

Supplementary Documents

Reply of the Lords and Holy Men of Tenochtitlán to the first Franciscan evangelizers in central Mexico, 1524

The following account was written by or for Bernardino de Sahagún, a Spanish missionary. It was written in 1564, forty years after the meetings it discusses took place. Sahagún wanted to record and understand the views of Aztecs so as to be more successful at converting them to Christianity. The account reads like a single speech or letter, but in fact the ideas were originally expressed over several meetings between Aztec and Spanish leaders in Mexico.

Our lords, leading personages of much esteem, you are very welcome to our lands and towns. We ourselves, being inferior and base, are unworthy of looking upon the faces of such valiant personages. God, Our Lord, has brought you to rule us. We do not know where you come from or where our lords and gods dwell because you have come by sea, through the clouds and mist, a route we have never known. God sends you among us as His own eyes, ears, and mouth. He who is invisible and spiritual becomes visible in you. And we hear His words with our own ears through you, His representatives. We have heard the words that you have brought us of the One who gives us life and being. And we have heard with admiration the words of the Lord of the World which he has sent here for love of us, and also you have brought us the book of celestial and divine words.

You have told us that we do not know the One who gives us life and being, who is Lord of the heavens and of the earth. You also say that those we worship are not gods. This way of speaking is entirely new to us, and very scandalous. We are frightened by this way of speaking because our forebears who engendered and governed us never said anything like this. On the contrary, they left us this our custom of worshipping our gods, in which

they believed and which they worshipped all the time that they lived here on earth. They taught us how to honor them. And they taught us all the ceremonies and sacrifices that we make. They told us that through them [our gods] we live and are, and that we were beholden to them, to be theirs and to serve our countless centuries before the sun began to shine and before there was daytime. They said that these gods that we worship give us everything we need for our physical existence: maize, beans, chia seeds, etc. We appeal to them for the rain to make the things of the earth grow.

These our gods are the source of great riches and delights, all of which belong to them. They live in very delightful places where there are always flowers, vegetation, and great freshness, a place unknown to mere mortals, called Tlalocan, where there is never hunger, poverty, or illness. It is they who bestow honors, property, titles, and kingdoms, gold and silver, precious feathers, and gemstones.

There has never been a time remembered when they were not worshipped, honored, and esteemed. Perhaps it is a century or two since this began; it is a time beyond counting...

It would be a fickle, foolish thing for us to destroy the most ancient laws and customs left by the first inhabitants of this land...for the worship, faith and service of the above-mentioned [gods], in which we were born and raised. And we are accustomed to them and we have them impressed on our hearts.

Oh, our lords and leaders you should take great care not to do anything to stir up or incite your vassals to some evil deed. How you could leave the poor elderly among us bereft of that in which they have been raised throughout their lives? Watch out that we do not incur the wrath of our gods. Watch out that the common people do not rise up against us if we were to tell them that the gods they have always understood to be sure are not gods at all.

It is best, our lords, to act on this matter very slowly, with great deliberation. We are not satisfied or convinced by what you have told us, nor do we understand or give credit to what has been said of our gods. It gives us anguish, lords and fathers, to speak this way. Here present are the lords charged with governing the kingdom and republics of this world. All of us together feel that it is enough to have lost, enough that the power and royal jurisdiction have been taken from us. As for our gods, we will die before giving up serving and worshipping them. This is our determination; do what you will. This will serve in rely and contradiction to what you have said. We have no more to say, lords.

Testimonies from Tlatelolco, 1968

The following excerpts are from eyewitness accounts of students who were at Tlatelolco Plaza during the massacre on October 2, 1968.

