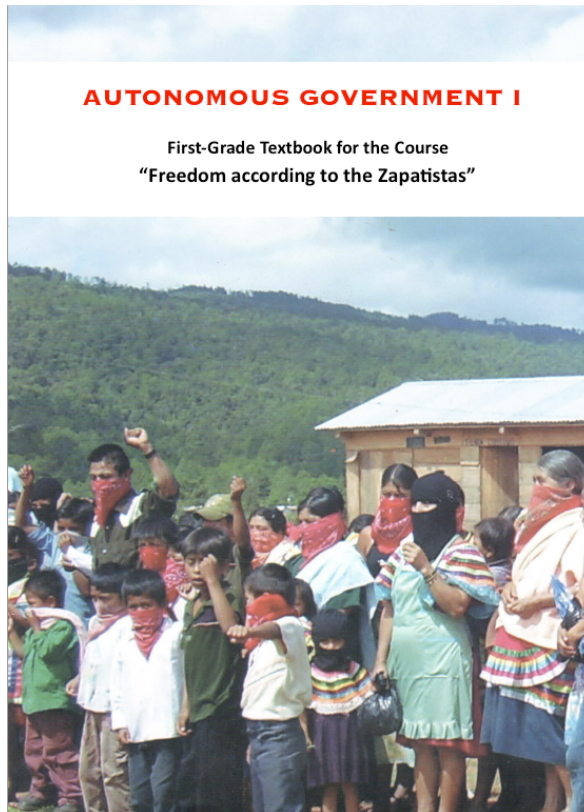


# Autonomous Government I

First-Grade Textbook for the Course “Freedom according to the Zapatistas”

Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional



2014

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**Caracol I: Mother of the Caracoles,  
Sea of Our Dreams**

La Realidad

# History of Autonomous Government

## **Lorena (Promoter in the Three Areas. MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)**

Before 1994, in what was the clandestine period, some of us compañeros and compañeras who had been working were already participating also since that time in the collective work, in different tasks that we had realized, but in that time no one thought that was already autonomy. Us health promoters participated there, we worked, we already had that work, the compañeros built a clinic called Pox, that clinic was staffed collectively, but in that time it was clandestine, no one knew how the work was, how the participation was; but that work was done, there was participation in that clinic. Like this we were working, no one imagined, no one knew that was going to be for what we are seeing now.

After this, when we declared war in 1994, we continued doing the work, we gave it more strength to be able to keep working, to keep participating in the different spaces where we were organized. We were supporting each other to see in what way we could do the work, but because of us being in the war we were losing the authorities of the communities, the local authorities, the agents of the community were being lost, as if they were becoming uncontrolled in the communities.

Also the leaders realized how we were working at that time, that the structure which we already had before the war had been lost. They saw that we could not continue like this, they took that work to control the people from civil society who arrived because we did not have that idea of how to be able to control them in each community, in each town where we work. That is why in that time they did that work, they saw how they are going to keep working, but they saw that they were not the ones who had to do that work, it was then when they told us that we had to prepare ourselves more to see for ourselves how we have to work.

They looked for other compañeros to analyze that problem which there was, that it was not the leaders job to do this. They made a call to the people and talked about all that work which they were doing but was not their responsibility, they talked about the work that they had to do because they saw that we were uncontrolled in the towns. They looked for the way to be able to work, they looked for the way in which we are going to work. Those compañeros discussed, saw that we have to form groups, organize ourselves, and that is when the creation of the 38 autonomous municipalities was declared in December 1994. Then the local and municipal authorities were already seeing the work, they have a position to be able to see the people, to be able to organize more, to be able to keep working better, to control in what way we are going to continue.

That is why the authorities saw that work which we are going to continue and that is how we can say now what autonomy is. With resistance we see that we now can force ourselves to carry



the work forward, before we could not advance, but from the things which are being presented in our communities now we realize that yes we are going to advance.

## **Doroteo (Former member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas)**

participated in the work of autonomy before the juntas de buen gobierno were formed, because there in our zone the autonomous municipalities were grouped together and then a directive association of municipalities was formed and we were participating in it. Then the formation of the juntas de buen gobierno took place and I was part of the first team in the Junta de Buen Gobierno in my zone, thus we are going to tell you a bit of the history that we remember of how the steps in autonomy were being taken until arriving to where we are in these moments.

Before 1994 different work was being done, as today we continue doing it, although it was very minimal in that time but is worked to give way to what today we continue to do. In 1994 with the war the towns were uncontrolled in civil matters, in the civil structures of the authorities, like commissioners and municipal agents, but the problems and matters to be resolved did not finish, they always were present, civil problems took place, civil necessities, but there was no one to control them, to resolve them.

The military and political leaders took those tasks, and they took them for a time. But then they realized that it was not their role, so once again the movement began to organize local authorities, commissioners, and agents, in the Zapatista towns. So the new local authorities began to take up the matters of justice and began to see how to resolve the civil necessities, like health, education, and other things.

Some months after those towns began to group together, all from the initiative of the military and political leader *compañeros*, the towns grouped together and like this we got to December 1994 with the publication of the 38 autonomous municipalities. There in our zone, in that time four autonomous municipalities were formed, one of them is San Pedro de Michoacán, which in that time had its municipal seat in Guadalupe Tepeyac; the following municipality was Tierra y Libertad, with its municipal seat in a community which is called Amparo Aguatinta; the following municipality is Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, with its municipal seat in a community which is called Santa Rosa el Copán; and the following municipality is General Emiliano Zapata with its municipal seat in Amador Hernández. That is how what are the civil matters began to be worked more formally and like this autonomous government was born. All this was born because we in the towns before creating the autonomous municipalities declared ourselves in resistance and many necessities came that had to be resolved, that is why the necessity was seen to group ourselves together in towns, in regions, and form our municipalities and like this autonomous Zapatista government was born.

All that was taking place according to what was within our reach of abilities and possibilities in the towns. An example we can cite: the municipality San Pedro de Michoacán did not have a town hall like the other three, in that time that municipality used as a town hall a dormitory in the IMSS hospital, which is in that community. The municipality Tierra y Libertad in that time used an abandoned house that some people who there they called appraisers had left, who did I don't know what, but they left their abandoned house and that house was used as the town hall. In the municipality Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas they used the town school, in General

Emiliano Zapata they used a building, an abandoned house, and that was the town hall. Like this the work of autonomy began in the zone, according to the possibilities of the towns and the abilities of the compañeros, because no one was prepared for this but necessity forced us to and we had to do it. Like this time was passing and there in the zone we were working in this way. So with the war declaration and with the declaration of the peoples in resistance, the solidary brothers and sisters from different countries and different states of our country began to arrive at our communities.

Unfortunately since our zone is very lacking in communication, the towns were few and the regions were few which had communication in that time, the solidary people began to get to know some towns more than others and in those they began to focus their support more, as much with economic resources and with aid in some work; while, in the other more marginalized towns they did not know if that aid was being given, if it was arriving.

So the political and military leader compañeros, realized that a disequilibrium was taking place among the towns, or rather that it was not level, they realized that as much with the aid, as well as in the work that was being organized in each municipality, was not level. That was how by their initiative the municipal councils met, they began to make their assemblies to begin to see how each municipality is, what aid it has, what work is being realized, what work is being organized to reinforce the resistance more.

Many meetings began to take place and back in 1997, after several meetings, they named the assembly of municipal councils the Association of Autonomous Municipalities, this is what the meetings of municipal councils that took place were called. The months passed, the years passed, and the work was done like that, organized. In that time the association of municipalities began to see the tasks, the health, education, and commerce work, and during that time a general store was created, which is in a village called Veracruz, with the idea of supporting the workers who are in the hospital that is in San José del Río full time, in the municipality of San Pedro de Michoacán; that was the work, initiatives that were taking place in those meetings of the Association of Municipalities.

Getting to 2002, the compañeros of the association of municipalities, decided to name a group of compañeros who were in charge of handling the coordination of that health, education, and commerce work. Seven compañeros and one compañera were named, there were eight compañeros who were in charge of handling the coordination of that work, that group of compañeros was called the Directive of the Association of Autonomous Municipalities. We were working like this, just as it began in the municipalities, with the conditions that our towns have.

We kept working we got to 2003, with the formation of the juntas de buen gobierno. We got to the juntas de buen gobierno but in our zone we did not know if the members of the directive of the association of municipalities some day would be authorities and be government. In 2003, when the juntas de buen gobierno were created, the people and the association of municipalities decided that those eight compañeros, members of the Directive of the Association of Municipalities, would go on to be authorities in the Junta de Buen Gobierno. Those eight compañeros are the ones who took the positions in the first period of the Junta, which was from 2003 to 2006, that is how it took place under the same conditions which the people had, the Junta de Buen Gobierno did not have an appropriate building.

Days before the juntas de buen gobierno were made public the towns constructed, in an urgent way, a building for the Junta de Buen Gobierno and a building for each one of the autonomous municipalities, in the middle of the caracol, the offices were constructed with the materials which

the towns had in that moment, used wood, used metal sheets, and like this it began. The constructions were made and in less than one week they were finished, like this it began, their offices were ready, August 2003 came and the juntas de buen gobierno were made public.

After the publication the towns got together, proud of having formed one more government body in autonomy, and with a party, with a great celebration, they formally installed the new autonomous government, handing over the office to the new authorities; we can say that it was a ton, but the people turned over a table and two chairs to the Junta de Buen Gobierno, that was their material, and a building a little bit smaller than this space where we are now, that is how the conditions were in which we began. Days later, someone out there donated a little machine of the oldest sort and with that the work begun, we received the empty space and we began like that, the work initiatives were taking place and we were beginning, arranging the space.

The government being formally installed, one of the first tasks was to organize the work areas. The work areas were organized according to the necessities, that were taking place in the towns. There in the zone they organized in the beginning nine work areas: health, education, commerce, transit, administration, agriculture, justice, human rights, and encampments.

These areas were formed and eight compañeros had to take them, aside from that they also organized to cover the office work permanently. Groups of two compañeros were organized for two-week shifts but that did not last, two shifts and we realized that it does not work, two compañeros cannot handle all of the tasks that had to be done there, for eight or nine areas two compañeros are not enough. We were forced to form two teams of four compañeros per team and work for two weeks each team, each one of the team members taking charge of two areas, like this we worked until finishing the period.

Those were some of the Junta de Buen Gobierno's first tasks, although aside from those there were other extra ones which we also had to cover as authorities and as government. What happened was that upon knowing that we are in the office, many people, compañeros and non-compañeros, came to us for different matters, for different things.

We had to act as lawyers, like in the system we can say, who have their lawyer for different matters, there we had to act as lawyers, we had to advise different people, the compañeros when they have a problem, we had to advise them on how they have to resolve the different problems that they had, giving them ideas was what we had to do. We also had to be secretaries, because if you resolve a matter you do not have a secretary who makes the documents for you, we ourselves had to do it.

More or less one month after the beginning of our roles as the Junta de Buen Gobierno, a problem manifested itself with an organization called the CIOAC; they kidnapped one of our compañeros along with a truck, so we were forced to denounce it but we did not have an idea of how to make a denunciation. The members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno and the municipal councils had to give our word, one or two words, to make that denunciation as a team, each one giving their word and like this we formed a denunciation, it was very difficult for us but we did make it.

We did many tasks, we acted as secretaries, we acted as cooks, we acted as sweepers because we had to clean our office and our whole work area, we did not have someone in particular to do those tasks and we keep doing it like this as of the present day.

When we were already in our roles, the towns and the municipalities began to discuss how this group of compañeros had to be supported, because they are permanent in their work. Organization began and the towns decided to provide a contribution of 10 pesos each one, 10 pesos

per person in the zone, to give 30 pesos per day to those compañeros while they were on their shift.

The work was done in this way for some months, each compañero who covered their shift had to receive their 30 pesos per day, those were the towns' agreements, but some months later, one of the military leaders, together with the political leaders explained to us the advantages and disadvantages of support of that type. Analyzing the advantages and disadvantages which they explained to us, as a team we the Junta de Buen Gobierno decided to suspend that support and it was made known to the people why we decided to suspend it.

We analyzed that it was not the viable path to become accustomed to working in that way, thus it was made known to the people and each town, each region, each autonomous municipality discussed another type of support, some were supported in one way, others in another way, but no longer with money. Since then and until the present moment there has not been more support with money, that is how we realized that money is not what can help the work of autonomy or the work of autonomous government.

There we realize that no one is working with a base in money, we see that some do receive support from their town in their work, with basic grains, different support according to how the town goes agreeing upon it, but not money and that is how we have been working these nine years in the Junta de Buen Gobierno. With that we realize that conscience and desire to serve our people is the greatest thing and it is what makes everything work, it is not money.

