



Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, AC



San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas
February 12, 2010

Public Pronouncement

Armed attack on the Zapatista town of Bolón Ajaw by followers of the PRI in Agua Azul (the PRI is the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the political party that ruled Mexico for 70 years)

- **The state government of Chiapas is trying to avoid its responsibilities in this conflict, which originated in 2007 and has been denounced since that time, by blaming the Zapatista bases of support for the armed attack against the Zapatista village of Bolón Ajaw.**
- **The federal government is pushing for a military intervention against the civilian Zapatista bases of support and is increasing its intelligence operations with a mixture of military personnel and civilians.**
- **The Council of Good Government has been taking action to have a temporary truce based on the methods of the Indigenous Autonomous Justice System.**
- **A lack of interest on the part of the state government has closed the door on the possibility of distention (Distention is a term used in diplomacy. It indicates a truce between two groups in which the conflict has not yet been resolved. The truce is temporary in character. Neither of the two sides has arrived at an accord and it cannot guarantee that relations will not deteriorate.)**

At 9am on February 6, 2010, this Human Rights Center received information from the Council of Good Government, Heart of the Rainbow of Hope, of Morelia (a Zapatista community in Chiapas) with regards to the emergency situation existing in the zone because of an armed attack against the Zapatista village of Bolón Ajaw, belonging to the Autonomous Region of San José, Autonomous Municipality Comandanta Ramona, part of Caracol IV.

At 9:39am, functionaries of the state government of Chiapas established contact with this Center to see if we had information regarding a confrontation in Bolón Ajaw. We informed them of the request to intervene that we had received from the Council of Good Government and told them that we did not have any more information at the moment.

For this reason members of this Center went immediately to the headquarters of the Region San José to have interviews with the Authorities of the Autonomous Zapatista Rebel Municipality Commander



Ramona and to document the situation of the armed attack perpetrated against the Zapatista bases of support by the villagers of Agua Azul identified as members of the PRI, the same that, according to officials¹, are presumed to have turned in their weapons and abandoned their militancy in the Organization for the Defense of Indigenous and Campesino Rights (OPDDIC)² back in 2007.

It is also worth mentioning that this situation of aggression and harassment by the villagers of Agua Azul, members of the OPDDIC, against the Zapatista bases of support in the village of Bolón Ajaw, have been documented and denounced repeatedly by not only the Council of Good Government, but also by other diverse civil organizations, principally since the year 2007 because of an increase in the climate of violence by the OPDDIC.

Since that time, the state government is responsible for granting impunity to the actions of aggression and harassment perpetrated by the militants of the OPDDIC. The government has also been dealing with the conflict of the moment without looking for a definitive solution. This situation has placed the PRI group under a cloak of impunity that has favored their belligerence and escalated the climate of hostility against the villagers of Bolón Ajaw.

Thus, the presumed ex-militants of the OPDDIC invaded, just a few weeks ago, the recovered lands of the villagers of Bolón Ajaw, to be in a position to participate in negotiations for the ecotourism projects planned for this territory by the Federal and State Governments. In response, the Zapatista support bases have mobilized to retake control of this territory where the aforementioned group perpetrated an underhanded armed attack against the Zapatista support bases.

Given the seriousness of the situation, this Center recognizes the sensibility and the responsibility of the Council of Good Government, which in its capacity of Autonomous Authority, took immediate action to lower the tensions. This is why they proposed that this Human Rights Center take on the work of “bridging the communication gap”, a role which we have accepted. That is to say, “lend an ear” to the proposals of the state government of Chiapas, whose words appeared to represent the interests and voice of the PRI villagers of Agua Azul, and take them to the Council of Good Government for their consideration and new proposals.

From this position this Center was witness to the procedures of autonomous indigenous justice in which the proposals were fairly equally split between acting to show good faith for advancing towards the accords, and the insistence on the recognition of the series of aggressions to which the community of Bolón Ajaw has been subjected and because of which they request respect for their territory.

