggle we realize that we were in another stage. We didn’t know the people and the people didn’t know us and then we got to recognize each other. It was a stage in which we needed to get to know each other.

As the Zapatista Army we accepted dialogue because that is what the people asked us. But now that’s history, now the Mexican people, indigenous or non-indigenous, realize that you just can’t do anything with the government. The government and the rich are not going to just stop exploiting us; they are going to defend their interests. They will put us in jail, kill us, torture us, disappear us—that’s their way. They even try it with us, and we’re an army.

The government and the parties have gone back to disdaining indigenous peoples. Supposedly dialogue is to resolve problems, and it didn’t work at all with them, but it did work to get to know the people.

The question that arises then, when it becomes obvious that the government is no good, is what are we going to do if the government doesn’t resolve anything and you can’t do anything with them?

But dialogue did work with the people. We met the exploited, the poor, from all over. We began to learn from them, from their struggles, and we also explained to them how we were struggling.

We felt that with the Mexican people, both sides were reaching out, a hand. The Mexican people take risks coming to meet us here and we are also taking risks going to their places, all to get to know each other and listen to each other. That helped a lot to explain to our villages and peoples the support of other people through struggle. The people confirmed directly that they are with us, although they aren’t willing to take up arms.

We already had territory under our control, and we created the autonomous townships in order to organize there.

The EZLN had lots of ideas of how a free and organized people should be. The problem is that there aren’t any governments that obey, only ones that give orders and that don’t listen and don’t respect you, that believe that indigenous peoples don’t know how to think. They want to treat us like broken Indians, but it all turned back on them and we showed them that we do know how to think, and we do know how to organize ourselves. Injustice and poverty make you think, they make you produce ideas, they make you think how to do things better even if the government doesn’t listen.

The dialogue with the government didn’t work but it enriched us, because we met more people and it gave us more ideas. After the “Color of the Earth March” we said that with or without a law we were going to build our government the way we wanted.

We already have a way of doing practice first and then developing the theory. And that’s how it was, after the betrayal, when the political parties and the government refused to recognize Indian peoples; we began to see how we would do things ourselves.

In practice we formed the autonomous townships and afterward we started thinking about an association of Autonomous Townships that would be the forerunner to the Good Government Boards. That association was a practice, a rehearsal of how we have to go about organizing ourselves. From there the idea was born to improve it and the idea of the Good Government Boards came up.

We had the idea and we were carrying out the practice. We thought that theory can have good ideas but in practice we can see if there are problems, or how to go about solving the problems.

Each municipality has different problems to confront. There are some that progress more and others less, but when they got together and began to talk about how to solve each one of the problems, that led to forming a new structure—the Good Government Boards.

Now we’re having meetings among the different Good Government Boards because we see that’s the best way to solve the problems. They get together when they have problems with one Board or another, but also to
help each other in their jobs and to advance in everything that each boy has to deal with.

We are showing the country and the world that to be able to develop a better life, you can do it without the participation of the bad government. The progress in health, education, trade, these are projects that we are carrying out with national and international civil society. Because together we are building what we think will be good for the people.

Why do the Mexican people and people from other countries support us? We think it's because they see that we are not thinking only about ourselves. We simply say that the people can plan and decide how their economy and their government should be, and we are working in practice on this form of government.

All this work is a very big responsibility. It feels like the song "time passes and we are getting old" (el tiempo pasa y nos vamos haciendo viejos) and we don't want to become caudillos or leaders, that's why the people need to be organized.

This training takes place in the midst of patrols, of counterinsurgency efforts, of paramilitaries, and in the middle of many other problems. And so in the middle of all this, we keep preparing.

What isn't recognized by the people is the constitutional government, because if it were, why would the Boards have more work than the government does? The Boards are solving problems that used to be resolved in the Public Ministry before. Now the people, even the ones who aren't Zapatistas, look for justice in the Boards. So I say the others are the ones who aren't constitutional. We are the ones who are recognized.

What do I feel in this twentieth anniversary? These nineteen years that I have been here have been hard, but we've done something, and there's a lot more to do. But now the difference is that we know each other and we are with the Mexican people and with other brothers and sisters from other countries. I hope that it is in their hearts that we are not alone, as they say. Now we need to put it in practice. We hope that some day it won't be "them" and "us" but we will all be the same, Zapatistas. We are going to build together with them for the benefit of the people.

I really didn't think that we were going to see this. It turns out that we didn't all die and that we are here, and that there's more to come. Now it's the role of the Mexican people to say what's been accomplished and above all what needs to be done.

Twenty years is very little. There's so much more...