“We knew that the police got gangs of roughnecks and bullies to commit outrages against the people, pretending they were members of the Movement and shouting ‘Hurray for students!’ In Coyoacán, a notorious gang of good-for-nothings, ‘Los Conchos,’ burned buses and manhandled the passengers and drivers. They wrecked stores and molested people on the streets, supposedly in the name of the Movement, but they hardly fooled anybody.... Why? Because that wasn’t the first time the police had resorted to such tactics, and people realized what they were up to. What’s more, even people who thought it was students who were responsible for such outrages regarded these incidents as more or less justifiable excesses: the vile language and the intrigues against the University in the Chamber of Deputies were bound at that point to be met with a certain amount of violence on the part of the students. In general, however, people could easily tell the difference between acts by more or less rebellious students and the outright provocations and the attempts to blacken the Movement’s name plotted by the police.” (*Gilberto Guevara Niebla*)

“We’ve already seen kids ten, eleven, twelve years old who know very well what fighting for the people’s freedom means. I remember very well, for instance, the Carlos Marx mini-brigade at the National School of Economics, consisting of one young girl and four teen-age girl students from the College of Madrid, all of them incredible kids: exuberant, brave, determined—some of the finest kids in their school.

“I think the Movement made such a deep impression on young kids that if there’s any hope at all for this country’s future, it’s because there is such an immense number of young people here in Mexico. The possibilities of a real revolution lie with the kids of various ages who stood on the sidewalks watching the demonstrations, seeing their older brothers and sisters march by, holding their parents’ hands at Movement meetings, those who have heard stories of the days of terror, or somehow felt them in their very bones. The government of this country ought to be very wary of kids who were ten or twelve or fifteen in 1968. However much they’re brainwashed, however they’re drugged, deep down they’ll remember for the rest of their lives the clubbings and the murders their older brothers and sisters were the victims of.... Despite the government’s every effort to make them forget, they will remember that as kids they witnessed the ignominy of clubbings, tear-gas grenades, and bullets.” (*Eduardo Valle Espinoza*)

“Upstairs there on the speakers’ stand, the confusion soon became utter desperation. It was all quite clear then: this was a sneak attack on us. The Olimpia Battalion had their firearms trained on us. And they had begun firing at will at the crowd fleeing in panic down below. The sound of rifle and machine-gun fire, and the screams from the crowd and those of us there on the speakers’ stand, were really deafening.

“‘Get upstairs! Run for it!’ some of us shouted as we looked around for some way to get off that big wide balcony on the fourth floor of the Chihuahua building from which the speakers had been addressing the crowd.

“Eventually some of us found an apartment where we could take shelter for the time being. Others who weren’t as lucky were already lying dead or wounded from the deadly hail of bullets, or were about to be.

“The Army troops were shooting in all directions. It was impossible even to show our heads in that apartment. The bullets were flying about everywhere, imbedding themselves in the walls after having shattered the windowpanes and torn big holes in the curtains. Bits of plaster and other objects were raining down on our heads all over the place.

“That was where the agents arrested me: there in that apartment on the sixth floor of the Chihuahua building.” (*Pablo Gómez, economics student*)

Testimonies from the Mexico City Earthquake, 1985

The following excerpts are from newspaper accounts and interviews with earthquake survivors, rescue workers, and journalists after the Mexico City earthquake on September 19, 1985.

“I invite all who suffer as I do at this moment to point to responsible parties and accuse them. We won’t let things rest. Let people use the proper tribunals to denounce the fact that international aid never reached the hands of the victims, that the supplies were sold in the provinces and the Federal District; that the army, far from helping us, stole people’s belongs....

“Let the people...speak up. And let them not be content with just making accusations, but go on to create an organization with staying power because Mexico’s social problem goes way beyond the earthquake.

“For the victims, for those of us who lost everything, a way of being able to live with ourselves is to participate in this change and not to allow business as usual. Let no one live in a house that can crumble....

“My family was not killed by the earthquake; what killed them was the fraud and

corruption fostered by the government of Mexico....

“We’re no longer the same.” (*Judith Garcia de Vega to Elena Poniatowska*)

“Raúl Trejo wrote, ‘The tragedy moves us all, in some way equalizing us, it evens us out.’ Right now, I am not so sure. Oh, my Mexico, my wounded Mexico, my Mexico that contents itself with so little! Is it possible that we can still believe in the efficacy of government when, at the crucial moment, it was the people who did everything? Even yesterday, the people in the street appeared grateful because the Route 100 bus was free, pay phones were free, even when they had to break the hydrants open in the street because the water trucks hadn’t arrived. People ask for little and are satisfied with exceedingly little. The populace, these days, takes care of itself.

