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## Government, Zapatistas Reach Limited Accord in Latest Chiapas Negotiations

by LADB Staff

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Representatives of the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) reached an agreement in principle on a partial withdrawal of government troops from some villages in Chiapas. The agreement, negotiated in the town of San Andres Larrainzar, located a few miles north of San Cristobal de las Casas, was a prerequisite for the continuation of talks between the EZLN and President Ernesto Zedillo's administration. In a communique issued on May 15, eight representatives of the EZLN and four from President Ernesto Zedillo's administration said that the two sides had reached what they described as a "limited agreement" during three days of peace talks.

Under the agreement, government troops will withdraw from some positions, and Zapatista fighters would occupy portions of those areas until other arrangements are reached. Earlier, the EZLN rejected a government proposal to move the Zapatistas into three areas, where they would be provided with food and housing during the duration of the negotiations. While the accord is considered only a small step in the overall negotiation process, government negotiators said the accord marked the first major development toward turning the EZLN into a civilian organization.

"In a historical context, its the first time since January 1994 that the (Zapatistas) have signed a substantive accord," Jorge Del Valle, one of the four government negotiators, told Reuter news service. Similarly, the chief spokesperson for the EZLN negotiating team, Commander Tacho, praised government negotiators for showing flexibility. "We think that the government has understood, it has been listening," he told reporters. Tacho said EZLN negotiators would take that proposal back to their supporters for "consultations" before the next round of talks, which is scheduled for June 7.

According to the daily newspaper Reforma, the agreement reached between the EZLN and the government included the provision for government representatives to attend a session at one of the villages where the EZLN-government accord will be brought up for discussion and ratification. "We will not visit all the communities in the Lancandon Jungle, but will go to a determined point to see how the consultation process is conducted," said the government's chief negotiator Marco Antonio Bernal. "We have yet to finalize the details regarding which community we will visit."

The talks have yet to touch on the central issues of land, housing, roads, medical care, and other problems that sparked the EZLN's uprising in January 1994. At least 145 people died in the fighting before the government declared a cease-fire 12 days later. Representatives of two mediating teams the Comision Nacional de Intermediacion (Conai) and the Comision de Concordia y Pacificacion (Cocopa) praised the openness of the two sides to seek "peace with justice and dignity." Conai is a civilian-based group formed by Bishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristobal de las Casas, while Cocopa is composed of legislators from the four political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies.

(Sources: Notimex, 05/12/95; Associated Press, El Universal, La Jornada, New York Times, Reforma, Reuter, 05/16/95)

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