Insurgent First Infantry Captain FEDERICO

The way I see it, me neither the insurgents nor the villages thought that the struggle would come so soon, that we would arrive at this moment so soon, although much more remains to be done. As an insurgent, the idea and the thought was that we would prepare to wage the war against the government and then go on, as it says in the First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, to battle our way to the capital, and I was convinced of that.

And that's how we trained, that's the idea we had. And it turns out that it wasn't like that. The struggle, the war—nobody knew how it would be. The compañeros of the villages, for example, if they had animals or a little money, since you knew you were going to die you had to eat them or spend the money. That's how we were preparing. We're thinking that if they kill us for some reason in the struggle, we're not going to die just to die. The mentality in those days was more centered on the military question; we were thinking that the Mexican people were going to rise up in arms and all together we would defeat the government.

In the first ten years, from 1983 to 1993, a lot of good things happened. The organization knew how to grow, it knew how to solve internal problems and it knew how to protect itself from the enemy. Although the enemy discovered our presence as an armed revolutionary group, we didn't let this happen, we continued to grow. Our problems or our faults knew how to go on and continue to grow. Our problems or our faults
were never so great as to ruin us, because we were very clear and convinced of the idea of our first compañeros, that whatever happened we would never turn back. It became clear when we were a lot of villages and militias and insurgents.

In these ten years of public struggle without using arms, although without setting them aside either, we’ve accomplished a lot. Such as, for example, the political question. From the first days of January 1994 we were very clear in our work, showing through deeds why we were fighting and the people could understand our cause. We told the people how we really live, the poverty, the situation of workers, the exploitation, that we aren’t fighting for our own interest, but for all of Mexico, for all the people, and that’s why the civil society supported us and still supports us.

The first accomplishment is that civil society understood us and not only that, but also began to make the same demands and confront the government with us.

There is another lesson, and that is that we see that there are other people fighting and resisting, because exploitation isn’t only in Chiapas, but in all of Mexico. We have heard about the struggles of other indigenous peoples, who also have died making their own demands and resisting in their own ways.

I feel good that we have made it twenty years. We see that we have built something through peaceful struggle, but that doesn’t mean that we are finished, more is left to do. It looks good and I feel good about it, but I think there’s still a lot left to do...

Speaking internally, the biggest project is the formation of the Good Government Boards. Our own villages have learned and are still learning to govern themselves without the Mexican government. Our people actually know how to govern themselves. For example, our education is much different from the education given by the government. We have our health services and our hospital. We have our small storage facilities. And it’s not some other guy who’s telling us how to do things, we’re the ones, even though many of us don’t know how to read and write, we are carrying out the work.

I feel proud of all this work, because we see that we are going forward, because each day we advance and we can see it. We see that when we say something we achieve it, and that gives us much pride. And our people feel it, although nobody feels overconfident. We’re convinced that we will continue to be rebels, we’ll always be rebels.

**Insurgent First Infantry Captain NOE**

For me it’s a great achievement to reach the twentieth anniversary of the formation of the EZLN. Reaching twenty is good. It’s an achievement of...
the dream of the first compañeros. When we prepared
I thought that it was going to be pure shooting. After
the first days of 1994, when we let people know who
we were and why we struggled, everything changed,
because civil society began to understand our struggle.
And there I want to say thank you to Subcomandante
Insurgenque Marcos who helped the people to under-
stand that our struggle is not just for us but for all of
Mexico, to see that we all have been forgotten.

We didn’t think that we would make it to twenty years like this.
When we went to war we were wondering who will return and who will
not. That’s why Subcomandante Insurgenque Pedro asked us if we were
committed. We were.

In these ten years we’ve seen many accomplishments. First of all,
civil society understood our objective of demanding our rights as indige-
nous peoples, our thirteen demands for all Mexicans. When people began
to understand our struggle, they started to organize to find a way to or-
organize with us. They came to meetings with the EZLN, like the National
Democratic Convention, and our organization committed itself more to
the peaceful struggle and we started to work together with them in these
ten years. Even with the peaceful struggle with civil society, we have never
laid down arms completely. We know that they are our security. If we
don’t accomplish our goals by peaceful means we are still ready. We do not
call to organize an army, but that everyone organizes resistance. We, our
peoples, are organized in Good Government Boards and that shows that
we can do things without the government. We create measures without
permission from them.

As the Zapatista Army that we are, we the insurgents are going to
protect the villages. Now the Boards, for example, should rule through
obeying. In other places they can also organize their autonomy. You don’t
have to wait for the government because it will never give anything. It
takes awareness and courage because you’re going to confront the govern-
ment and this government is going to prohibit it.