“In any case, those on the bottom are accustomed to the fact that nobody even throws them a line. The absolute uselessness of government is nothing new to them. They are so different from the apparatus of power, such helpless onlookers at government decisions, so elbowed to the side that one would think they do not speak the same language. What’s going on outside has nothing to do with what’s going on underneath this monumental umbrella of stone, nothing. The language of power is simply “other.” For all the talk about “the people,” they have never been granted anything but the role of extras; leaders have always been there to obstruct, to paralyze, to block the way....” (*Elena Poniatowska*)

“In many ways, the government is designed to control, to maintain institutions, to keep the status quo and exercise power. After September 19, it became evident that the government had been left behind; thirty-nine hours went by before the President addressed the nation.... In a nutshell, the government failed.

“First the government tried to minimize the disaster. It ordered the population, ‘Stay home,’ when it should have made an appeal

to all professionals: engineers, physicians, architects, miners, nurses, contractors, operators of cranes and bulldozers. Second, it rejected international aid, going so far as returning airplanes with cargo that later were made to come back. Yes, yes, we need the stuff, after all. Third, it launched the self-deception of ‘normality.’ We had to go back to normality at any cost. We were living through the greatest catastrophe of our history and they kept saying, ‘Mexico is standing up; we are all standing; the country is still standing.’ When we had not gotten our people out from under the twisted concrete, we were ‘standing’ and on our way to normality.

“It was the people—beyond all acronyms, political parties, government ministries, social classes—the guys and gals, the compadres, who organized themselves in the districts of the city. This is the way we got the rescue brigades and the shelters. Many hours went by before the government arrived to take the reins....

“I was astonished that there never was a call by the School of Medicine to its graduates, who could have been distributed among the emergency zones in an orderly way. What was done, was done voluntarily.

“‘No to normality. We refuse to go back to normality.’ Gustavo Esteva.” (*Elena Poniatowska*)

“We entered the building looking for survivors. But in fifteen minutes the machines were on again. But in fifteen minutes the machines went on again. Once again, I went out, explaining to him that we needed silence so we could hear the voices of survivors. He stopped the vehicles in a very bad mood, and we spent forty minutes of intense search in the three floors until we were persuaded that no life existed in there. The only thing to be done was to recover the bodies. We left a brigade in charge of that effort and departed wondering how many of the thirty-six people who were trapped could have been saved if someone had been there in the first three days after the earthquake....

“The hope that kept us all going was the possibility of finding a person still breathing. That hope was stronger than fatigue, hunger, sweat, or dust....” (*Unknown rescue worker*)

“At the Red Cross they gave us T-shirts that read ‘Rescue Worker’ and ‘Paramedic,’ so on Friday, September 20, we were traveling on Cuauhtémoc Avenue, near the Ministry of Commerce, says Luis Bosoms, a twenty-two-year-old student from Anáhuac University, when the earth suddenly started quaking again: people stood in the middle of the street, others knelt down, others wailed loudly, and still others cried quietly....

“We had to stop the car because the ground underneath cracked open about twenty inches. Some buildings that had been damaged previously, but were still standing, crashed down all the way. There was no electricity. The air smelled of natural gas. You could hear explosions. If you looked up, you could see fires here and there on the horizon. I tried to lift a woman from the ground, but she was stiff, praying aloud, ‘Christ the King, the bleeding Christ, pray for us. Christ the King...’

“In the building across the street from us, some people were calling from the fifth floor. In spite of the smell of gas they had candles in their hands. The building they were in was still rocking. The neighbors saw us with Red Cross badges and came to beg us to go up and get them down. They said that the grandmother had a broken hip and couldn’t make her way down...as if we were Superman. And that’s what you want to be, mighty.