Like this we kept working and one year after that first period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno began, it was put into discussion with the people how it is that the changes of authorities must be done, because we realized that upon our departure, the whole team, a new team was coming in, all new and we felt that we are obligated to advise those new compañeros with our experience.

Seeing this the initiative was launched with the towns that one year before we left office, at the very least one compañero for each municipality is to be named to begin the work together with us one year before, the idea is that he stays when we go and he is the one who advises the new compañeros. In this way it has been handled until the present day, the authorities there do not change as a whole team, some leave, others stay, and like this it has been working.

## Questions

*I did not understand well the support that the towns give to the delegates of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, but principally I want to know how they are organized at the zone level of what is Caracol I.*

Different types of support were given after that. They support some compañeros in their work, it was different what each town agreed upon. If the compañero must be given the two weeks which they go to cover their turn, well 15 compañeros are going to work in his or her milpa, if the compañero must be given 50% well they give 7 or 8 days, and those days have to be supported for the service of the people. Others no, they are supported with their grains, their corn, their beans. And it is worth telling you also that some compañeros do not receive any type of support, their town did not come to any agreement, but the compañero did not fall behind and carried forward the work.

*The question is if only the town where the compas live is the one which supports them or is it the zone.*

After that there was no support at the zone level, the towns organized and some at the municipal level, but since that occasion and up to the present, there has not been support at the zone level.

*How much time does each period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno last?*

Three years, thus we have already passed, with the current Junta that is there now, four teams of compañeros. Each compañero who completes their period, the period is three years of work.

*Has it happened that there are compañeros who lose heart and leave their position?*

Yes it has happened that there are compañeros who lose heart in their position for different reasons and they leave. Some say “This is why I’m leaving,” or they explain their reasons, others don’t even explain to us, they leave their shift and don’t come back. So we are forced to inform their town where that compañero is, and that town has to name another compañero to substitute to not leave the space empty.

*Is the Junta de Buen Gobierno separate from the Council?*

That’s it, there is a team who their task is to do the work of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, apart from that there are the Autonomous Municipal Councils.

*Since the beginning of the Junta de Buen Gobierno was there participation of compañeras as members of the Junta or years later? What did the compañeras do to enter into their role as the Junta de Buen Gobierno?*

Since the beginning there was a compañera participating, because one of the compañeras who began in the Junta de Buen Gobierno was part of the Association of Autonomous Municipalities, and since the directive team of the association of municipalities went on to be the Junta de Buen Gobierno, well that compañera also went on to be the Junta de Buen Gobierno, and like this work was done in the whole period, with a compañera. In the second period there already were more compañeras because work had to be done in the towns, to make conscience with the compañeras so that they participate and like this it was taking place. In the second period there were six compañeras and now in this period there are twelve compañeras. Like this, with much sacrifice and much effort, the compañeras have been giving their participation.

*What do the compañeras do, do they choose among themselves in the municipality or is it together with the men and women that the compañeras are named? What is the way in which the compañeras are chosen?*

There is an agreement that goes per municipality the choosing of the compañeras. Each municipality has to contribute one compañera or two compañeras, according to how it may be, and it goes per municipality, arriving in the municipality it goes down to the towns. In the municipality they agree on which compañera has to do the work, they have a shift in which it is checked which town has not contributed a compañera to the Junta, like this they do it with the men also, with the compañeros, it is seen which town has not contributed and that one is responsible for contributing a member for the Junta de Buen Gobierno, it can be a compañero or a compañera.

If it is necessary to choose a compañera not only the compañeras meet and choose her, the assembly is done, men and women, all the participants, so there the compañera is named. Like this it is done, it is like a shift that the towns take, so then the town that is responsible has to choose within its members who is going to do the work, it has to take out the authority then.

*How many members of the Junta are there?*

In the first Junta, eight; in the second, twelve; and now in the current one, 24 compañeros. It is worth mentioning that the members for the Junta are chosen in this way, that it is necessary to go making a shift in the towns and in the municipalities, well a team comes out for the Junta,

a group of compañeros leave and new ones stay. Currently, with the new selection which was done two or three months ago, for the following period now it has changed, it was seen that that way did not work, so by agreement of the zone now it is a matter of looking for compañeros who are known for their performance in their work, for their experience and like this the current ones are chosen who will enter into the role for the following period.

*How many municipalities does the Junta de Buen Gobierno encompass?*

In our zone there are four autonomous municipalities.

*The members of the Junta how do they get to their caracol?*

If there is public transportation well they go with transportation, if there is no transportation they go walking. Their fare comes from the few resources that the Junta has, that they do receive, the support for their fare nothing more. If it is 20 pesos well their 20 pesos to return and their 20 pesos to get there.

*How is the food of the members of the Junta covered?*

It is the same, it is supplied with what the Junta has. In the beginning, in the first period of the Junta, each compañero had to carry their tortillas, only their tortillas. Then later in the following periods it was changing and now everything is done with the resources that the Junta has.

*When the delegates leave some leave and others stay, is it from the same team which stays or how?*

No, in the beginning we were eight members, we were like that and two years later, at the beginning of the third year four more members entered, four new members. The eight first ones who began in 2003 left in 2006, but the four who entered in 2005 had to leave in 2008, and like this they again named four more, and like this it came to be done as a stairway so that when there is a change of authorities they are not all new, but rather there are already compañeros with experience.

We realized that if a team is going to be on the Junta de Buen Gobierno three years, when those three years of their period are up they are going to leave and other new ones are going to enter, the problem is that the new ones do not have a clue, they do not know anything about how the work is going to be done. So what was seen is that before the group that is on duty leaves, a group that works with those who are going to leave has to enter, they enter one year before the period is finished so that they can learn how the work is, and now those who completed their three-year period can leave freely. The idea is that the one which entered one year before more or less already has experience and can teach it to the rest, that is why as of today it continues like this, so that more or less there already is a bit of experience in the new team which is going to stay.

*We understand that when there is a general assembly in the zone, the assembly is the maximum authority in that moment and when the assembly is finished after two days or three days, the command is left in the Junta de Buen Gobierno, so when there are emergency things, like a hurricane or whatever it may be, can the Junta decide what to do or does a special assembly have to be convened? Do you have an emergency plan?*

The truth is that there is not any plan, but when problems like that take place it is decided what to do, some principles might be violated, but it is not because it is done from bad intentions, like to say that there is a desire to take the place of the people, it is decided because they are emergency cases. But since we have the municipal councils on hand an assembly is made, urgently, among the councils that we have on hand in their office in the caracol and the Junta, and some immediate, quick decisions are made.

For example, we the first ones in the Junta de Buen Gobierno were responsible for seeing a problem like that with Hurricane Stan on the coast. What happened? Today it took place and the next day they are asking us what we have to do, at that time we could not convene a special meeting because our compañeros in the towns live far away, a great distance, so a meeting had to be made between the Junta de Buen Gobierno and the Autonomous Municipal Councils, we had to provide a bit of support to the affected compas with what the Junta was able to at that time, with the resources that it had at that time. The day after we received the information a team from the Junta traveled, went in a truck with some provisions and took it to where the compañeros were, but they also convened special meetings to see how they could support the towns, according to their possibilities, with corn, with beans, with tortillas, with some other things that can support those compañeros.

It was done like this in that case, the Junta began to see how to support the compañeros with their own resources that they had, and then it was made known to the towns what it is that was done. Then came the support from the compañeros from the towns giving their contribution of corn, of beans, and then came the solidary support from other countries and from other solidary brothers and sisters here in Mexico. The helping went like this then later with more food, with the reconstruction of their houses and other necessities. But there is not a plan that the people have made for emergency cases, but it has been done in that way, we have the municipal councils on hand and with them we make agreements to resolve in the moment.

*The resources for that shop that was made came by way of a collective work or was it a donation? What work was done or how was it advancing?*

In that time when the store was made, there was a disequilibrium between the autonomous municipalities, or rather the municipalities that there were some had a fund, others did not have a fund; some had projects, others did not have projects; some had donations, others did not have donations; so the complaint came. The association of municipalities did a meeting and there it began to be discovered, it began to be delved into and seen how we were in the zone. So then there was the hospital in San José del Río, in the hospital there were compañeros but they did not report, or rather it was uncontrolled, not even the municipalities to which they belonged knew if there was a donation or not, so it was loose.

When there then were the authorities of the four municipalities, the authorities of the association of municipalities, they took the role as a common authority, and they had to bring in those who had work and who belonged to the zone. They dragged the compañeros who were in the hospital and they asked them for reports, they asked them how they were spending the donations that came in over the years that they then had working there, they asked them for reports and they asked them what was left in that moment, they were asked if there was something and what they were going to do with that which was left.

The truth is that there was no plan on what to do with those donations, they were being spent on food, that is why the association of autonomous municipalities decided that it was not going to continue to be done like that, it was said that what there was there was ours. In that time there were 40 thousand pesos that were stored, getting moldy, as it is said, and the compas from the association of municipalities saw that there also was an abandoned shop that before belonged to the government.

“Now it is ours. We have to put in supplies to sell retail and wholesale,” said the compas from the association of municipalities.

So the compas made an agreement: we are going to take this money, but it is not so that we are going to spend the capital, which is 40 thousand pesos, we are going to invest it and take the profit and return it to the hospital so that it keeps functioning, so with what is being generated we go along supporting those who are controlling the hospital, but now reporting, on how they are spending it from here forward. And that is how it was, it was money that was asleep, which are donations from our solidary brothers and sisters, so it had to be created into something so that it is not just there, the funds were allocated to settle to expenses of the permanent personnel of the hospital in San José del Río; in other areas, like commerce, they are going to talk to us about how many shops they have now, but the result is thanks to what the first shop gave.



# Roles of Autonomous Government

## Fanny (Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno)

In autonomous government, in the work of being a local or municipal authority and on the Junta de Buen Gobierno, responsibility is assumed through conscience. In autonomous government we are functioning through conscience and without any interest in earning a salary, because the participation of all is needed for the proper functioning of autonomous government. Serving the people is done with the conscience that each one of us has, not through money, it is not with the interest of earning a salary, but rather is serving our people, with support or without support per se we are realizing the work of the construction of autonomy.

In the second period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno the *compañeros* were supported on two occasions each one, they were supported with 800 pesos, this support was only given two times during the three years of their period. In the third period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno some *compañeros* were supported by their towns, according to how the town was organized is how the *compañeros* were supported. The fares of the members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno were taken from the resources of the Junta, which are the resources of the people, this is how supporting comes regarding fares and other support for the authority *compañeros*.

Also the participation of the *compañeras* was being promoted because in the first period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno only one *compañera* participated, and there was where the promotion of the *compañeras*' participation began. In the second period there were already six *compañeras* who realized that work. In the third period there are now twelve *compañeras* who are realizing the work within autonomous government.

In this work that is being promoted the participation of the *compañeras* is being demanded, this is done through assemblies. We see that there is more participation of the *compañeras* in the various work areas that we are realizing, like in education, health, and in other work areas. That is how we see that the participation of women is advancing more, it is not at 100%, but more participation of women is being seen.

Also within autonomous government various work areas are handled, as with education, commerce, health, communication, justice, agriculture, transit, projects, encampments, BANAPAZ, BANAMAS, and administration. These are the work areas which are being handled within autonomous government.

In the beginning, when the Junta de Buen Gobierno began, since the *compañeros* were few, each one was responsible for three to four work areas, they were very few. In the second period of the Junta there were already twelve *compañeros* and the work that we had to do was being balanced more, there were then two or three work areas per *compañero*. In this third period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno there are 24 of us, the work has now balanced more.

There are 24 of us who make up the Junta de Buen Gobierno and we cover a shift of two weeks each month. The various work areas are balanced between *compañeras* and *compañeros*, we are

two teams in the Junta, in each area there are two compañeros and two compañeras, that is how the functioning of the Junta de Buen Gobierno is, they are the areas which are handled.

## Questions

*How has the participation of women been promoted in your zone?*

It is being promoted through meetings with the autonomous councils and the towns, that is how that work has been realized. The participation of the compañeras has been being demanded, municipal meetings are done, local meetings, it is there where the participation of the compañeras in the various work areas is promoted.

*As a Junta de Buen Gobierno what do you do when you see that there is a necessity or a problem? For example, when it is necessary to make a rule, does that demand the relationship of the various government bodies because the Junta de Buen Gobierno is not going to impose a law. How is it that these tasks are done, because there democracy comes into play, because the insurgent leaders are not going to be there all the time and we understand that nor is the information commission, that is the CCRI, so you, as the Junta de Buen Gobierno, how do you make one thing that is needed go on its way, be it a law, rule, or something to resolve a problem, some matter that is necessary to take forward, a project or whatever it may be. How is it that the Junta de Buen Gobierno, MAREZ, authorities and people interact?*

The initiatives, in many cases, take place within the Junta de Buen Gobierno, in other words the needs are seen from the various work areas. If there is a need to make an agreement or a task that has to be collective or as a zone, or some collective work as a municipality that is not going on its way, there has to be an agreement on how the tasks have to function well, what is done is that ordinary assemblies are convened, which we normally do every three months in the zone, where the municipal councils and all the authorities and also the different work areas meet to plan, to analyze, discuss, propose how the tasks are going to function better.