We have seen that in these ten public years our struggle has become
combined, seeking alternatives so we can be less war-oriented, as we say.
We give an opportunity to organize outside and we also organize within.
Yes, you can carry out a peaceful struggle, but we are willing to use
our arms, as we did ten years ago. That’s why we’re the EZLN.

We want to respect how we organize ourselves. We are showing that
we can start very small and get bigger, and we are sure that we will accom-
plish it. We never think that we are going to accomplish everything, but
we’ll see.

I never imagined that so many people would join. Before 1994 we
weren’t afraid. We thought that the people would rise up with us in arms,
but we didn’t think that civil society would stop us in order to get to know
us. We’ve gotten to know each other a lot and now we know who they are.
In these ten years we’ve learned things. In politics we learned that the gov-
ernment should rule by obeying, and we knew that but we also learned it.
In military questions we also learned a lot in ten years. We learned to resist
faced with 75,000 soldiers that they sent to fight us. We learned to get
around fences and fool their military intelligence. We learned what strate-
gies they applied to us, and we fooled them with and without arms.
We never fell in the traps that they set, we always discovered them in time.
In economics, we kept on resisting. We use what the people give us. In
ideology we’ve learned that we’re going to go as far as our people tell us.

Insurgent First Infantry Captain Lucio

The first ten years of the struggle was a time of political and military prepa-
ration for us, the insurgents, and for our communities. It was a lot of train-
ing for everyone. What I see now is that those ten years, from 1983 to 1993,
see now. Our organization—for us and for many people—brought something that didn't exist before. Now what we're seeing are the results of what we went through before, during those ten years of preparation.

We had to go to war and we did. We had to struggle with arms and so we did. We were clear that we had to take up arms. We were convinced and so we prepared for that.

Now what I see is that after ten years, we are still clear that we just had to declare the war in 1994 and that it could still last longer because the road is long, but we see that we have not let the people down.

What we've learned in all this time, well, it's that we know when the enemy is, but also where our allies are.

We originally had the idea that we were going to struggle for a long time, but in armed struggle. It turns out that we have to do other things and that we have to learn and that the people support us, but not with arms.

I'm proud of that time. There are a lot of things that I can see now only say things, we do them.

The people didn't come out to support us with arms, but they did support the causes and they are against the government. That doesn't mean that arms don't ever work. The arms are there. But we also fight back peacefully with the people and with people from other parts of Mexico and the world.

From 1994 to now we have had the opportunity to meet a lot of people and we've learned. We've also learned a lot from the war, how to defend ourselves and struggle, to trick the enemy. Because before, in the first ten years, it was pure preparation and now in the next ten years we used that political-military preparation to defend ourselves. We've taken some heavy blows, but that's taught us how to resist and to resolve problems that we face.

I think that because of the way we've struggled, we've had the opportunity to meet other people from Mexico and from all over the world. Maybe we would have never met them another way. That is, if we kept shooting all the time, then who knows if we would have had time to meet these people.

I am very clear that we are now fighting back according to the needs and the growth of our peoples. That's what we're doing now, and we think that other people of Mexico are probably going to say or are going to see that you can organize the people, although they may do it in another way.

I didn't know if we were going to ever have Good Government Boards and now we already have them, because we needed them and that is very good for the villages. And it's moving forward because we have many plans and it's growing a lot.

I see a lot of differences between this time and other times. Our children are being born with a school and a clinic, with their own system of education and health. Still it's hard in areas of production and marketing, but they're already searching for ways to solve it and to have projects, and that's really good, because it's not the same as before.

We still maintain our troops and we are still growing. Our work is to protect the work of the Good Government Boards and in this regard we are always on guard. We are waiting for orders for something else but now this is our job, our task and our duty as insurgents.

Insurgant First Infantry Captain CORNELIO

During these twenty years many things have happened, but it's all for the best. Before we had a different idea of working underground. We prepared ourselves for war. We had goals that we had to reach. We dedicated ourselves a lot to military preparations and we were clear that we had to fight with arms until victory, we were not thinking about anything else or about doing it in any other way.

We were soldiers and the time came for us to go into combat. Before we left the camps to go to war, I said goodbye to the mountains. I knew that the combat would go on and that I was either going to live or die, that the combat would go on and that I was...
but it turns out that afterwards we started to see new things, and that confused us a little, but now after ten years, we're very clear. We know that the struggle can be carried out in many ways. After ten years we are clear that all that we've achieved is because we went to war. The popular support, the confidence that they have in us, is another arm and with that we can achieve many things, although with the government we already saw that you can't get anywhere.

Now I see what the development of our struggle is really like, how it's a war, how it follows its path, the movements that we made with our struggle, to go out and talk to other peoples of Mexico, to go out in masas and uniforms, we did all that, and I never thought we would be able to.

