

Chiapas, Our Agreements And Disagreements

Speech by President Ernesto Zedillo*

There is much, much more that identifies and brings us together than divides and distances us from one another.

Today, I want to reiterate that, even given complex and painful conflicts like the one in Chiapas, we Mexicans can and want to come to the agreements that ensure respect and harmony for all, opportunities and progress for all, dignity and justice for all.

With that conviction, I want to restate here what the federal government does not agree with and what it does agree with in order to solve the conflict in Chiapas.

The federal government does not agree with, nor can it agree with, violence.

Violence does not lead to harmony; it generates more and worse violence. It does not lead to progress, but to destruction and backwardness. Neither does it lead to justice or dignity.

Violence never solves problems; it only makes them worse.

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Angela Torrejón / Imagenlatina

Poverty and marginalization of indigenous people are at stake.

For that reason, the federal government will never agree with any form of violence, no matter what its origin.

It is unacceptable to defend a just cause—that of finding a solution to poverty and abandonment—by using the threat of arms, which is the same as the threat of violence.

In this same fashion, regardless of the threat of arms or the threat to someone's property or interests, whether legitimate or not, a violent reaction is also unacceptable.

Anyone who resorts to violence or arms, and equally, anyone who threatens to do so, is attempting to take justice into his own hands, is trying to put himself above the law and judge others.

This is unacceptable. Neither the federal government nor society can accept it.

Trying to take justice into your own hands is a crime against both the law and democracy. It is a crime that must be punished.

The federal government does not believe that it is the force of the state that should resolve the conflict in Chiapas.

That is why the federal government has neither used nor threatened to use that force. That is how it has been since the first day and that is how it will be until the last day of my administration.

Those who speak of a threat from the federal government, those who speak of the government seeking confrontations or encouraging violence, know perfectly well that they are not speaking the truth.

They know perfectly well that there is no such thing as inevitable confrontations and that the federal government neither follows nor has a strategy for war in Chiapas.

They know that their words aim to win supporters, to maintain approval, to back up their propaganda in Mexico and abroad.

The truth is that the federal government has repeatedly shown in practice that it does not believe that the use of force is the solution in Chiapas.

Those who for reasons of strategy, propaganda or political interests are falsifying the truth know perfectly well that during these three years, the federal government has not used force in Chiapas, despite the provocations, falsehoods and threats.

They even know that, no matter what they do, the federal government will not use repressive force. It will only defend the law and institutions of all Mexicans.

And certainly, those who are not speaking the truth know that they are taking advantage of the tolerance of the federal

government, of a tolerance that, even if irritating to part of the public, is an aspect of authentic democracy.

But they must also be aware that when they act in this way, instead of hastening a solution, they are prolonging the conflict; instead of being part of an answer of justice and dignity for all, they become part of the problem.

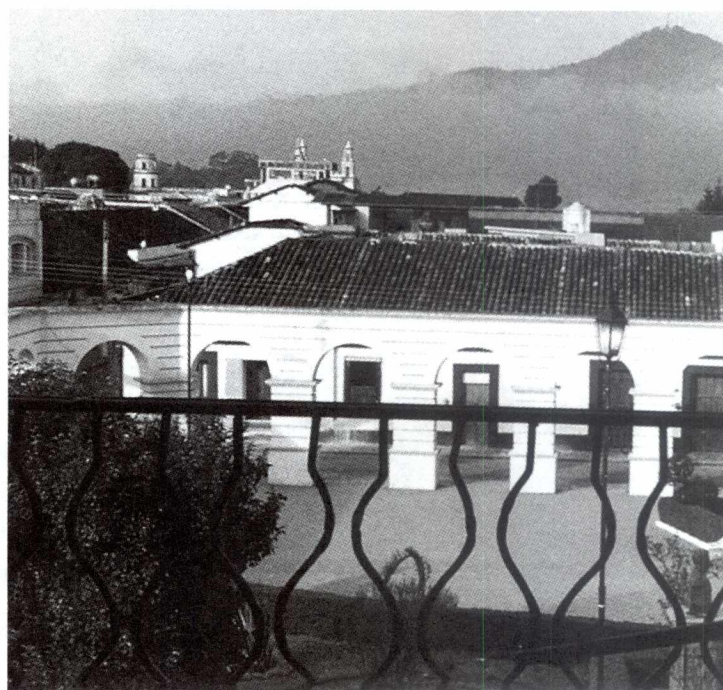
In that sense, those who utilize the Chiapas conflict, or even the tragic events that cause us all pain and indignation, to further their cause, to promote group interests, or to confuse public opinion, know perfectly well that they are not contributing to the solution of the conflict.

It is unacceptable that the Chiapas conflict be used to favor political aims unrelated to the solution of the profound origins of the just grievances of the indigenous communities.

