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## Zapatistas Claim Success in Political Referendum

*by LADB Staff*

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The Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) is claiming success in a nationwide referendum on indigenous rights held on March 21. EZLN leader Subcomandante Marcos said almost 3 million Mexicans participated in the plebiscite, with participation extending to expatriates residing in the US and other countries. The referendum asked Mexicans four questions dealing with indigenous rights and peace in Chiapas (see SourceMex, 1999-03-03).

The Fundacion Arturo Rosenblueth, which managed the vote count on behalf of the EZLN, said the referendum was well organized and attracted fairly strong participation at the more than 7,000 polling stations set by Zapatista members and volunteers throughout Mexico and in more than a dozen countries. As expected, the strongest participation in Mexico was in Chiapas, followed by Oaxaca, Veracruz, Mexico state, Jalisco, Hidalgo, and Mexico City.

Speaking to reporters, Marcos said the turnout was encouraging, particularly since the EZLN did not have to resort to handouts or bribes to entice supporters to go to the polls. His comments were in reference to charges that the PRI has won elections by offering voters food, clothing, building materials, and other gifts. Some charges of vote-buying were also reported in the recent PRD election for the party leadership. "We did not fool the people, since we gave them space to express their will and to deposit their vote," Marcos said.

Political analysts said the vote was an attempt by EZLN leaders to show strong support for the Zapatista cause. But some questioned Marcos' claim of broad support from indigenous communities throughout Mexico. "No one can deny that the EZLN has strong support among indigenous communities in many parts of Chiapas," columnist Tonatiuh Ramirez said in the daily newspaper Excelsior. "But we have yet to see evidence that the group is the undisputed leader of the more than 10 million indigenous people in Mexico." The Zedillo administration had few comments on the referendum, which was mostly ignored in the official broadcast media.

In statements to reporters, Interior Secretary Francisco Labastida Ochoa dismissed the results of the vote, saying the survey was "fixed" to bring about certain responses. Zedillo attempted to put his own spin on the administration's policies while delivering a speech in the Chiapas region of Las Margaritas. The president accused the EZLN of holding up the peace process by refusing to resume negotiations. "The people of Chiapas, like all Mexicans, recognize those who run from dialogue and solutions," said Zedillo.

Zedillo urged Congress to approve the amendments to seven articles of the Mexican Constitution he proposed in March 1998 (see SourceMex, 1998-04-01). But Zedillo's speech failed to address the government's refusal to comply with the San Andres accords negotiated by former Chiapas peace negotiator Manuel Camacho Solis and EZLN representatives in February 1996 (see SourceMex, 1996-02-21). Zedillo proposed his own constitutional amendments last year as a substitute for

the San Andres accords. But the EZLN has refused to enter into any direct dialogue with the government because of the administration's failure to comply with the these accords. (Sources: Los Angeles Times, 03/19/99; Associated Press, 03/21/99, 03/22/99; The News, El Universal, Spanish news service EFE, The Washington Post, The New York Times, 03/22/99; La Jornada, 03/22/99, 03/23/99; Novedades, 03/23/99; The Dallas Morning News, 03/21/99, 03/24/99; Excelsior, 03/22-24/99)

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