We even made it to the capital itself but before we thought that we would do it with arms. The government and the political parties do not hear us, but that doesn't matter because we made it, we were with the people and that is a great gain.

We keep on resisting and we keep on organizing. We, as insurgents, keep on taking care and preparing ourselves militarily and politically. We keep on preparing, keep on training and keep on doing what we have to as a military organization. The people have to work to make the autonomous municipalities a success. Rule by obeying, this is how an authority really should govern. Now we're putting everything into practice because that is our role.

During the past ten years the insurgents learned how to reject the different wars that the government waged on us, such as the psychological war, the dirty war, the provocations, the paramilitaries. . . we already knew how to reject those wars and we learned to resist in questions of life. We see how our villages go on improving and how we continue to learn to resist. For that reason, we say that we insurgents have learned from our people.

I feel content because we’re living our advances. Nobody tells us about it, we see it ourselves. We didn’t even feel these ten years pass. How

Insurgent Lieutenant of Public Health Gabriela

As insurgents we explained to the villages that the struggle is going to take many years. We talked to the women, the youth, and that is how we began forming battalions and regiments. And we started to grow a lot and our organization became very big. It was growing and growing those first ten years and more and more insurgent compañeros kept joining.

After 1994, when we went to war, we were determined to face whatever happened. It turns out that here we continue to exist, we see our advances and we feel that we live to keep on working. What I see is that for example, each year there’s more participation and more growth. For example, the compañeras hardly participated, but after 1994 the path before the compañeras hardly participated, but after 1994 the compañeras opened up for them, the compañeras of the villages saw how the women opened up for them, the compañeras of the villages saw how the women went insurgents went to war too, how they used arms, and how they went
along with the compañeros. That’s where we saw how the women weren’t just good for cooking and taking care of kids, but also how they can participate in the ranks of insurgents.

That was how more women started to arrive after the war. Now, twenty years later, women insurgents continue to join. That is, more are still joining and we are showing that we are really growing. We’re also growing in the villages. There are more women as local and regional coordinators, members of the Committee, also joining in tasks of health, education, and other jobs that are necessary to the struggle.

And there’s been a change in the men’s way of thinking in the villages. Now they let the women participate. Earlier, they did not permit it. The men’s way of thinking has changed, and although we have a way to go, it’s not the same as before. The women have had to fight for these changes in the men, because they are aware of their rights and they force the men to make these changes.

These ten years have gone by quickly. I think it seems like that because of all the work we have and the participation. Although we have problems, the people don’t quit participating, and we already have our governments of the people. The Good Government Boards are already taking care of resolving problems, but it’s little by little. The people run the Boards, it’s not like the Boards can do whatever they want. Here it’s the people that run things.

As part of health services I see that we have grown a lot. At the beginning we built some clinics that attended to small needs but they were very small. Since 1994 the service has grown a lot, but little by little. Now there are health promoters in every village, first aid kits, and explanations of health. The people feel like their health workers understand them because they’re from there too, not from the government. Now we even have hospitals and there we train health workers to work at the microclinics. We still have a lot of needs, but the less serious illnesses we can treat in our own villages.

In our territories we have decreased respiratory infections, parasites and intestinal infections. All this has been achieved just by our work and the people of civil society who have helped by the organization, and by the health workers give talks on hygiene and that’s why disease has decreased.

In the hospitals, little by little, we’ve started to treat emergencies. I always thought we would someday because even though they told us our struggle was going to be long and it would be a lot of work, I also thought that we would see changes. Subcomandante Insurgente Pedro told us, “If we die, prepare yourselves because there will be more work, because more people will arrive.”

I did think that more people would come from Mexico and other places, because that’s what our comandantes said. They told us that there was a lot of work we were organized, to participate with our health workers. There’s a lot of difference between us and the government hospitals because we don’t have charge. Our health workers work for the people for free.

I’m proud of our struggle because you can really see the improvements in our villages. There are people from other countries helping us, because that’s what we’re doing. We’re going for all poor people. Other revolutionaries say that they are going to take power but they don’t do anything, but we say that we are not going to take power and we organize. That’s why I’m proud.

We are like a bridge that other friends can pass over, like our compañer Insurgente Marcos says.
COMPÁRERO RAÚL
Representative of the Zapatista villages

We spent ten years preparing ourselves collectively for a long war. We sowed beans, sugar cane, bananas, yucca because we thought it would help when the enemy attacked our villages.

So we as villages began to organize ourselves for the war. We signed our act of war because we just didn’t see any other way. And we thought that our fight would make it to Mexico City, but then came the war and things happened in other ways.