In these assemblies is where the agreements on work are come to among all. Many times there in the assembly everything cannot be decided on because behind it is our people, the bases, so proposals are made and are taken to consultation with the towns and in the next assembly the response then comes how it is, if it is good or the towns proposed something else. That is how everything goes along being defined, be it rules or work plans that have to be done in the zone. Also this relationship takes place when there is, for example, a job or a project in a municipality, there the relationship is with the councils to see how the work is going, the reports on how the work is functioning, if it is functioning or it is not functioning. We have collective work, for example work on a cattle project in the zone, a zone milpa, or also there is that coordination among the councils and the authorities; when a job is necessary we have to check with the councils, and the councils with their authorities, yes there is that relationship.

Also when there are urgent cases as the Junta de Buen Gobierno special assemblies are convened, when it is urgent to do something, an agreement or a work plan, special assemblies are convened. Many happen, we say as members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, but also supported by the CCRI, which also gives their idea, they orient us, they say: this is missing, this must be done. With these ideas they then give us motivation as if to orient us and do the work; also the leadership that we have in the zone orients us.

*Could you tell us about an exercise, an experience of how you do in practice our word which we have said “governing in collective”? Some example of how it is that it is done collectively?*

Within the Junta group we are divided into different work areas, some coordinate health, others coordinate education, transit, but the one who takes education is not the one who resolves all the educational questions. The work of government we carry collectively because we resolve the matters among all, for example if a problem of justice comes, well not only the one who coordinates justice matters is going to resolve it, but rather the other work areas intervene to solve that matter.

Also in many cases we meet with the councils, when there is a matter to resolve and it is not within our ability as the Junta de Buen Gobierno, but the municipal councils are there so we are supported with them. We meet with the municipal councils and the Junta de Buen Gobierno to define, be it an issue or a work plan that is going to be done, or a project that is going to be put on its way.

When an issue is not within our abilities also it is seen in the assemblies, in other words the way of governing, the work that is done in autonomous government, it is not that they only leave it to the Junta and that they see what is going to be done; or in the case of the municipality that the councils see it, no, but rather we are all assuming a responsibility. As the Junta de Buen Gobierno, although we are divided up between work areas, but yes we do the work in a collective way.

*Some bitter experience within your work as autonomous government?*

We have had difficulty in the case of plans that we have made and have not turned out well for us. Although we planned them, discussed them, it does not mean that all the plans that we have made turned out well for us, at times they did not turn out well, and we are being honest in saying that there are things that we did plan and discuss but we did not manage to see the consequences that they are going to bring, we do the work and later we realize that we have failed.

For example, before the whole transit issue was in control, the cars that travel on that route, but later an organization, which is the CIOAC, began to put in other cars and take out of control what we were handling as the Junta, they went outside of the rules that we handled as the Junta de Buen Gobierno and put their cars in like that without permission. What is it that we thought? We analyzed it with the municipal councils and we saw that a roadblock had to be done. We did that roadblock but we did not see the consequences that it was going to bring; after a while they put a different roadblock against us and there they did not let us pass at all.

So we say that what we decided, what we planned to do brought us consequences and we realized that it was because we did not manage to see the consequences that what we decided to do could bring us, that stays with us as an experience that not all the things that we plan go well. When we do not know how to analyze it, when we do not think of what consequences something that we are going to do can bring, if there are things that affect us, well we are being honest that it does not go for us exactly like we intended it to or like we want it to be and something else turns out for us.

*We understand that it is necessary to govern collectively and within the Junta de Buen Gobierno team they are distributed in each area, there is the responsibility for the one who is in education, the one who is in health or in agroecology, or whatever it may be, there is collectivism, do the compañeros ask for help or is it necessary to be poking that compañero, compañera, that it is his or her responsibility that he or she must ask for help if needed?*

We entered into the work and not all of us have that ability to understand what exactly is our role, many times we go in and we do not know what our role is, so the reasons for which government is handled in collective, for which we do the work in collective, one is because we know that the responsibility belongs to everyone, it is shared; the other is also because we are clear that within the team us members who are assuming the responsibility as autonomous authorities well we do not all have the ability. There are compañeros who have more experience in the work and others who do not, what we do is that we share the experience with each other, the one who has more knowledge of the work shares it with the rest.

In many cases the compañera o compañero is restless because they know their responsibility, so they have to ask: "How do I have to take my work forward? I am going to ask to see if I do it like this or do it in another way." There are compañeras and compañeros who also feel that responsibility to ask if they do not know, it does not matter if they are in education or transportation, if they do not understand something or do not know how to do it they ask how they have to do it. But there are compañeros for whom this is difficult and we have to tell them: "This must be done, compañero, this must be done in this way, this must be checked." It is always necessary to be motivating or to tell the compañero what has to be done, it is necessary to be critical upon saying that it is not that we all are now looking after all our responsibility, that we now know what it is and in the face of that I have to prepare myself because I have to take my work forward. We have to be helped so that we realize, orient ourselves, and know what exactly our role is or what it is that we have to carry out.

I think that it is necessary to be there as if watching what it is that is working, what it is that is not working, and to whom it corresponds, what it is that has to be done, orient how the work has to be taken forward. There are compañeros also who know of their responsibility and they also ask for orientation on how to take the work forward. That takes place among members of the Junta but also with other compañeros, as well as those from the CCRI, if there is something that we cannot do or we are lacking, also we ask them for orientation on how we can do it. It is a way like we are doing it, in a collective manner, but there are some who need to be told what has to be done, and compañeros who don't, well they themselves ask for orientation so the work may go forward.

*Is there some idea on how the future is going to be with respect to our autonomy? Have you thought how we are going to do it, because others are going to come and then others, has some idea come on how it would be?*

Yes, we have analyzed that, but those of us who are assuming the work in the Junta de Buen Gobierno, those who have been members already have experience. We arrived without any preparation on how the Junta's work is, many of us were an authority in the town before and many compañeros and compañeras were not. We arrived and had to make a denunciation, we had to fix an issue, when we have never done it, there was no preparation before, so that is why sharing experiences takes place. We ask ourselves what it is that has to be done, an alternative, because this work, as they have told us and we are understanding, is not something for 10 years, this continues, and future generations are going to come, if we do not do anything, just the same those who are going to come are going to have to enter into it without experience and the same thing is going to happen.

What we saw, thanks also to the orientation of our leaders is that trainings have to be done, that is to say, that the compañeros and compañeras who were already members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno now have that experience of how it was when they worked, what problems they saw

or what it is that they did that worked well for them, now they are able to share for the rest of the compañeros. A first training has already taken place for all the authorities, where the compañeros and compañeras who were already members of the Junta are sharing their experience. Those authority compañeros go to the towns also to explain there how the functioning is within the Junta de Buen Gobierno, how a denunciation is made, everything that is done there.

Those steps that are taken, are in process, because what it is that is wanted is that afterward the one who is going to come to be a member of the Junta is no longer going to say “I don’t know, I am not trained for that.” That is why it is now being prepared, when they going to arrive there if they must fix an issue, if they must make a denunciation, if they must make a letter, a summons, they are no longer going to say that they do not know how to do it because they are now going to be prepared, going to know what is the role that they have to do like health, like education, like transportation, like justice.

Until now that is the plan that continuity must be given to that preparation and it is for everyone, not only are we going to prepare the authorities, because since we say that we are democratic and it is the people who decide who is going to be the authority, they are not going to choose someone just because they are already trained. When the people choose a compañero or a compañera it should be because that is they saw as convenient, but know that the compañera is prepared, that is why the preparation is going to be for everyone. That is what is being done so that future generations have an idea and experience for when they are an authority, be it as the Junta de Buen Gobierno or as municipal councils, or even as a local authority in their town.

# **Duties of Autonomous Government**

## **Tony (Member of the Municipal Council. MAREZ Tierra y Libertad)**

As part of the duties of autonomous government we have several important duties which are to turn in reports and present proposals to the towns, also to report on any collective work that we have at the zone or municipal level. We have been doing that in our zone through the general assemblies which are done at the zone level through the participation of the authorities of each town. This is how the information goes down to the towns so that the towns are informed or so that whichever proposal that takes place before the assembly goes down to the towns to consult among all the compañeros and compañeras about whichever work is intended to be realized.

Another one of the duties that we have as part of the autonomous government is always keeping an eye on how many compañeros we have at the municipal or zone level, like also how many towns there are at the zone level or as municipalities. We have checked that through the censuses that we have requested from the authorities of each town, we ask them to send us the census to see the number of compañeros and compañeras that there are at the zone level or as municipalities.

Another one of the duties that we also have as autonomous government is to create the work initiatives which are necessary in our towns, but this also must be done respecting the decisions of the towns. Some of the initiatives that we have been able to take forward in our zone are the following: cattle work collective, in the zone milpa also we have promoted organic fertilizer, agroecology training to learn to make organic fertilizer.

Through initiatives, the various levels of what is health and education have also been created. Another one of the initiatives that as part of the autonomous government of our zone we have had was to buy an ultrasound for the hospital, and also in the various municipalities of our zone.

Also we have the construction of the Junta de Buen Gobierno's offices, with their rooms divided for each area. A fund has been created with the name BANAMAS, which is for the compañeras, it is an economic fund for them to administer to give the loan to do whichever collective work they ask for, those loans have to be paid with the interest owed that the compañeras put.

Those are initiatives which the autonomous government has promoted and which have been achieved through the consultation of the towns, have been realized through the support of the towns and the municipalities, this work is the initiatives which have been approved.

## **Rosy (Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)**

The duty of the Junta is to balance the four municipalities, for example, in matters of projects which our solidary brothers and sisters give. There is a relationship between authorities in what

are the three health areas: midwives, medicinal plants, and healers, well those are the three areas of health that are being promoted by the Junta de Buen Gobierno, together with the municipalities. Also we have the radiotransmission work, in this work we are also interacting with municipalities and zone to check the functioning of the radiotransmitters, check the work of the radio hosts, we have our eye on the devices which they use, we see if they are complete or if they are not complete. The radio hosts are taking training for there to be improvement in the municipalities and in the Junta de Buen Gobierno.

We also have our eye on, as municipalities or towns, if there is food, if there are work materials. In questions of fertilizers or chemical pesticides we are checking that they do not come in to our communities, to the towns, nor into the municipalities, because they affect health.

We also check that drugs do not enter our communities, because as autonomous authorities we see that in the municipalities or towns where they enter there are many problems, so we are seeing as municipalities, as authorities, how to control it because drugs are not allowed in our towns.

We also see how to control alcoholic beverages, which also take place in the communities or municipalities, we are trying to see with the authorities, towns, and municipalities, see about controlling it because it affects the family and health

## Questions

*In the towns which are mixed, Zapatistas with non-Zapatistas, how is it controlled so drug addiction or alcoholism does not enter?*

The way is being sought to deal with it together with the compañeros or towns, it is what is being checked to not allow these things to enter into our communities.

*If a member of the organization makes that mistake of consuming alcohol or drugs, what sanction is applied?*

A punishment is given, for example, if in a community someone makes that mistake, the community gets together and makes an agreement on what punishment is going to be given to the compañero or compañera who committed that crime; or also they go to the Junta de Buen Gobierno together with the autonomous councils and there is where they see how it can be resolved and how to give the punishment.

*You mentioned the duties of the Junta, it was said that one of them is to inform about the Junta de Buen Gobierno's work in the zone, and another is to report to the towns. The question is who guarantees the reporting that the Junta gives on the administration of the few resources that there are, who guarantees that what they said is in fact true? Or is it that the towns completely trust you, in that you do not exaggerate the accounting or make anything up? Is the reporting true?*

Currently there is vigilance in the towns, a team of authorities from the towns has been formed, they call them the filter, they are the ones who do the revision of the Junta de Buen Gobierno's accounting. But this did not exist from the beginning of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, in the beginning there was no vigilance, much less a filter; those from the Junta made the reports, they sent them to the CCRI, to the military leaders and then to the autonomous councils so they would arrive to the towns.

Really a verification of the accounts to see if they are clear accounts or not, sincerely, compañeros, no town, no authority has sat down to analyze in detail each one of the reports that has

been given. That is lacking in our zone, a team that is able to do that work and someone two or three days after the Junta de Buen Gobierno's report verifying the account well, who checks that there is no misuse of the resources.