“Anyhow, we went to the building half dead of fright, we went up to where they were, put the old lady in a chair, and lowered her slowly, slowly, hoping there would be no more quakes and the building wouldn’t give way. When people trust you like that, it makes you feel like an idiot. Because they put a badge on you, you are supposed to know what to do and what’s going to happen. The feeling of impotence is awful when that kind of natural catastrophe strikes....

“On Sunday the 22nd, they sent us to the store to get cloth and string to make surgical masks—I believe about 50,000 pesos were coming out of the cash register every five minutes. They gave us 30,000 pesos. Between the university and the store we collected 40,000 more. We told the store clerk that we wanted 70,000 pesos worth of cloth, not thinking about taxes and all that.

“It was a grocery store. I asked the manager to let me use the microphone and in five minutes I got 70,000 pesos more. One señora alone asked me, ‘How much do you need?’ and took out 30,000 pesos from her wallet. Even the maids would give us 200-peso donations.... In the afternoon we went to the bakery of Barri-laco to buy bread for sandwiches for the rescue workers. The man in charge asked me what I wanted so much bread for. For the Red Cross, I said. So sure enough, he told me to take all the bread he had, for nothing. I filled up the VW.

“The Camino Real Hotel sent food to the Red Cross. It was kind of surrealistic, to see trays of hors d’oeuvres delivered by uniformed waiters.

“People would come in to donate blood, to sweep the floor, to unload pots of food, whatever. It’s awesome, let me tell you! After an experience like that, you realize that you are not alone on an island, and that you better make yourself useful where you are.” (*interview reported by Marisol Martín del Campo*)

EZLN’s Declaration of War “Today we say ‘enough is enough!’ (Ya Basta!)”

*First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle,
1993*

TO THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO: MEXICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio

Díaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don’t care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children.

But today, we say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70 year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups. They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the “scientific” Porfirio dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones the today take everything from us, absolutely everything.

To prevent the continuation of the above and as our last hope, after having tried to utilize all legal means based on our Constitution, we go to our Constitution, to apply Article 39 which says:

“National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government.”

Therefore, according to our constitution, we declare the following to the Mexican federal army, the pillar of the Mexican dicta-

torship that we suffer from, monopolized by a one-party system and led by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the maximum and illegitimate federal executive that today holds power.

According to this Declaration of War, we ask that other powers of the nation advocate to restore the legitimacy and the stability of the nation by overthrowing the dictator.

We also ask that international organizations and the International Red Cross watch over and regulate our battles, so that our efforts are carried out while still protecting our civilian population. We declare now and always that we are subject to the Geneva Accord, forming the EZLN as our fighting arm of our liberation struggle. We have the Mexican people on our side, we have the beloved tricolored flag highly respected by our insurgent fighters. We use black and red in our uniform as our symbol of our working people on strike. Our flag carries the following letters, "EZLN," Zapatista National Liberation Army, and we always carry our flag into combat.

Beforehand, we refuse any effort to disgrace our just cause by accusing us of being drug traffickers, drug guerrillas, thieves, or other names that might be used by our enemies. Our struggle follows the constitution which is held high by its call for justice and equality.

Therefore, according to this declaration of war, we give our military forces, the EZLN, the following orders:

First: Advance to the capital of the country, overcoming the Mexican federal army, protecting in our advance the civilian population and permitting the people in the liberated area the right to freely and democratically elect their own administrative authorities.

Second: Respect the lives of our prisoners and turn over all wounded to the International Red Cross.

Third: Initiate summary judgments against all soldiers of the Mexican federal army and the political police that have received training or have been paid by foreigners, accused of being traitors to our country, and against all

those that have repressed and treated badly the civil population and robbed or stolen from or attempted crimes against the good of the people.

Fourth: Form new troops with all those Mexicans that show their interest in joining our struggle, including those that, being enemy soldiers, turn themselves in without having fought against us, and promise to take orders from the General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Fifth: We ask for the unconditional surrender of the enemy's headquarters before we begin any combat to avoid any loss of lives.

