

Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional — EZLN)

Organization: Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional — EZLN)

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Date Entered: 2005-05-05

Description The EZLN is an insurgent army comprised primarily of Indigenous Mayan peoples from the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas, Mexico. In the face of economic, political, and social crises which had been intensifying both nationally and in Chiapas since the 1970s, the EZLN was formed on 17 November 1983 by Indigenous people and by urban mestizos (people of mixed European and Amerindian descent) from an urban guerrilla group called the Forces of National Liberation (FLN). The EZLN has deep roots in the tradition of Indigenous resistance and peasant organizing in Chiapas and also in the tradition of urban, Marxist, revolutionary organizing from within Mexico's urban and intellectual centres. According to Zapatista leaders, the Indigenous tradition "defeated" the Marxist-oriented approach of the urban guerrillas and led to the EZLN becoming an increasingly popular option for Indigenous political participation and struggle.

On 1 January 1994, the EZLN seized several towns and hundreds of ranches in Chiapas. The uprising was timed to coincide with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement which the Zapatistas considered a "death sentence" for Indigenous peoples because of the reforms it necessitated to the Mexican Constitution, ending land reform and redistribution. This would directly challenge the ability of Mexican farmers to earn a living against powerful US-based agribusiness interests and fundamentally threaten the capacity of Indigenous peoples to sustain cultural practices that exist in profound relation to the land. More broadly, the Zapatistas describe the uprising as a struggle for "justice, liberty, and democracy" for all Mexicans against the dictatorship of Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the corruption of the federal executive.

Suggested Reading: **Harvey, Neil.** 1998. *The Chiapas rebellion: The struggle for land and democracy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.