That is why now another group of *compañeros* has been organized, aside from the vigilance in the towns, now there is another groups of *compañeros* which also is doing the vigilance work. It has not been long since that work began, it began one month ago and the new team is made up of many *compañeros*, included are the former juntas, former councils, and other persons in charge of the struggle, those of us who are involved in this new vigilance team, we are part of the people, but aside from this is the vigilance in the towns.

*In what moment are the reports verified? Do you check that the accounts are clear after the report or before the report?* Now with the filter the revision of the accounts is done beforehand, but when the filter did not exist it was done afterwards. In other words the Junta makes their report and then they turn their report into the people well it then goes to the CCRI and then to the municipalities. After the Junta turns its report in copies are sent and well there it remains, an assembly has never been convened specifically to analyze the reports, to check if they are clear, truthful or if something has happened during the time of that report, which checks if it is or is not well informed, as of now an analysis of that has not taken place.

Speaking of how it is that the account which the *compañeros* from the Junta de Buen Gobierno give are approved, what is done is checking if the accounts square up. What is being done right now is the revision and verification of the accounts together with the *compañeros* from the CCRI, so together we have to square up the accounts before giving the report in an assembly, there it is checked if the accounts square up or not. If there is a problem of the account not coming out right, of it not agreeing, we have to investigate where that money went or how it was spent, on what it was spent. This is how it is being done now, but it is believed that it is necessary to prepare another group so that it stays afterward and can do that work.



# Rights of Autonomous Authorities

## **Jimmy (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ San Pedro de Michoacán)**

The compañeros and compañeras who work in the various positions as authorities, do so out of conscience, out of choice, they do not receive a salary. But these compañeros also live in towns where other compañeros live, so there is also communal work to organize the resistance, aside from their work as authorities. According to the agreement of the communities, some of these authority compañeros, have the right to carry out their own work in their free time, so these compañeros are not counted in this collective work and communal work.

These compañeros who are authorities work out of conscience but this does not prevent them from being able to receive support on behalf of their town, provided that the town makes the agreement and that it is out of choice that it is given to them. The compañero who is in this role cannot force their town to support them, the support has to be by the choice of the town.

These compañeros who work in the Junta de Buen Gobierno or in the Municipal Council have the right to two weeks break during the month, so that they may take their break two work groups are made; now that there are 24 compañeros, 12 of them cover a shift for two weeks in the various areas and another 12 have to take a break so that they can continue with the work.

When one of these compañeros or compañeras is in their role in their work they also have the right to receive free medical attention, and in the event of a severity they also have the right to be transported to a hospital nearby so that this compañero or compañera can heal, and they have the right to recover at home, without regard for the recovery time.

If the family of an authority compañero gets sick, the town is the one who has to take care of them, that is like a right that we have given to the compañeros and compañeras who work as authorities. But they also have the right to return to their work to go home and take care of their family until the person recovers, without regard for the time it may take, and so the compañero or compañera can return to their work.

In the zone where we work there are different personalities, different ways of dressing, different colors, different beliefs, different ways of talking, and in work it is also a right for the compañero or compañera to be respected, independently of how they are. The only thing which matters to us is the willingness to work and their ability, so all that about how they are does not matter to us.

The authority compañeros have the right to be heard if they have a proposal, or when applicable, if they make a mistake in the work they also have the right to be heard by the people. We all have the right to hold any position at any level, no matter our color, our belief, or our level of study, we all have that right.

The towns have the right to demand that the authorities fulfill their work and to decide the way the town wants it to function, that is, the town has to say how it wants their authority to

function. The towns also have the right to be informed of the spending of economic resources, of the work or whichever other thing it may be, but the town has to be informed on time and receive a clear report.

The authority also has the right to demand that the people fulfill the agreements and rules established, that is the people demand, but also the authority demands that they fulfill according to the rules which are made.

# Obligations of Autonomous Government

## **Doroteo (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas)**

We consider one of the obligations of autonomous government to be attending to whichever person who goes to the office for different matters, that it does not matter if a solution to their problem is given or not given but they have to be heard. Whoever it may be a Zapatista or non-Zapatista, they are attended to, provided that they are not people from the government or sent by the government, if in fact they are people from the government well they are not attended to, but if they are not sent by the government, it does not matter if they are from whichever social organization, they are attended to.

Another one of the obligations of government is to care for all the goods of the people, be it donations, projects, or what is being created through initiatives of the towns and municipalities, it is the obligation of the government to maintain them and take care of them, ensure that they are in good conditions for the service of the towns.

We are working always making sure that in what we do we are fulfilling the seven principles of lead by obeying:

1. Serve and not be served.
2. Represent and not replace.
3. Build and not destroy.
4. Obey and not command.
5. Propose and not impose.
6. Convince and not conquer.
7. Lower and not raise.

We think that we have to do it like this, that it is like an obligation to not make the same mistakes that the evil government institutions make and to not carry their same ways, so what is going to rule us is the seven principles.

# **Caracol II: Resistance and Rebellion For Humanity**

Oventik

# Introduction

## **Esau (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Juan de la Libertad)**

In Zona Altos de Chiapas since the year 1995 autonomous municipalities were formed, before the declaration two autonomous municipalities had already been formed: San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres, which was first formed in 1995 and the other municipality was San Juan de la Libertad. Those two municipalities began to work before the rest.

In this zone the people themselves began to organize since the war declaration in 1994, first two autonomous municipalities were formed, this was before the formation of the juntas de buen gobierno. As we well know, it is not good for us to be governed by the evil government or by the official governments, and in agreement the people went developing and organizing themselves, the other Zapatista autonomous rebel municipalities began to be formed. In this zone there are seven autonomous municipalities which were formed on the following dates:

On December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002 the autonomous municipality Magdalena de la Paz was formed.

In December 2002 the autonomous municipality Santa Catarina was formed.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003 the autonomous municipality 16 de Febrero was formed.

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003 the autonomous municipality San Juan Apóstol Cancuc was formed.

Before the municipalities San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres and San Juan de la Libertad had been formed. Like this we were organized in this zone. These autonomous municipalities worked two or three years like this until in the year 2003, on August 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, the juntas de buen gobierno were formed. When the juntas de buen gobierno were formed just 14 compañeros participated in the first team, in that time there were no compañeras participating. Maybe the participation of the compañeras was not demanded, in the beginning only 14 compañeros participated, there were no compañeras, but currently the team of the Junta de Buen Gobierno is made up of 28 compañeros and compañeras, in other words there are 14 compañeros and 14 compañeras.

Now the compañeras are participating, their participation has taken place in accordance with we were organizing and advancing our work, our areas, because the women, together with the local and municipal authorities, began to promote the compañeras understanding that they have rights and that they can participate in the work. According the agreement of this zone two compañeras and two compañeros from each municipality have to be named so that they are integrated into the Junta from each municipality, the members for the Junta come from the members of the Autonomous Councils of each municipality. Upon the autonomous councils being named the town chooses who is going to fulfill that work in the office of the Junta de Buen Gobierno; the role of the Junta members last three years.

When they complete the three years of work in the Junta de Buen Gobierno not all the members of the team change. In this zone from the beginning we said that if the 14 members change all

at once, or the 28 that exist now, the new members are not going to have knowledge or not going to know how to do their jobs when they come as new people. The members of the Junta in this zone change in different moments, for example, this year the municipality San Juan de la Libertad and San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres are going to change, the members of those two municipalities change and new ones come in.

It means that when there is a change of members in the Junta de Buen Gobierno, eight compañeros leave, four compañeras and four compañeros, the rest of the members of that team stay because they already more or less got experience, they already know how to handle all the matters, they know how to work, that is why they stay together with the new members. The members who stay begin to teach the new ones, they have to tell them how they are going to do their jobs, how to carry out their tasks in each area; the compañeros who stay have the obligation to teach, to support the compañero or compañera who is integrated as a new one. Like this we are organized in this zone and each year there are changes in the members of the Junta, each year the members change from different municipalities.

The compañeros and compañeras who are working as part of this Junta de Buen gobierno do not receive any support, the work that they do is free, only the money for their fare comes from what the Junta has, from what the solidary compañeros and compañeras from other countries contribute. In terms of food, if we have to spend a whole week outside of our house each compañero counts up how many tortillas they eat in one day, if a compañero eats 10 tortillas a day, or twenty, or thirty, if they eat three times, they have to add up how many tortillas to bring so that it lasts them their shift. The beans, rice, salt, come from the Junta's resources but the tortillas as of now we continue bringing from our houses, we bring the necessities so that it lasts us the time that our shift is.

All the members of the Junta have to cover one-week work shifts. We have three work shifts and each shift has its coordinator, when there is a problem the group goes in, the members of the group meet to see how to resolve it; currently there are nine compañeros in each shift and they have to meet when there is a problem and look at how to resolve that matter.

## Questions

*Do those who finish their position in the Junta return to have another position or do they stay in their town?*

That depends on the community where they live. If a former member comes from a large community, it has more support bases, not so fast are they going to be responsible for another position well there are other compañeros, the community's agreement is that they have to take shifts, this period already passed well another compañero goes, like this we go taking shifts in the towns.

*You talked to us about the 7 municipalities formed and talked to us about others which are not formed, how is that?*

In our zone there are seven autonomous municipalities, but there are other regions in which they have still not named autonomous municipalities but there are compañeros. 24 municipalities are all that this zone encompasses, but not all are autonomous. Why are we mentioning this? Well because there are compañeros who live in those municipalities, for example Bochil and Huitiupan,

are official municipalities but in those two there are compañeros, that is why we have mentioned them like this.

*You say that those compañeros do not participate in the seven municipalities, they are not part of the seven currently-formed municipalities?* The compañeros who do not belong to any of the 7 autonomous municipalities participate in their regions, but not in the autonomous municipality, in other words they are our people, they are our compañeros it's just that they do not have their autonomous municipalities formed.

*When it is the change of government and the two municipalities leave, how many municipalities stay to teach the work to the next government?* The compañeros and compañeras from the five municipalities stay to teach the nine members, but the two municipalities who leave send their new members.



# Government of Three Levels

## **Rosalinda (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Juan Apóstol Cancuc)**

In our zone we have three levels of autonomous authorities:

On the first level are the agents and autonomous commissioners which are in each Zapatista community, they are the direct authorities of the community.

On the second level are the autonomous authorities of the municipality, they are the authorities which control and watch over the communities which make up their autonomous municipality.

On the third level is the Junta de Buen Gobierno, which is responsible for the other government bodies and which governs the whole zone, but the people are the maximum authority.

In Zona de los Altos de Chiapas we have the following work areas:

1. In our zone we have our Zapatista Autonomous Education System (SEAZ). We have a central clinic, 11 micro clinics, 40 health houses which have their respective general coordination made up of 9 elements. We have health promoters, they had trained more but some abandoned their jobs and 30% were left doing the work.
2. We have our own Zapatista National Liberation Autonomous Rebel Education System, Zona Altos de Chiapas (SERAZ-LN-ZACH), with its respective general coordination made up of 14 elements, 496 promoters, 157 autonomous primary schools and a secondary school (ESRAZ), 4,886 students in the whole zone.
3. We have our autonomous agroecology area with its respective general coordination made up of 6 people, there are 278 promoters in the 8 training centers which there are in the zone, although there are compañeros who do not follow through.
4. We have our Community Radios (RC) and their respective general coordination made up of 10 people and 52 radio hosts from the three radio stations in our zone.
5. There is the artisanal cooperative “Women for Dignity,” with its respective management and its local representatives and the artisanal collective “Women of the Resistance,” with its coordinators.
6. We have the cooperative society Yaxil Xojobal, with its respective board of directors made up of 9 people and its local representatives. There was the coffee cooperative Mut Vitz, but it disappeared due to misadministration problems and board corruption.

This is the way in which our zone organizes the work areas and the autonomous governments, which are a form of responding to and defending ourselves against the evil government’s attacks. With these work areas, we see that we have certain difficulties upon governing our towns and

controlling the various work areas, it is not because we do not want to do the work well but because of lack of preparation and experience. We know perfectly well that we who make up the Junta de Buen Gobierno, the autonomous authorities, are simple support bases, we lack many things from learning and understanding, but it is not that the work cannot be done, although it is difficult to believe that it can be done, but it is difficult to do it.

## Questions

*You said that there were more compañeros in the health area and now it is only at 30%, how were those compañeros leaving? Did they leave the organization or did they abandon the work?*

Some abandoned their jobs, others left the organization, so now nothing can be done to them, now nothing can be said to the compañero who abandoned the work.

*With regard to the naming of authorities, being of the councils or of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, what is the naming form?*

The authorities begin to be named from the communities and when they come chosen from the communities they pass to the municipality. In the municipality the compañeros who make up the municipality gather together, men and women, and there is where they name their authorities.