Sixth: Suspend the robbery of our natural resources in the areas controlled by the EZLN.

To the People of Mexico: We, the men and women, full and free, are conscious that the war that we have declared is our last resort, but also a just one. The dictators are applying an undeclared genocidal war against our people for many years. Therefore we ask for your participation, your decision to support this plan that struggles for work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. We declare that we will not stop fighting until the basic demands of our people have been met by forming a government of our country that is free and democratic.

JOIN THE INSURGENT FORCES OF THE
ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY.

Open Letter about Human Rights Abuses in Mexico, 2015

The following excerpts are from a letter sent to U.S. President Barack Obama by the international organization, Human Rights Watch, in anticipation of a meeting between President Obama and President Peña Nieto in January 2015.

Dear President Obama,

In anticipation of your meeting with President Enrique Peña Nieto on January 6, 2015, I am writing to share with you Human Rights Watch's serious concerns regarding the human rights crisis that Mexico is facing today.

This crisis has attracted international attention in recent months due to two major atrocities—the worst we’ve seen in Mexico in years—involving public security forces. One involves the killing of 22 people by soldiers in the town of Tlatlaya, in Mexico state, in June. The other involves the enforced disappearance of 43 students after they were taken away by municipal police forces in the town of Iguala, in Guerrero state, in September. While federal prosecutors have obtained arrests in both cases, the government initially delayed investigations, and state prosecutors sought to cover up military wrongdoing in the Tlatlaya case by using torture to coerce false testimony from witnesses.

Unfortunately, these cases are by no means isolated incidents. Instead, they reflect a broader pattern of abuse and impunity, and are in large part the consequence of the government’s failure to address it.

Since then-President Felipe Calderón launched a “war on drugs” in 2007, Mexican military and police have engaged in egregious human rights violations, including torture, extrajudicial executions, and enforced disappearances...

When President Peña Nieto took office two years ago, he recognized the human rights problems he inherited and his administration promised to take steps to address them. Yet his administration has largely failed to follow through on its own initiatives. For example, in 2013 it created a special unit of prosecutors to handle cases of people who had been disappeared by security forces. After nearly two years, the office has failed to successfully prosecute a single case from the past eight years. Instead of strengthening the unit, however, the administration recently decided to drastically reduce its budget...

The United States could play an important role in helping Mexico address this crisis. Unfortunately, however, your administration has been sending precisely the wrong message by failing to enforce the human rights requirements included in the Merida Initiative, a joint US-Mexico effort to combat organized crime.

The US has authorized more than \$2 billion in Merida funding to Mexico since 2007, a significant part of which has gone to training and equipping Mexican security forces. Fifteen percent of that assistance is supposed to be conditioned on Mexico’s meeting a set of basic human rights requirements, which include ensuring that abuses by security forces are being investigated and prosecuted.

Despite unequivocal evidence—including cases documented in the State Department’s own reports—that Mexico has failed to meet these requirements, your administration has repeatedly allowed the funds to be released. In its most recent report, in September 2014, the State Department justified the release of funds on the grounds that Mexico has demonstrated “progress” toward meeting the requirements, which is not the standard set by the law and does not reflect the reality in Mexico. More recently, when asked about the funds for Mexico conditioned on meeting human rights requirements, you said that “the best thing we can do is to be a good partner and to build on the progress that’s been made.”

Mr. President, in light of the Mexican government’s failure to address the problem of abuse and impunity, we believe the best thing the United States could do now to be a “good partner” would be to press President Peña Nieto to take this crisis more seriously. Concretely, in your upcoming meeting with President Peña Nieto, you should ask him to explain exactly what steps he is taking to ensure that Mexico prosecutes abuses. In addition, you should make it clear that if Mexico is unable to show significant results in prosecuting human rights crimes, your administration will no longer be able to certify that the human rights requirements in the Merida Initiative have been met.

Sincerely,

José Miguel Vivanco

Americas Executive Director

Human Rights Watch

(Full text available at www.hrw.org)