

Zapatista Forum on Defense of the Territory and Mother Earth



On December 21 and 22, 2019, in the new Jacinto Canek caracol in the facilities of Cideci / UniTierra, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, the Forum in Defense of the Territory and Mother Earth was held, convened by the National Indigenous Congress, the Indigenous Government Council and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

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The event was attended by 435 attendees and 486 delegates and guests, adding a total of 921 people from 25 states of the republic and 24 countries: France, Germany, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, United Kingdom, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Spanish State, United States, Italy, Kenya, Peru, Uruguay, Cuba, Switzerland, Ireland, New Zealand and Portugal.

Over the course of those two days, the presentations of the peoples and organizations throughout the country (in addition to testimonies of the native peoples of Colombia, the Mapuche people of Chile and Kurdish women) constituted a very valuable examination of the nation that is not found in other spaces and much less in the official discourse.

The theme common to all the presentations was what many called a war of capital against the original peoples, through megaprojects that devastate the territory and Mother Earth: extraction of hydrocarbons (including the devastating method of hydraulic fracturing or fracking), gas pipelines, hydroelectric, thermoelectric, wind, mining, agribusiness, tourism megaprojects, as well as the interoceanic corridor in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the so-called Mayan Train.

The result of this capital offensive has been the dispossession of territories, the contamination of land and water, the forced displacement of populations and the threat not only to the material survival of the peoples, but also to their ways of life, their cultures, their traditions, their languages, their worldview.

Companies (many of them transnational), the three levels of government (with the backing of the National Guard) and organized crime, who increasingly function as the weaponized arm of the capital that they kidnap, participate in a coordinated manner, disappear and murder resistance leaders and displace entire populations, to make way for companies and their megaprojects.

Most of the concessions granted in the country are for 50 years, renewable for 100 years, and involve thousands of hectares of the national territory. In virtually all cases, Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, of which Mexico is a signatory, and which requires the prior free and informed consent of the affected peoples, is not complied with. As reported by the peoples and organizations present, the consultations promoted by the government of the “Fourth Transformation” are rigged and are far from complying with the requirements of ILO 169.

Another common axis is the division of peoples, through pressures, gifts and purchase of wills, as well as threats and direct violence. Although this has been a constant throughout the neoliberal period, these divisions increased in the current administration, with the co-optation of many by the Morena party and

the seduction of programs such as “Sowing Life” and “Young People Building Future,” strongly criticized by several speakers.

Resistors

Faced with this panorama, the people resist. Throughout these two days, we heard stories of murder, forced disappearance, displacement, dispossession and evidence of a legal system that “is not to protect us, but to protect them [the business interests] from us,” as a delegate said. At the same time, stories were heard of struggles that managed to stop megaprojects and initiatives that defend the territory and Mother Earth through organization, collectivity, autonomy, legal action and especially direct action. Among the most successful experiences are those of Cherán and Ostula, in Michoacán, that of Ejido Tila and of course the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

The peoples and organizations recognized that resistance includes several axes: organizational political processes, scientific and technical processes to fully understand the dynamics of destruction, legal defense processes and, above all, processes for the construction of autonomy and strengthening of their own cultures.

The delegate of the organization LA VIDA de Veracruz defined with some humor the territorial defense with the following formula: $DT = E7 / C$. The defense of the territory, he explained, implies seven “E”: Ethics (the task of resistance always guided by ethical principles); Epic (the possibility of the peoples to confront and overcome, the power of capital, of government and its repressive forces and of organized crime); Aesthetics (the sense of beauty of the people); Hope (an active hope, not passive, that feeds on organized action); Education (knowledge as the basis of any action of resistance); Spiritual (what brings people together and makes them come alive); Emotional (the central place of the heart in struggles). All this, based on “C”: the Collective, the Community.

The Zapatista experience

An important moment of the Forum was the participation of Zapatista support bases, which led us through a journey of the construction of its autonomy and of “another possible world.” The words of 20 Zapatista women and men revealed

the meticulous work, throughout these 26 years of public life, in the construction of their own form of government; in their conception of democracy; in the construction of their own health and education systems; in the participation of women and young people in the organization, autonomy and the three instances of autonomous government; in resistance and rebellion as the foundations of autonomy; in the organization of collective work as a means of financing all autonomous initiatives; as well as the political work done in recent times with non-Zapatista brothers and sisters.

Far from an idealized vision of Zapatista autonomy, what the bases of support (with the timely intervention of Subcomandante Moisés twice) revealed to us was also the difficulties, problems, challenges and failures in that construction.

Although it does not represent a formula to be followed to the letter by other peoples and other processes, the testimonies gathered here constitute a complete proof that it is possible to construct life alternatives in the face of the death system we suffer.

Agreements

At the end of the event, the resolutions raised during the meetings of the delegates in previous days were discussed. The following was agreed:

On January 7, a call will be launched for the Days in Defense of the Territory and Mother Earth “Samir Somos Todxs,” for February 20, 21 and 22, 2020, ending on February 22 with a National Labor Assembly. The call will be prepared by the coordination of the National Indigenous Congress – Indigenous Government Council and the Sixth Commission of the EZLN. To make the Conference viable, on January 11 at 1 pm, in Mexico City, a meeting of logistics and internal and external communication strategies will be held.

A caracol is born

The day after the conclusion of the Forum, the Jacinto Canek caracol was formally established at the Cideci / Unitierra facilities in San Cristóbal de Las Casas with “the formal delivery of the five batons representing the municipalities and autonomous regions that make up this new Caracol, by the Good Governance

Board of the Caracol II of Oventic,” as expressed by the General Command of the EZLN. The new Board of Good Governance will be called “Flower of our word, light of our peoples that reflects for everyone,” and represents an important step in the expansion of Zapatista autonomy with the establishment of a caracol in the colonial city which, since the Conquest, has represented the landowner, racist and oppressive power over the original peoples of Chiapas.



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