

# Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

**T**he Nobel Committee awarded the 1992 Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, in recognition of her efforts to achieve social justice and reconciliation between diverse ethnic groups and respect for the rights of indigenous groups.

Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan Guatemalan living in exile in Mexico since 1981, was born January 9, 1959, in the village of Chimel de San Miguel Uspatán, Quiché. Even as a child she participated in pastoral activities with her Indian parents, who were Christian leaders in the area.

In 1979, she joined the Committee for Farm Workers' Unity, an organization devoted to achieving economic, social, political and ethnic rights for farm workers. Menchú is the first Guatemalan woman to have participated since 1982 in the UN working group on indigenous peoples.

In 1983, Menchú helped form the Guatemalan United Opposition Front. She has also attended numerous international Indigenous and Human Rights conferences and peace colloquia.

The Nobel prize-winner has received a number of international awards, including "Testimony" from the House of the Americas in Havana, for her book, *Rigoberta Menchú - the birth of awareness*, a testimony to the life of Guatemalan Indians, the UNESCO Peace Education Prize in Milan and the Mayor and County of San Francisco Honorary Diploma.

This is the fifth time the Nobel Prize has been won by a Latin American. It was previously awarded to Costa Rican president, Oscar Arias Paz in 1987, and shared in 1982, by a Mexican, Alfonso Robles and a Swede, Alva Myrdal.

The prize, consisting of 6.5 million Kroner (1.2 million dollars) is the highest ever awarded to a native voice of the unheard dispossessed of the world. For Menchú, it represents hope for dialogue and peace in both her country and the rest of Central and South America ✕

*Raquel Villanueva*  
Staff Writer.



Rigoberta Menchú and Mexican president Carlos Salinas.



Rossy Alemán / Imagenlatina.

*Her kindness and simplicity are framed by her richly colored dress.*

### Self-sacrificing motherland

I crossed the border, my love,  
 I don't know when I'll be back.  
 Perhaps in summertime,  
 when grandmother Moon and father Sun  
 greet each other once again.  
 One bright dawn,  
 feted by all the stars.  
 The first rains will fall  
 and the squash will blossom that Victor sowed  
 the afternoon the soldiers mutilated him,  
 the peach orchards will flower and our fields will flourish.  
 We shall sow much corn.  
 Corn for the children of our land.  
 The swarms of bees that fled  
 so many massacres and so much terror will return.  
 Once again, calloused hands will make more  
 earthen jars for collecting honey.  
 I crossed the border steeped in sorrow.  
 I feel immense grief for that dark, rainy daybreak,  
 that goes beyond my existence.  
 Raccoons and howler monkeys cry,  
 coyotes and mocking birds remain silent,  
 snails wish they could talk.  
 Mother Earth mourns, drenched in blood,  
 weeping night and day from so much grief.  
 She will miss the soothing sound of hoes,  
 of machetes and grindstones.  
 Dawn after dawn she will listen anxiously  
 for the laughter and song of her glorious children.  
 I crossed the border bearing my dignity,  
 carrying a sack full of so much from that rainy land:  
 the age-old memories of Patrocinio,  
 the sandals I was born with, the smell of spring,  
 the scent of moss, the corn field's caresses  
 and the glorious callouses of childhood.  
 I carry the multi-colored *huipil* for the homecoming fiesta,  
 the bones and what's left of the corn. And of course!  
 Come what may, this sack will return whence it came,  
 I crossed the border, my love.  
 I shall return tomorrow, when my tortured mother,  
 weaves another colorful shift,  
 when my father, burned alive, rises again at dawn,  
 to greet the sun from the four corners  
 of our little ranch.  
 Then there will be home-brewed liquor for everyone, incense,  
 laughing children and lively marimbas.  
 There will be fires in every little farm, at every river  
 to wash the corn for tortillas at daybreak.  
 Pitch pine will be lit to illuminate the trails,  
 ravines, rocks and fields.

*Rigoberta Menchú*