Now we’ve seen many changes in our villages. The compañeros told us we had to prepare politically and militarily, that it would all be necessary later. And we saw that it was true, that everything was necessary.

We trust Subcomandante Marcos a lot because he does what he says for the people. It’s not like others who do whatever they want. Not him, he is with us and we trust him and he trusts us.

We are organized now in the autonomous townships and we have more and more tasks. With the Good Government Boards even more work came and it just never ends.

At the beginning we thought that education and health and everything would be won through arms, but we saw that we can organize ourselves in other ways without setting aside our weapons, through our organization and our work. Not with the government. We don’t expect anything from the government. We only expect things when we organize with the people.

I feel content because I never imagined that we were going to achieve so much, little by little, with our work. For this we have confidence in our organization.

Where I live there is no road, but we have education, the children are learning. We have health workers and they are taking care of our needs although we still lack a lot.

The government never gave us anything, so we have always resisted. We’re not taking anything from the government, but then they never gave us anything anyway. Resistance is the most important thing for the future of the villages. Resistance and organization.

I’ve been part of this struggle for nineteen years. My village was one of the first. I’m not discouraged after nineteen years of struggle, because I’ve understood. What they compañeros originally told us has been carried out, so it’s true.

COMPÁRERO GERARDO
From the first Zapatista villages

When we started in 1983 we didn’t think about what it would be like. Little by little we learned, but we always put security first.

In the first years, almost twenty years ago, when the insurgent compañeros arrived in the village, the main part of the villagers’ work was to assure security for the insurgents in the mountains. That was the task of the villages, to take care of them.

Also to sustain them. We took what we could get—tostadas, pinto, sugar cane, or whatever we found. We realized that where they were there wasn’t anything to eat and we gave them what we could.

Another task was to keep growing as villages and educating about the struggle. First to our families and then to the whole village. We had many jobs in those years. To take care of the security of the insurgents, to feed them little by little with what we could, and also to explain our struggle and bring more and more families and villages in.

Afterwards we decided on war. We decided that it had to begin. And then we had other jobs. So we know now that we have to organize ourselves to get what we want because no one is coming to give us things. Not the government or anybody else.

In my village there wasn’t a school before, there wasn’t anything.
Now the boys and girls are taking courses as education workers, and we are building a school, because we all have different jobs.

The resistance means that we have to make a real effort to be better off. The people aren’t thinking about crumbs, they’re eating from what they get from their own sweat. We’re not leaving the resistance, that’s all we have.

The struggle is long and hard, prolonged. At times we are happy, we throw a dance party, and other times it is work and we have to get down to it. So we go on, we’re encouraged.

COMANDANTE ABRAHAM
Revolutionary Indigenous Clandestine Committee

One the first of January 1994, I never imagined what it would be like now. We imagined that we were going to take the cities with arms. We didn’t think that we were going to live; we thought that most likely we would fall and that others would continue the struggle. We didn’t think that there would be people to help us. We thought it would only be a few that would understand the struggle.

It was a big change, because we saw that many people started to talk about us. They started to say that the war should stop and we should look for other ways, political ways. We heard what the force of the people was saying—that we should look somewhere else. The people said no to violence and we listened.

We’ve seen that the society is mobilized with us.
We got excited on the road with the March.

In our territory we don’t see other people. But thanks to the Consultation and the March we could meet other people. When we went out on the March we met a lot of people... They all yelled that we were not alone and it was very exciting.

It doesn’t worry us that the government does not listen to the people. It doesn’t worry us because we’ve seen the strength of the people. That’s why it doesn’t concern us about the government and the political parties. They just let us sit down in their chairs in their Chamber, that is, they just showed us to sit down but they didn’t talk to us seriously, they just took it as a show.

We saw that we’d had enough with the government and that we had to continue to struggle. Time was running out and there were a lot of things we had to organize in the villages.

The organization now exists not because the government allows it, but because we struggle and organize. The government never gives us anything good. It’s the people who decide. We exist because we are. They could not disappear us.

The politicians thought it wasn’t important but that’s not surprising because they never do anything. But the people decided that with or without a law [for indigenous rights] we’re going to work.

It’s like the war of 1994, the government didn’t allow it but we did
it. That’s how the Good Government Boards are going to be, whether the government likes it or not we’re going to go on with this work.

Now I feel really proud. For one thing, because we’re alive, and we’re seeing the organization. The other thing is that there have been a lot of changes and we know that these twenty years aren’t much. The struggle is long. They told us that in 1984, they told us it was long and hard, and we’re clear on that.

Twenty years, then, and we’re just beginning.