The selection of the authorities begins in the town, in the community, each town gives its candidates to choose as their authorities, a list of all the candidates is gathered and presented in the municipality. The municipality convenes a general assembly, among men and women, to present those candidates in the municipal seat, there although there are many candidates the people choose who works best for them to be their authority. Once chosen they then form part of the positions that each one is responsible for.

Upon finishing this selection in each municipality the list of the autonomous council is made, from this team they choose two compañeras and two compañeros who they send to the Junta de Buen Gobierno to cover the other work level, the level of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. The other members of the team stay in the municipality to cover the shifts during their period; it is handled like that in this zone.

*If a municipality has, for example, 30 communities, do the 30 communities go to the assembly or how is it done?*

That's how it is, but not 100% of the town arrives, sometimes 70% or 80% come, but the municipality has a census, if it is the majority the selection proceeds. The municipality San Juan de la Libertad chooses its authorities like this, but it is not like this in all the municipalities, each municipality has its plan for how to choose its authorities. How they choose is not the same, in San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres they have another way for how to choose, also in San Juan Apóstol Cancuc they have another way. In San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres they choose their authorities through assemblies, because in San Andrés they have two authorities, some traditional and others which they call "constitutional."

*Those constitutional authorities are the official authorities?*

No, we within the organization we still call them that, but they are not official, we only named them this. The authorities which we call "constitutional," are chosen by a general assembly, here the Council is chosen, representative, councilperson, and two judges, are chosen through a general assembly of all the support bases. These five authorities meet with the agents also, like this it is chosen. That is chosen in each town, or rather the five authorities meet with the other agents

of each town, they then take instruction from one person in each town so that he or she goes to cover a position, but still it is not known what position that person is going to have, later in the assembly, among all the authorities there he or she comes to have a position, be it first councilperson, second councilperson, or third councilperson, or be it a substitute. San Andrés is a bit like this.

*Do those authorities also work in collective or does each one do their own thing?*

The compañeros who have positions as Councilmembers and first councilperson, do the work in collective, no one says “I am the council, I am going to command.” With the officials from the evil government it is like this but in our organization no, our authorities work in collective, even if someone is a substitute but they have participation also.

*Councils and constitutional authorities were spoken about, the question is why they are called constitutional. It is that constitutional I understand that they are from the evil government.*

Before when the organization was not here the official municipalities were formed like this, but then later we in the organization then named our own authority, but we still have not modified that name, the same name continues to be used but they are not official.

*Regarding the traditional authorities what is their role and how do they interact with the authorities that you call constitutional?*

The constitutional authorities are called this, but the municipal council always convenes the selection, the municipal agents from the 31 communities within convene it, so the municipal agents, that is the municipal council always convenes a special meeting so that the support bases, the compañeros and compañeras, participate in the selection of the new members of the council. When they have been named in each community, or in each place, they choose a person to come to the municipality and can choose which is the person who can be a councilmember, then as they take the order of the day, in the normal meeting, then that person arrives at the municipal seat.

Before it was like this, as the compañeros say, there is a council, there is a representative, there is a first councilperson, there are councilmembers, these were the so-called “constitutional authorities.” There are also traditional authorities who are in charge of culture, who are in charge of choosing the alférez so that he or she takes charge of doing the traditional festival, that is what they call this, traditional authorities. But recently the idea changed, it changed this year, the compañeros and compañeras from each community chose their authorities in the whole municipality, so it is now chosen normally in the municipal seat.

It always happened like this, but now when the compañeros from each community choose a person they take that person to the municipality so that the selected individuals are presented, they pass to the front, but at the time when they are on the stage it is chosen who is going to remain as the council and who is going to remain as the members of the authorities which we call the municipal representative, the first councilperson; those authorities are working together, not divided. For the position of municipal judge there are two municipal judges, there is a substitute and there is the holder of the position, they are in charge of resolving the problems which there are in each community, what cannot be resolved in the community is passed to the municipality.

So this is how the authorities are formed then, but recently that idea changed, that they choose the whole municipality, they look for a councilmember who can stay, who can follow-through, as they say, there still are problems in the municipal seat of San Andrés but they already happened, it does not mean that the things keep occurring, the mistakes happen and what occurs in each municipality.

*If there is a traditional people's festival, is there a relationship, an agreement between the traditional and the constitutional authorities to do that festival?*

The council with its respective members is organized to see how the work should be done and the traditional authorities, as we call them, are in charge of looking for someone to make the traditional festival; there are mayors, governor, and councilpersons, they are in charge of looking for the people, for who wants to become *alférez*. They are traditional festivals, that is what the traditional authorities are in charge of, that is what they know, because the other authority that we call constitutional, the council and the councilpersons, as they do not know what the role is for the traditional festival, that is why there are traditional authorities, because there is a manner of speaking, a manner of thinking, a manner of praying and they know how it is. The councils do not know, nor do I know it, but the mayors do know it, that is the position then, because they have the way how to express, how to speak.

# Explanation of How the Traditional and Autonomous Authorities are Chosen in Zona Altos

In our autonomy there are different ways how it is being done, I am going to give an example: in the jungle, in the frontier and the tzeltal jungle, for years now they were going to be native municipalities, which means that because of their belief they wanted to separate with their structure from how the catholic religion is, which has its missionary, has its diocese. The compas from the frontier and the tzeltal jungle wanted to do that, they wanted to separate as rebels, as autonomous rebel municipalities, so that was going to get us into a problem because we were going to take from them how the diocese works, so it was said to the compas:

“No, we are not going to organize in terms of religion. We are not going to be able because there are Catholics, there are Presbyterians, there are charismatic Catholics, there are Jehovah’s Witnesses, I don’t know how many there are.”

Well, the compas in this case, are not promoting that idea pushing and shoving. In this zone there are authorities which are called constitutional, it sounds as if they were from the evil government but no, they are the *compañeros*, only they still carry the name. To say, we as Zapatistas, do we struggle for socialism or why? We say: we do not know why they say socialism, we want land, health, housing, education, freedom, peace, justice, democracy, we do not know if it is called socialism or if it is called paradise. The name does not matter to us, what matters to us is that there are the 13 demands.

In this process of changing the name right now there are the compas from this zone, because it has had problems, for example: in the municipal seat of San Andrés is the official government, that is the municipal president of the evil government’s system and there also is the rebel government, just that the house is divided in two, over there is the constitutional government and here is the rebel government.

“Why do the Zapatistas come to enjoy the party here if they do not contribute?” say the municipal presidents of the official government.

“No, well yes we do have to pitch-in,” say the compas.

So when that happens the Autonomous Municipal Council has to contribute, but they spend a ton just on the party, on what is fun, there is a fortune wheel and those things, because that’s how the official authorities do the party, and the municipal council also spends there.

Another problem in San Andrés was because the park is shared between the two, the autonomous rebel municipality and the official municipal president of the government system. So those from the official government want to fix the park to make it nice and they force the compas to contribute because they are also there, the support bases go for walks in the park, and yes, they spent millions of pesos there, only because the park looks pretty.

Then came another problem, it turns out that the party is very nice and that the park is very nice, but there are Priistas, Panistas, Perredistas who to solve their problems go to the compañeros of the autonomous council. With the compañeros from the autonomous rebel municipality there go the Priistas, the Panistas, the Perredistas, and on them what little the compas have as Zapatistas is being spent. A day came in which the compañeros said:

“We no longer have anything, what should we do?”

“Where did you spend what there is,” the question arose.

“Well it’s that many Priista, Panista, Perredista brethren came and we spent it there.”

It turns out that the Zapatista compas now have a problem and there is no longer a way to move the municipal council, so it was said that we are going to separate without losing what we call attending to people, it does not matter if they are from the PRI or from the PAN. So it was said to the compas that they have to give priority to the compañeros, they have to give the most importance to the compañeros and tell the brethren who are pro-government.

“Go to your government.”

“But it is that they don’t resolve it for me.”

“What is your government for? So see that the system in which you are does not work.”

That is the process in which San Andrés is, it is not as easy as giving a military order in the form of the compas’ beliefs, so they are going to have to understand, reason how they are going to unify without losing, even if they do not know what it is going to be called. Right now there is a traditional and the other is constitutional, so how they are going to unite and what they are going to call it I do not know. That is the matter, there are things which are going to be changing.

I am going to give you another example of things which are changing, it is about what they call the councilperson, who if they are the first, if they are the substitute, before they did it like that and now it is changing, those were part of the traditional authority. For example if someone is councilperson and they now must leave, they had to keep an eye on who is going to stay in their place and have to go find him at home. As it is a traditional authority he already knows that person, so if he sees the compa who wants him to take the place and is going to look for him at home, then the compa says:

“Here comes that guy, he is going to name me,” so he doesn’t leave his house.

That compa does not want the councilperson to come because he is going to say, “you have to be my substitute.”

In order for that not to happen the councilperson sends a young person and sends him to go to the house of the one who he wants to be his substitute, the young person is the one who goes and talks, so they do let him into the house. But the councilperson goes there behind, the bait went which sent the young person for him to go in and then allow him to come in and now the councilperson does go. As the compa is a Zapatista and the councilperson is a Zapatista he tells him:

“Compañero, I have seen that now it is your turn,” no matter now, the compa has to accept because he was already allowed to speak.

That is the way in which the traditional authorities name their substitute, now they have already changed it, because it is being understood what democracy is. That is the traditional way, there are traditional things which are good, which we must never lose and there are traditional things which aren’t, which we have to understand they are of no use to us. It is like in what we are as indigenous people, there still is that which we believe, the spirit animal, for example, there

are compañeros who believe it and compañeros who say that their spirit animal is a tiger, is a cat, is a lizard, they still believe it but we go along understanding that it is like a story.

That is what is happening to the compas in Los Altos, because here the compas are more closed in what is culture, tradition. Here they note that it is difficult for the compas to explain, clarify, they have an idea, in their language they are going to tell it to you clearly but then when they have to express it in Spanish it becomes difficult for them. That's how it is but it is important for it to be clarified so that we can go understanding together how each zone is doing it and what it is that we understand to be the best way how to take our compañeros and compañeras into account in the towns.

## **Gonzalo (Former Judge)**

In San Andrés, here in Zona Altos, when the municipality was formed as if in the beginning the structure for how the official governments are was copied, there it was confused but currently it is already changing, no longer is that word "constitutional" going to be mentioned, rather the Autonomous Council will be talked about.

There is the council, there is the representative, there is the councilperson, there are judges, the municipal authorities are made up like this because it is the idea that we have from earlier, from the constitutional governments. Our autonomous municipal authorities were made up of those various positions, but it is necessary to understand that each one with their role was not separated, but rather they worked and governed in collective, they did the work together although each one had their role.

There also are traditional authorities but they are not the ones who celebrate the festival, they simply have the task of naming other compañeros for a traditional position, it is the traditional authority's role to name a compa who is in charge of making the festival, that is the traditional authorities' role. But among all they work in collective when there are problems, when there are plans they always do it together, it is what that municipality of San Andrés has been doing.

That is the difference of what there is in San Andrés, another difference is that there are two authorities right in the municipal seat of San Andrés, the autonomous authorities continue governing in the same palace, the same town hall, since it was taken in 1995. It is the only municipality here in los Altos that continues governing there, in other municipalities they tried to take the town halls or make a place for the autonomous authority in the seats but they were removed, only San Andrés continues resisting like this, it continues governing right in the municipal seat.

There was that problem which was mentioned about the park. The official authorities, since they are across the street, began to pressure the autonomous government about what is going to be done with the park, there was a great problem, it was full of stands, full of garbage. There was a former-council compa who made a mistake, that is he messed up, he made the decision that the park can be done without taking the people into account, without seeing what is the first necessity, so he began to spend money, also he managed to seek help from the council. Of course it took some time of sheer fighting of the official government with the autonomous government, but an agreement was come to that the park will be done. But the problem was that the seven principles had not been understood, the council itself made the decision that the park can be done, when the organization indicated to us that it was not useful, that it is not the first necessity of our people, a ton of money had been spent on that damn park, they did it like that, luxurious.

The mistake that the council made was indicated and that council was sent off, they had to leave their work, they did wrong because they did not take into account what was the first necessity of our people. As of now their sanction has not been lifted, two councils more have passed and the council that made that mistake continues to suffer since they cannot receive solidary assistance if they get a project, until now, more than four years later, it continues to be pending when their sanction is going to be lifted.

It is the problem that happened there in San Andrés, we tell you this so that you may have the experience that you need to go thinking what is the first necessity. Yes the park is there, but it cannot be eaten, while here in los altos there is nowhere to get their corn, people are dying of hunger but the luxurious park is there, that is very bad. Let's talk straight so that the same thing does not happen in other municipalities, in other caracoles.

There are other problems which have happened there, for example one council which accepted a bit of aid, but from the same government which got involved there, that is how confidence is given with a priest, who says "yes we are with you, we'll take this donation, this aid," but it comes from the government. When that was heard the council was sent off again, they had to be removed from their work, it is bad, it fell into the evil government's handouts. It is a problem which happened over there in San Andrés.