Those who do so are betting on discord and confrontation; they are betting on whatever mobilizes people of good faith, regardless of whether it is true or not, to support their political aims, instead of betting on working together to solve the basic causes of the injustice and abandonment.

The federal government also disagrees with those who desire, seek, motivate, invoke or facilitate foreign interference to do what we Mexicans can do ourselves.

Down through our history, never, absolutely never, has any problem among Mexicans been solved by foreigners or from abroad.



A view of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.

Intervening, even in good faith, in the domestic affairs which are the business only of Mexicans, is unfair to a country that has always distinguished itself for its respect for the internal life of other nations. It is unfair to a country like Mexico that has striven for respect for the self-determination of all nations, large or small, weak or powerful.

For all Mexicans as well as for the federal government, it is inadmissible that there be those who in violation of our laws, although they argue humanitarian reasons, are directly involved in the conflict in Chiapas. We are especially concerned with their conduct when their own countries still suffer from division, conflict and even terrorism born of colonialism or authoritarianism in their not-too-distant-past.

Many of those who interfere from abroad, not to help solve the conflict but to raise it as a banner, would do better repairing the injustices that authoritarianism and the exclusion of their own ancestors have left as a legacy.

The federal government can never agree to either violence or foreign interference.

But it has agreed and will continue to agree that the only way to establish peace with justice and dignity in Chiapas is through dialogue, through negotiation.

The federal government has agreed and will continue to agree that the only fast, peaceful and definitive solution to the

conflict is in satisfying the demand of indigenous people for a new relationship with the Mexican state.

That is why the federal government agrees that it is necessary to build a new relationship among the indigenous peoples, Mexican society and the state.

As the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords say, a new relationship which addresses and solves the problems of poverty, exploitation and political exclusion that for years and years has harmed and continues to harm indigenous peoples.

A new relationship in which the federal, state and municipal governments promote in their respective spheres, together with the indigenous peoples themselves, their equitable, sustainable development, as well as the struggle against all forms of discrimination.

The federal government has agreed and always will agree with complying with a fundamental commitment to fostering the elimination of discriminatory mentalities, attitudes and behavior toward indigenous people.

It agrees that to forge a new relationship between the state and indigenous peoples, a culture of plurality and tolerance must be developed. A culture that accepts the world views, life styles and ideas of development of indigenous peoples.

As the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords say, the federal government agrees to promote legal and legislative changes that broaden the political participation and representation, both locally and nationally, of indigenous peoples, maintaining respect for their different situations and traditions, and strengthening a new federalism in Mexico in a constitutional framework ensuring national unity.

The government agrees that the call for the voices and demands of indigenous peoples to be heard and duly attended must carry with it the recognition of the political, economic, social and cultural rights of indigenous peoples within the framework of the Mexican nation.

The federal government agrees that it has the duty to guarantee full access of indigenous people to state institutions, with the recognition and respect for cultural specificities and their internal systems of norms, guaranteeing at the same time full respect for human rights and the principles of the Constitution.

The federal government agrees that during all trials and legal proceedings, indigenous people have the right at all times to be assisted by interpreters and counsel for the defense familiar with



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their languages and cultures whether private or government appointed.

The government also agrees to recognize the cultural diversity of indigenous peoples; to ensure their greater and better education and training, an education that, if provided by the government, will be public and intercultural, and training that can improve production.

The federal government agrees with the San Andrés Accords in the sense that the state must guarantee to indigenous peoples conditions which will allow them to satisfactorily procure their own food, health and housing, and at the same time the state must promote a federalist, integral, participatory social policy that attends to basic needs, especially those of women and children.

The federal government agrees to promote production and employment among indigenous peoples, as well as to foster specific policies to protect indigenous migrants both within our borders and abroad.

The federal government agrees with the San Andrés Larráinzar Accords. But it would not be able to accept interpretations of the accords that threaten national sovereignty and unity or put individual guarantees, freedoms and human rights at risk. It would not be able to accept exclusionary statutes or privileges or disdain for minorities.

It seems to me that whoever truly wants a solution to the conflict in Chiapas will agree with the government on these points. Therefore, let us formalize the San Andrés Accords.

Let us formalize the San Andrés Accords so that all of us, beginning with the authorities, can open up roads to progress and democracy vis-à-vis cultural diversity and political pluralism.

Let us formalize the San Andrés Accords in order to genuinely advance in the recognition, inclusion and encouragement of indigenous peoples so that democracy, freedom and justice can be for all, so that never again in Mexico is there a Mexican who does not feel part of the nation.

Ours is a great nation.

Nothing and no one must divide it. Nothing and no one must put its sovereignty or its territorial integrity at risk.

Nothing and no one must undermine the pride that each Mexican feels simply in being what he or she is, being, first and foremost, Mexican.

For this reason, let us take advantage of the fact that there is more, much more, that unites us as Mexicans, to join our determination, our creativity and our efforts and thus heal the wounds that give us so much pain.

Thank you.