The state government, for its part, has insisted that the only viable solution to this conflict was to establish a dialogue at the Governmental Palace at which a representative of the Zapatista community of Bolón Ajaw would have to be present since the PRI leaders from Agua Azul would be there. This dialogue would be presided over by the Governor, and if they were not willing to meet these terms, then the only avenue left would be that of military intervention. This was the position maintained by representatives of federal agencies in Tuxtla Gutiérrez with representatives present from the state government of Chiapas, the Governor, the Secretary General of the Government, and the General Prosecutor of Justice of the State.

¹ Communication by the General Prosecutor of Justice of the State of Chiapas, December 20, 2007.

² This is a paramilitary group characterized by its belligerence and its role as an actor in the integral strategy of counterinsurgency implemented by the Mexican government against the EZLN, its civilian bases and its sympathizers.



It is important to show that while looking for an agreed upon resolution to this problem, the tensions in the region were elevated because of an operation carried out by mixed federal and state forces. There were fly-bys of helicopters in the community of Bolón Ajaw, there were six transport trucks with police, and approximately 15 trucks that belonged to the State Preventive Police that were installed in the community of Xanil, just 15 minutes from the crossroad of Agua Azul.

The movements of Intelligence Agents of the State that disguised themselves as reporters and tourists to enter into Agua Azul was constant. There were also people from the region that functioned as informants for various government agencies. Furthermore, this Center was informed of the incursion of a mixed group of forces that included the Mexican Army, the General Prosecutor of the Republic, and the Federal Police in Agua Azul.

With these actions, the state government did not support distention or back a solution to the conflict. The state government showed an unwillingness to correspond to the actions of distention established by the Council of Good Government; it continued to modify and radicalize its posture with regards to the steps to follow to arrive at a solid accord. In this way the state's "win-win" strategy became evident, logical in a political institution, but a strategy with little sense given the magnitude of the problem and the actors that had been intervening. This was a clear signal of a lack of respect for the community life of the indigenous villages.

Similarly, while expressing its disposition to arrive at an accord, the state used the media to distort and fabricate a version of events that would blame the Zapatista bases of support in Bolón Ajaw. Likewise, the state intended to criminalize the farmers that share common land that adhered to the Other Campaign from the Ejido San Sebastián Bachajón and by this means put pressure on them to participate in the dialogue and so isolate them and convince them to throw in the towel.

Given the position of the state government, the Council of Good Government has concluded that it no longer needs for the Center for Human Rights Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas to continue with the role it had developed of bridging the communication gap. This Center would like to say that having completed its responsibility in this exchange, one it accepted to facilitate better communication between the different parties and to construct accords that would help find a solution to this conflict, it has not emitted any public information.

Given the information that has been expressed here-in, this Center of Human Rights declares:

1. Profound concern because of what has happened in the village of Bolón Ajaw, the result of unacceptable actions and omissions on the part of the state government to resolve a problem in a climate of violence that has been generated against the Zapatista bases of support by the people of Agua Azul, people that are members of the PRI and presumably ex militants of the OPDDIC.
2. We reject the attempt of the state government to blame the armed attack against the Zapatista population of Bolón Ajaw on Zapatista bases of support, on the adherents to the Other Campaign of the Ejido San Sebastian Bachajón, and the general conditions for a military intervention, ordered by the federal government against a civilian population, a situation that aggravates the conditions of internal armed conflict that have not been resolved in Chiapas.



3. We hold the federal and state governments responsible for acting against the peace to which we have a basic right.

4. We make an urgent call to civil society, both national and international, to all those who are dedicated to the defense and practice of Human Rights, to pronounce themselves against the clear increase in violent actions against the autonomous process, both civil and peaceful, of the Zapatista support bases and their Councils of Good Government.

Note: Shortly this Center will make public a report that includes the documentation that we succeeded in getting from the zone, testimonies of the armed attack on the civilian Zapatista population of Bolón Ajaw.