Here in Los Altos since they are very other, but we are now taking steps. For example, in the selection steps are being taken, they are no longer named like before it was done that each community proposed their candidate, but rather now that is done in an assembly everyone together. Before only the first five members of the municipal authorities were named: council, representative, first councilperson, and five judges; that's how it was in San Andrés, but now no longer because it has to go along being understood what democracy is, now the towns themselves propose in an assembly who is going to stay as the council, as the authorities.

In other municipalities of our zone from the beginning they named their authorities in an assembly, they bring their proposals from each community but it is not said there what position each compañero is going to have until it is said in the assembly. That is why we have analyzed here in Los Altos that there are things which are bad, we are cheating national and international civil society, they come to us to ask here in the Junta how we were chosen and it is answered that we were chosen democratically in an assembly, but not in all the municipalities was it like this, that is why now there are things which are changing.

We said that there are things which are bad, which must be changed. Now we are going to change more, we are taking steps. Yes we have made mistakes, mistakes have been made since the beginning, but we are realizing which are the steps that can be taken. That is what there is about San Andrés but in other municipalities they are now taking the idea of how it is done, for elections, for the naming of authorities.



# Relationship with Other Organizations

## **Patricia (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Magdalena de la Paz)**

The Junta de Buen Gobierno of Zona Altos de Chiapas has a solidary relationship with other national and international organizations who come to visit us and share their ways and life experiences in their countries and share moral support with us, also there are groups and organizations which leave a small economic donation.

There are solidarity organizations which support us from their countries, with encampments, protests, roadblocks, etcetera. Also there is another kind of relationship which takes place between the municipal authorities and those who visit us, because there are people who come to the Junta and request authorization to visit an autonomous municipality.

There are other people who visit us who do not belong to any organization, this kind of relationship with them we see that it is very important for our Zapatista struggle, because it is a force given to our organization when they tell us that they make the struggle theirs and also that we are an example for them to begin to organize in their countries or in other places in our country.

This way of relating with other people and organizations is something which has allowed us to advance in our struggle, the evil government has not been able to exterminate us because it knows well that our struggle extends to other places and that there are organizations which sympathize with us.

Here in Caracol II de Oventic visitors come from other countries and also countrymen and countrywomen, many only arrive to visit the caracol center, to see it, but a certain number, some people who arrive leave a small donation, they want to support the people. That small donation is left in the Junta, they do not leave much but for each donation a receipt and copies are made, the receipt is sent to the vigilance commission, a copy is sent to the CCRI compañeros, the original stays with the Junta de Buen Gobierno and another is going to be taken by the person who made the donation.

The donations are gathered and the Junta administers those small donations. Those donations are used for whatever expense there is in the caracol center, like this the donations are spent, but they are small donations, they do not leave much, according to the quantity that they want to leave, forty, fifty pesos, one- hundred pesos. But when it is spent not only the Junta knows but rather each month the Junta makes its reports, all 28 of us members meet to make a report, there some compañeros from the CCRI are incorporated so that together we can see how the resources that there are in the Junta in the caracol center were spent, or how the Junta de Buen Gobierno administered it.

# Territoriality

## **Alfredo (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Pedro Polhó)**

As the autonomous government of Zona Altos de Chiapas we have in our knowledge that our support bases extend to 24 municipalities, among them there are 7 autonomous municipalities and 17 official municipalities. We are governing hundreds of communities, below we will mention the following autonomous municipalities:

- The autonomous municipality San Andrés Sakamchen de los Pobres is made up of N communities, with 45 municipal agents and a communal goods commission with its 12 members.
- The autonomous municipality San Juan de la Libertad is made up of N communities, 15 municipal agents, and 6 autonomous commissioners.
- The autonomous municipality San Pedro Polhó is made up of N communities, 38 municipal agents, and a communal goods commission with its 12 members.
- The autonomous municipality Santa Catarina is made up of N communities, 25 municipal agents, in this municipality they do not have a commission.
- The autonomous municipality Magdalena de la Paz is made up of N communities, 10 municipal agents, 2 communal goods commissions with 8 members, and an ejidal commission with its 6 members.
- The autonomous municipality 16 de Febrero is made up of N ejidos, 37 municipal agents, and 9 ejidal commissions.
- The autonomous municipality San Juan Apóstol Cancuc is made up of N communities, 17 municipal agents, and a communal goods commission with its 6 members.

Between the seven autonomous municipalities we have N communities, 189 autonomous agents, and 41 commissioners.

Also there are the municipalities which do not belong to any autonomous municipality like Huitiupán, Jitotol, Chaumula, Zinacantán, Tenejapa, Sitalá, Chilón, San Cristóbal, Teopisco, Las Rosas, Carranza, Simol, Tuxtla Guitérrez, Amatenango del Valle, Mitontic, Suchiapa, Socoltenago, Bochil, Villa de Acala Chalchihuitán, Cintalpa, and Duraznal.

In the majority of these mentioned official municipalities there are no autonomous authorities and only some have their autonomous agents, like Chalchihuitán, Zinacantán, San Cristóbal, and Sitalá.

In these official municipalities there are also communities where we have Zapatista compañeros and compañeras. We are clear that there are communities with very few Zapatista support bases or even with only one family, but however it may be there is Zapatista presence, so all those municipalities are part of our territory and it is under our responsibility to attend to all the Zapatista communities which belong to those municipalities mentioned.

## Questions

*In the town authorities, agents and commissioners, are there men and women or are they only male compañeros?*

In this zone there are now compañeras also, they are just beginning because on their own the compañeras are not used to having a position, but yes we are beginning there.

*If there is a problem in your towns those compañeros who do not belong to an autonomous municipality where do they fix their problems?*

Those compañeros of ours who are in the official municipalities are a concern for us, although in those places where they are the support bases are not a majority, those compas stay strong in the struggle. The reason for them not having autonomous municipalities is that it has not come to be seen if it would work well to form municipalities there because the support bases are not a majority in those places, that is one of the reasons and the other is that they are very far-away places. But also it depends on how those from the political parties act in those places because they are provoking problems more and more and many things are happening in those regions.

Some compañeros who are living in the official municipalities already have their agent, their judge, their commission, but they are not a part of an autonomous municipality, they do not have a Council, they are part of a region but not of an autonomous municipality. What is done when they run into a problem is that it is seen if the problem can be resolved there with their agent, with their commission, they try to resolve it there in their community, but if they find no exit they have to go directly to the Junta de Buen Gobierno to ask for an idea on what they can do with the problems that are happening there.

But there are times, I think that all of us have begun like that, where those compañeros have been supported more through the regional persons in-charge, clearly they are not authorities but while they do not have their council, their authority, they can take charge of resolving with the support of the regionals, well they ask them for their opinion, they ask for the support of the persons in-charge. *The compañeros who have not formed their autonomous municipalities, they do not collaborate in the autonomous municipalities?*

They do not collaborate in the autonomous municipalities because they have their meetings, collaboration, they have commissions there, they have to collaborate in their region.

*That means that the compañeros participate in the official municipality?*

They no longer participate in the official municipalities, they participate in their regions.

# Duties of Autonomous Governments

## **Víctor (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Juan Apóstol Cancuc)**

In our zona Altos de Chiapas the majority of our Zapatista communities have their autonomous agent and autonomous commissions, which are the direct authorities of the community, these government bodies are in charge of resolving the problems of the community, the autonomous commission is in charge of resolving the agrarian problems in the communities. If these government bodies do not find the solution to a problem they go to the autonomous municipality to which they belong; the autonomous authority of the municipality does everything possible to solve it, but if they cannot solve a problem they go to the Junta de Buen Gobierno, which is the final body of autonomous government.

The autonomous municipalities are not only in charge of resolving problems, but also are in charge of controlling all the communities which there are in their territory, when we see that there is the necessity to have meetings with personnel from the various work areas that is how we do it, only when it is necessary.

One of our duties as the Junta de Buen Gobierno is to attend to all the problems that are brought to our office by the autonomous municipal authority and do everything possible to solve a problem; also we make public denunciations when there are aggressions, attacks, and provocations from the parties of the evil government against our Zapatista support bases.

When in the Zapatista communities which do not belong to an autonomous municipality they do not find a solution to their problems, the agents and autonomous commissions of that community go directly to the Junta de Buen Gobierno to find a solution to the problems that they have.

As autonomous government it is under our responsibility to coordinate the various work areas in our zona Altos de Chiapas, that is why we have had various meetings with the general coordinators in the various work areas, like in health, education, agroecology, media, community radios, the result of these meetings was the sharing of work experiences, difficulties, necessities, and dreams of each work area. We think that this is a way of coordinating ourselves with the various work areas.

In these meetings with the various work areas it was thought in a collective way that there is the necessity to have gatherings in the various Zapatista regions, so we as the Junta de Buen Gobierno participated in the various gatherings, the general coordination also participated and also members of the CCRI. This was done with the objective of explaining and understanding the importance and the relationship that there is between the various work areas in our Zapatista struggle, because we have not done more gatherings to foster collective work and politicize the other work areas, like small artisanal cooperatives, coffee cooperatives.

It is our duty to coordinate with the Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities (MAREZ), that is why we have had meetings with the autonomous authorities of the various municipalities, where the importance of the work is explained to them. Although we do not have a defined plan to continue forward with this form of working we are aware that we are going to continue getting together to go along strengthening more the autonomous municipalities.

We, as the Junta de Buen Gobierno have not met with the autonomous agents and commissions of all the Zapatista communities in our zone, but the authorities of the various autonomous municipalities have done meetings with them during each change of authorities in the municipalities to orient them and explain their roles. The council and their other compañeros, compañeras, always meet with the autonomous agents and commissions to motivate them and give them politics so that they can continue forward with their work.

The communities which do not belong to any autonomous municipality do not have an autonomous municipal authority that coordinates them, we as the Junta de Buen Gobierno have not had meetings with them, we understand that this is one of our failures. The way how work has been done with them is through regional and local persons in-charge from the region. In these communities, each time they have social or agrarian problems, and they cannot solve them, they go directly to the Junta de Buen Gobierno, in this manner work has been done with them.

## **Abraham (Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Juan de la Libertad)**

Another one of our obligations as autonomous government, as much the of Junta de Buen Gobierno as of the authorities in the autonomous municipalities and the authorities in the communities, is to foster the participation of the compañeras so that they take positions in our struggle, but we have seen few results, because the compañeras themselves do not take self-initiative due to the lived custom dating back many years. This has made difficult the compañeras' participation in the civil authorities, as agents, commissioners. In the autonomous municipalities and in the Junta de Buen Gobierno there are some compañeras, in some autonomous municipalities their participation was promoted through the local and regional political leadership, and the CCRI, because this is what our organization requires.

As autonomous government it is also our job to find the way how to resist the personnel who are giving their services permanently, we have not found an alternative to be able to directly support the compañeros and compañeras who are working permanently, like in health, in education, in the health area we are supporting a bit economically, only in terms of food and other necessities of the personnel has it been being solved in a collective and individual manner, also the towns have supported a minimal part in terms of food. In the micro-clinics which are found in some Zapatista communities, the promoters are supported a bit by the town with their food.

As autonomous government, we have not found an alternative to directly support the promoters of the autonomous education system in the Zapatista autonomous rebel primary schools which are found in the various Zapatista communities throughout zona Altos de Chiapas; the way how they are solving some necessities is through the support of the town where they work. Now in the central caracol there is the autonomous secondary school which includes all of zona Altos, we have not found an alternative to directly support the promoters who are giving their

service there, the people hardly are supporting, the only form of support which they receive with some necessities is through the Language Center.

The Language Center is a place where people from other countries and from our country come to take Spanish and Tzotzil classes, where they leave a small economic contribution. The education promoters themselves have to organize collectively to do some work to cover some personal necessities, they themselves have their milpas in collective, they also have their collective stores and have their chicken collectives, this work they do without the support of the town. With this way of working, the secondary education promoters have been covering some of their necessities and in this way they have been resisting and developing collective work.

The Junta is not supporting the secondary school which we have here because it does not handle projects, nor does it handle resources. The promoters themselves look for the way how to live and work in their duties as promoters, because although we want to support we cannot find the way. Only in health do we support a bit, but we do not support much because we do not handle resources. This is how all the work areas are that we have here in the center, also we as members of the Junta bring our tortillas, that is how we are living, that is how we are.

One of the duties as the Junta de Buen Gobierno is to organize meetings and assemblies, but we have not done it, the only thing that we have done are support base gatherings in the whole zone when there is an anniversary, when cultural, sports events are done, and when we give our message. We have not convened a general assembly with the support bases to deal with special topics, on the other hand the municipal authorities do convene general assemblies of the support bases in their municipalities when important dates are celebrated, for the solution of some municipal problems, when reports are turned in, when new members of authorities are chosen, and there are moments which they convene an assembly through the autonomous agents when they see the need for an urgent job.

In our zone, our Zapatista towns, the communities, are very far away, we even go four or five hours in car, our territory is very big, there are 24 municipalities which we are controlling, this caracol is very big and in addition it is very populated, that is why we have not been able to meet with the support bases. The communities and regions which have not been able to form their autonomous municipalities carry out their gathering when, by internal agreement, in communities they have already named their autonomous agents, autonomous commissioner, autonomous judge. These authorities convene the support base assemblies, together with the regional and local persons in-charge and they are those who intervene in the solution to those communities' problems.

Another one of our obligations as autonomous government is to work collectively in each government body. In this case we are trying to participate in each body and additionally competition is not allowed, but rather all of the work we do among all, like this we are working. In the Junta, in the autonomous municipalities, we are doing the work in collective, no one says "I know more," "I don't know," but rather we are working together, no one says "It's that I don't know, I don't do that." Each member is going to do it up to the point that we can, where we cannot well there's no other way, there are going to be other compañeros.

As autonomous government one of the obligations is to administer, with sincerity and honesty, all the entries and exits of economic resources that there are in each government body, because all of the goods and materials that exist are for all the people, the Junta does not handle the resources that the solidary compañeros donate however it likes. Each government body in the municipalities, in the Junta, does its report monthly, and we do the reports very detailed, even

if it is 50 cents it is necessary to note where it was spent, to say clearly on what those 50 cents were spent. That is how we are doing our report, one or two members do not do it, but all 28 of us members do it, we all meet and there also are the compañeros from the CCRI. This is how we are working here in the caracol center.

# Organization of Autonomous Government

## **Marta (MAREZ San Juan de la Libertad)**

In zona Altos de Chiapas as autonomous government we have an internal organization. The 28 members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno have organized ourselves internally to be able to control the various work areas, like health, education, agroecology, media, community radios, Huitepec ecologic reserve, the healers', herbalists', and midwives' workshops. Each work area has its respective commission which is in charge of gathering information on the work and accompanying in the meetings. In this case, we say clearly that there are moments that we have come through and there are moments that we have not come through for some reasons, one is because some of us Junta members live very far from the caracol center; the other is some of us lack understanding of the importance of our work and our struggle.

We have a vigilance commission in our caracol center, which is made up of Zapatista support bases from the whole zone, they are in charge of controlling the data on the national and international visitors who come to the caracol center, also they have in their knowledge if they leave donations in the Junta de Buen Gobierno. This commission has functioned since the formation of the Junta de Buen Gobierno in the year 2003, the work form is in weekly shifts, each shift is made up of five members, although with this commission there are problems because some do not come to cover their shift.

## **Susana (MAREZ San Juan Apóstol Cancuc)**

As autonomous government we respect the recommendations of the General Command, on forming the General Vigilance Commission, this was carried out on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the commission was formed by 18 support bases, autonomous agents, autonomous commissioners, and members of the resistance nucleus. This commission was formed with the objective of watching over and controlling the economic administration and good-functioning of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, autonomous municipal governments, and the various work areas, like health, education, agroecology, various cooperatives in the zone. This is with the purpose of taking information for the Zapatista support bases, on how the functioning is of the governments and their respective work areas. Also a commission has been formed for the zone savings fund, made up of 13 members, they are compañeros from the various work areas. The role of this commission is to administer the small zone fund and think how it needs to be invested, although in these moments we have not found the way how to invest our fund.

## **Questions**

*Are there two vigilance commissions in the zone?*



First we'll talk about the vigilance commission that we have formed since the year 2003, that is since the Junta de Buen Gobierno began to work. There is also another commission, which is called "general vigilance commission," but it is for the recommendations of the general command, so this is how the general vigilance commission was formed.

*A savings fund in the zone was talked about, how did you begin it and where did you get the resources?*

Last year all the work areas met, we analyzed among all how we could get together a savings fund, among all the areas we analyzed about getting a bit together, each area what it could, there was health, education, also the cooperatives contributed their savings fund and also the Junta de Buen Gobierno contributed their savings fund. We managed to get a bit together, then later, this year, we are gathering a bit of contribution from the herbalists, midwives, and healers. Like this we managed to gather money and that is why the savings commission was named, we finished forming that commission, for the time being it is not known where that fund is going to be invested. The savings commission analyzed how that fund is going to be administered, it is still not known how they should administer it, how they should handle the fund.

There are three women's areas, herbalists, healers, and midwives, this work area one time prepared a project but it is not specifically the healers', herbalists', or midwives', but rather is in the central clinic, that is in the health area, so there the group was included in the three areas. In this project, a budget was given for what is food, which was 50 pesos per day and the workshop was three days, so the food for the course cost 150 pesos, but on the side was the transportation costs, it was also budgeted, so the quantity that the compañeras spend depends on the distance.

Upon doing the budget for this project in the whole zone, all the regional authorities, autonomous councils, came to analyze that it is important to make a fund, the agreement was made that not all the money that there was for food was going to be spent but that each compañera was going to give a small contribution of 10 pesos, since it was three days then 30 pesos were spent on each course, on each workshop. According to the assembly of authorities' agreement, the rest would be kept as a zone fund, also what is transportation, the agreement was made, only 50% was going to be spent and the towns were going to contribute the other 50%, so that 50% stays for the zone fund. But why was it done like that? Because we have seen here in our zone that the people are always very scarce on economic resources when there is some movement, that is why they decided to keep as a fund the rest that was left, that is how the support was created, the zone fund, and for this reason the fund commission was formed, the savings commission.

Almost two years ago we began to look for a way how to begin to have a zone fund, in this zone we have failed upon thinking how to begin to have a fund for the zone, but that situation demanded us to think how to begin the fund. Almost all the work areas did a meeting to see how it is going to be done, because they always handle a bit of the resources in each work area, in health, education, or cooperatives.

We came to the conclusion of giving a contribution, not the same quantity, according to the quantity of money that they handle in each work area and so a contribution was taken from each work area to begin to have a common fund for any urgent matter in the zone. Like this it began, but there was not a special commission for that fund, two months ago the special commission was formed. Who is going to control, who is going to administer later, we do not have a plan yet but yes we are going to think about it.

And why was there not a zone fund or a collective work for the whole zone? Because we have not found the means, how and where to do it, it is that here in los Altos de Chiapas it is very

different, we do not have the means for how to begin or how to work, how to have a collective work for the whole zone to have a fund for the whole zone. That is why it is a beginning that we have given with the three women's areas, a contribution has remained for the whole zone and a part has been given for the compañeras food in each monthly workshop. The plan that we have is what has to be gathered, increasing the quantity of this savings fund.

# **Caracol III: Resistance Toward a New Dawn**

La Garrucha

# Introduction

## **Gabriel (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Francisco Villa)**

Before 1994, why was the cause of the armed uprising? Is it because of domination, marginalization, and humiliation, the injustices and the norms or laws of the evil governments or of the landowning exploiters. Before they did not take our parents and grandparents into account, they suffered and so we did not have land on which to work for the upkeep of our children. Like this the Zapatista peoples began to organize where they said “enough of so much humiliation,” so they rose up in arms, they did not mind walking by night, nor hunger, like this we were formed and we saw that organized, united, yes we can and we shall be more able.

After passing this uprising which we did in 1994 we saw how we are going to advance to form our autonomous authorities in each municipality. That is why here we are all reunited to chat and share how it was that we began to work our autonomous governments, why do I explain this topic to you? It is because what I think is that from there we were beginning and advancing to where we are right now.

# Formation of the First Autonomous Authorities

## **Pedro Marín (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Francisco Gómez)**

I am going to tell a little a story of how we began, how our first agreements were being formed to name our first authorities. In the first Aguascalientes that was constructed in Guadalupe Tepeyac, there the first step of our organization and our way of valuing our right began. This Aguascalientes we said that it was a cultural, political, social, economic, ideological center, but with the betrayal of Ernesto Zedillo it was dismantled, he thought that with this dismantlement, that offensive that he did, he thought that with that he was going to finish the politics of our organization, but it was the opposite because in that same year, in 1994, it was declared that five more Aguascalientes were going to be made.

In that time, in the community assemblies themselves, in the regional assemblies, there the naming or decision began on how it is going to be done to govern our municipalities, how to govern our peoples. The autonomous municipality to which we belong was the first to name the seat of our municipality, there the agreement came out that there were going to be four autonomous municipalities, the seat was La Garrucha ejido, the other is Las Tazas, the other is Taniperla, the other is San Salvador, those are the official names. It was said that those were going to be the seats of the autonomous municipalities and the search for names for the municipalities began, what they are going to be called.

The first autonomous municipality which is La Garrucha it was said that it was going to be called Francisco Gómez; the other municipality which is Las Tazas was called San Manuel; Taniperla was called Ricardo Flores Magón; San Salvador, Francisco Villa. All the names were in honor of the fallen compañeros. Francisco Gómez, as we all know, is a compañero who gave his life for the cause in which we are, he died in combat in Ocosingo on January First, 1994, that is why the municipality is called Francisco Gómez. The name San Manuel was given to the other municipality in honor of the compañero Manuel, who is the founder of our organization. Ricardo Flores Magón, also as we all know is a social fighter who is already in history. Francisco Villa, the same is a revolutionary who we all know.

This is how our autonomous municipalities were formed, this is how we decided all this to name all our municipalities and the agreements were all in a community assembly, in the regional assembly, there all these names were chosen for our municipalities.

## **Griselda (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Francisco Gómez)**

Those four autonomous municipalities are the place where the authorities chosen by the towns meet to attend to the needs of the peoples in resistance. In the community assembly the candidates are chosen, by majority of the vote the first six compañeros to be autonomous authority in each municipality are named. In accordance with the advance of autonomy the necessity is seen to choose more committees, like agrarian, civil judge, honor, and justice.

## **Rebeca (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Manuel)**

When those authority compañeros and compañeras were named we were working collectively, together we thought with our compañeros, we discussed, we planned the work. We were doing the work, we worked with will and conscience, there we knew well that we were not making money, the sacrifice which we carried in our struggle did not matter to us, there was no support for the fare still but we sought the way how to get to our municipal seat. We followed-through and we were doing the work, carrying our food, like tortillas, coffee, sugar, and pinole. Like this we did the work, leaving our town, it did not matter to us that there was no money for the fare, we walked hours and days until arriving at our municipal seats. This is how we worked for the years that our town gave us the position.

## **Artemio (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)**

We were responsible for the third period of the Council's work, we also worked in the Junta de Buen Gobierno, since we had two positions because there in the zone we had another way of working. First when they began to function since '96, in each autonomous municipality we had many problems, the government attacked us many times, they dismantled one of the autonomous municipalities, not all. The municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón first constructed the offices in the Taniperla ejido and the government together with the priistas sent their army, police, and organized paramilitary groups to dismantle, to destroy our offices, the construction of our autonomy was like this.

When the government dismantled the municipality Ricardo Flores Magón it thought that there everything was finished, it thinks that we are no longer going to continue constructing our autonomy, but it was not like this because once again it was organized, first the authorities like the CCRI and the elected Autonomous Council, like this we were organizing again to agree on where we were going to put our new municipal seat.

Like this the local authorities took control of each community, we said that it is more better for us to look for another seat to not fight once again with the paramilitary groups or with the government, that is why the municipal seat remained in the La Culebra ejido; like this the agreement was made in the assembly to change the seat.

The Autonomous Municipal Council went to work in the municipal seat where the peoples said, that is how they began to work, but in the beginning we did not know what to do, because the simple truth we did not have a guide, we did not know how to make autonomy. We have experience per se just like they have in each community, because we always have practices and customs, we follow the custom that we have in each community, because we see that in each community they have an agent and commissioner, and they resolve the problems that there are in each community.

We began to work with our municipalities, with the Autonomous Council, but in that time only six people were named because we did not know on what course it was necessary to go, in what way we are going to do our work. In accordance with the work that we were realizing with our towns we began to see the necessities of each town, because the support base compañeros already began to go to the Autonomous Council, like this they saw that there are more important things in order to make agreements with the authorities of each community, so the Autonomous Council convened an assembly with the local authorities to make an agreement on how the roles were going to be carried out in our municipalities, in our autonomy.

This is how the four municipalities were made in that zone, once the agreement was made in each municipality, then they said how they are going to do the work, that is why it is said that autonomous government obeys and the people command. Since there also the idea came out which says that what the people say the government obeys.

In that time, with six people who were named as the Autonomous Council, they began to attend to things on justice, agrarian problems, and began to present problems of education in each town, that we do not have education, that we do not have a health promoter. Those six compañeros saw that doing the work with six people is heavy stuff, it is a great deal of work, and that is why in the municipal assembly it was seen that it is necessary to name more compañeros, like this autonomous education and health began to be formed.

When the agreement was made that a promoter is going to be named in each community, they took the authorities and when another meeting was convened of the municipal assembly, they brought how the work is going to be carried out. The municipal authority had the responsibility to see how the training is going to begin, who is going to train our health and education promoters. We had many meetings and we made many agreements, not only was the agreement made, we saw that it is heavy work, it is not easy to do it. Why? Because we do not have a guide, we do not have a book to look at, to follow, we were working with our people in accordance with their necessities.

Like this we said in the assembly and like this it came out in the assembly of each town, that it is better to strengthen or make the work of these two areas more, the autonomous councils took charge of finding the trainers for the health promoters. This is how the year passed which the councils worked because still there was no Junta de Buen Gobierno, that is why work began only in the autonomous municipalities, a meeting was only convened of the zone to plan how they are going to carry out the work of the four municipalities.

More or less like this we were working with our autonomy and like this we saw all the work. We already saw that it is not easy, in that time the towns did not know how to do the work and the agreement was not made if the authorities were going to do the work for a period of time, the first period was done and it was not said how many years the Autonomous Council was going to work. The first Council worked four years in the first period, then it worked three years, the agreement was made that it is better to see the work for a period, because if there is not an



agreement with our towns on how many years each authority is going to work it means that it is now known how much time it is going to be there; there are some who worked like this for 4 or 6 years, but once the agreement was made we then were changing the authorities for a period, I was responsible for working in the third period of the Autonomous Council.

## Questions

*How are the families of the fallen compañeros supported, for example the family of compañero Francisco Gómez?*

We all know that by agreement in the zone or by agreement in the regions, the families of the compañeros who lost their life are always supported, the families are supported with basic grains, this is how his compañera was supported, the family of compañero Francisco Gómez.

*What is the role of the civil judge and who has that position, are there compañeras and compañeros?*

The civil judge is in charge of recording the boys and girls in our autonomous municipalities. In the beginning in our municipalities only compañeros were named.

*How many people make up the Council in each municipality?*

When we began in each municipality there were six people and accordingly they were presenting different needs we saw that it was better to name other people, like the agrarian committee, the honor and justice committee. First 6 people entered as members of the Council and now there are 14 members, that is how we are working in the four municipalities.

*Are there compañeras as authorities in the municipalities?*

In the beginning when the autonomous municipalities began to function almost entirely male compas entered, now in the second period, in the municipality Ricardo Flores Magón, two compañeras went in, the same in other municipalities the compañeras began to participate in each municipality.

*How many compañeras are there in each municipality currently?*

The agreement that was made in the assembly of each autonomous municipality and in the zone assembly was that seven compañeros and seven compañeras are going to participate, but there are some municipalities where the compañeras still do not want to participate, for that reason it is that still we are not participating equally with the compañeras.

*What do you do so that the agreement that was made is fulfilled?*

The authorities of each council, the CCRI itself, they are looking for the way how to make gender equality so that the agreement made in each municipality is fulfilled. We think that like this we can make the work level, compañeras and compañeros.

*What is it that has been done so that women participate, has it been achieved or has it not been achieved?*

More or less, because in Ricardo Flores Magón there the compañera is already there, she already remained as president of the Autonomous Council, the same in Francisco Villa, in San Manuel there now is participation of the compañeras. We are more or less succeeding in convincing the compañeras to work in autonomy also.

*During the period that you have passed as councils, have the compañeras covered the positions or were there periods in which the compañeras from your zone did not participate?*

There are municipalities where as of now they do not have even 20%, nor 50% of participation by the *compañeras*. But we are trying to see how to do the work, how to convince the *compañeras* to work as authority also, the idea is for us to work together with the *compañeras* so that it is seen that yes we do have the equal right to participate in autonomy.

*How is convincing done in each town or what is it that it is done?*

What is done there in each zone assembly, is that we are trying to say or to make more agreements with the authorities of each ejido so that they name *compañeras* so that they participate also in whichever work of autonomy, for example health, education, or in the Council, in the vigilance commission and council. But I cannot lie here saying that we already did the work 100%, more or less there are some who are already participating, but I do not know how we are going to make it more, for that I believe we are doing this sharing ideas thing, I believe there we are going to go seeing, organizing more in each zone.

### **Ceferino (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)**

What we are doing to promote the participation of the *compañeras*, in the zone meetings what is done there is that agent, commissioner *compañeras* attend, and in that meeting the necessity for participation of the *compañeras* is explained, for example in the municipalities, in the Junta. Because we see that there are mistakes, that the shifts on the Junta are not covered well, in the case of the Council and the Junta there is more necessity for *compañeras* because the shifts are not covered well.

In the meetings we give the tasks of the agents and commissioner, so that they meet in their town too and those agents and commissioners participate in convincing the *compañeras* of the importance of participation, because we see that it is very important for women to participate. The agents and commissioners are the ones who carry that task to explain in the communities, in the towns, so that the *compañeras* are convinced, so that they are encouraged how they can participate.

*What do the compañeras in your community do as commissioners, as agents?*

The female agents in my village, for example, they are the ones who control the town, they watch over in some problems, little problems of people, of animals that are harmful, the agent is the one who is in charge of solving that type of problem. They also do meetings to give orientations to avoid problems with alcoholic beverages, with drug addiction, in each meeting the *compañeras* participate giving that orientation so that these serious problems do not come. The commissioners also do meetings to talk about land, about boundary care, about the use of agrochemicals. Everything that we have planned before, like rules, is what the commissioners and agents handle within the towns.

*The compañeras who have come to be agents can they now solve problems in the communities alone or are they supported by the compañeros?*

In my community the *compañeras* sometimes request the support of a local authority, like the person in-charge, to listen if it is that sometimes they cannot participate well, so they ask for a reason or things like that. Many times that happens, but there are moments when they are not there, the local authorities, the *compañeras* do the work alone. For example in my community there is an agent who is a *compañera*, substitute who is also a *compañera*, so the two of them

have resolved problems alone, as they have already seen how it is done one or two times they follow that example and make the solution, I am talking about recovered lands.

In the beginning yes as if the compañeras feel that they cannot do it, they request the help of the persons in-charge, of other authorities who are like listeners so that they may go along supporting, but right now we are seeing that the compañeras every day are doing the work and giving solution, there is work in which they organize alone and the support of a person in-charge is no longer necessary because the compas already are more or less carrying out that work in their communities.

### **Felipe (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ San Manuel)**

The agreement of the zone where we are working is that each town has to name their agent, commissioner, and at the same time they have to take the compañeras into the practice, they form their commissioners, but work together to learn also. If there is a town issue, they are the ones who are in charge of fixing the issue, but together.

*Or rather the school of the compañeras is in the same town?*

Yes, it is like that. The commissioners for us are the ones who take care in matters of land, the female commissioners as well do that so that they carry them into practice because one day they are going to come to another position, for example a compañera commissioner could come to be a municipal authority as the agrarian commission, a town agent could come to be a councilmember. That is the participation that we are promoting together with the compañeras.

*In your zone can it be said that it is the majority of towns which already have women authorities or is it the minority?*

It is already a majority of towns which have compañeras participating as autonomous authorities. In each meeting, zone meetings and municipal meetings, it is always explained to them, the compañeros and compañeras are becoming aware that they are already participating, in the communities which still do not have participation of compañeras the naming of compañeras in the positions is being promoted so that like that they may go learning also how we are going to govern in our town, on our municipalities, in our caracoles.

*Those compañeras, those which are doing the work, how do they feel? Is there some commentary or reasons that you have heard?*

What the compañeras over there have said, like now they take it into practice, they have now made the work, what they have said is that they now feel incredible with their rights and now they say “we can see that we too can indeed do this work.” And not only are they going to do that but they are going to continue more, just as we who are in the Junta de Buen Gobierno are doing right now, they are in the Council, not only in the town but rather they are already working in the zone.

The authorities and the committees in each town, in each region, are in charge of encouraging the compañeras more, they do visits in each town to encourage them. But there is a detail there, I think that in all the caracoles this exists, because machismo truthfully has not finished, that is what there is still in the dads and in the husbands.

There are times that the compañera wants to do the work but sometimes her dad does not give her a chance, if she is single he tells her that no because she might go off with a compa. That is the problem that we have had but we have resolved it, what we do is go to visit the compa or her dad, convince him to give his daughter chance because she has the right to do the work, we are

struggling for that, it is in the demands. And like this sometimes we successfully convince the compa and if not, as we have different attitude, sometimes the compa says “no, I am the one in charge, I am her father and what?” But well, we seek the way how to convince him, sometimes we can, sometimes no.

It is necessary to be clear, not because it is our zone we say that there is not that problem, it is necessary to talk about the problems that there have been. That the heaviest thing for us, if we were to finish with that machismo the compañeras would be working just like us, that would be 100% from the women and 100% from the men or 50%. But sometimes the men are the majority and the women are the minority who work in each office, in each area. That is the detail that we have there in our Caracol, but I think that exists in other caracoles, or if not well then much better.

*Beginning at what age is responsibility given to the compañeras so that they may receive positions?*

To be an authority compañeras 16 years and-up and until where they can, when she is already very old also I think that it cannot be done.

# **Work of the Junta de Buen Gobierno**

## **Cornelio (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Francisco Gómez)**

Those were the first steps that we took in our autonomy. With the disappearance of our Aguascalientes, when the Caracoles were born and the Junta de Buen Gobierno were formed, these same compañeros, those who first realized the work from 1996 to 2003, in accordance with the advance of our autonomy, they themselves realized this work, but then with the role of two offices, vigilance and Junta de Buen Gobierno, taking 10-day shifts in a rotational way.

They had their shifts in the group but they did not have a period for how long the position of the authorities is going to last, so it is that one of the assemblies of local and regional persons in-charge, approved having a period of three years in the role of their position. Then once the authorities of the Junta de Buen Gobierno assumed the responsibility of being autonomous governments, of the administration and began to control equity, the development of the four municipalities, the various authorities.

When those first six authority compañeros worked, before the formation of the caracoles, each municipality had control of its territory, but then once the authorities of the Junta de Buen Gobierno were formed they began to administer the various work areas. For example, the percentages in the donations from the solidary brothers and sisters, also the compas from the Junta began to see it, because before these authorities began to function each municipality saw it, but the autonomous authorities in the zone now being formed they are the ones who administer it, they saw in what way that money was going to be worked, the percentages and everything.

The Caracol center where the Junta de Buen Gobierno is also remained as an assembly center to discuss and plan what to do, to make each command of the people be fulfilled. In vigilance, those who realized the work were also the CCRI compañeros, their role is to watch over the authorities in administration, in the imparting of justice and in every type of work. That was the role of vigilance so that like this we do not take another path that is not from our autonomy.

## **Artemio (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)**

When the Junta de Buen Gobierno began to function the zone made the agreement that the autonomous councils themselves would go on to a shift as members of the Junta, as if they have two positions. The same Autonomous Council worked two days in the municipality to attend to the needs of the people and when they were responsible for their work in the Junta de Buen Gobierno they had to go to work 10 days in the center of the Caracol.

Like this we began to work, like this we worked five years, but we saw that it is a mistake just how we did it because the councilmembers work in their municipality and again go to work

another time in the Junta. We saw that it is a very heavy job and at times we cannot do all the work, at times we do not understand how to do it, that is why better if members were named for the Junta and the autonomous councilmembers then stayed to work permanently in their municipalities. The problem that we see is that they no longer managed to see all the work areas, education, health, and for this motive it was seen that it is more better to name personnel so that the work remains more structured.

When we were working as in two positions at the same time there was no possibility, there was no time to see how to do the activities that are done in the four municipalities, at times we just dedicated ourselves to seeing one municipality. Although we were working in the Junta de Buen Gobierno but at the same time we were working in our municipality and plus we carried the responsibility of our municipality.

After the *compañeros* who were going to be authorities in the Junta de Buen Gobierno were named other necessities were seen. In 2008 we saw the necessity to form the Information office, because from 2003 to 2007 there were just two offices, Vigilance and Junta de Buen Gobierno, with those two offices we did the work in that time. The agreement that came out in the zone was so that for the vigilance the towns from the four municipalities would shift, the CCRI folks no longer took shifts in vigilance. When the information office was formed the CCRI folks stayed to work in the information office, they remained as responsible for seeing the organizations and the collectives, that is civil society, who wanted to know how we are working in our autonomy.

Like this we formed the three offices but each one was not in its place, the Junta de Buen Gobierno had to have a relationship with vigilance and information, because they are different issues and problems, where we see that the Junta cannot solve and that is why we have to as for reason, orientation, with the *compañeros* from information and also from vigilance so that together we carry the work. If there is a problem, if there is a job from another area like health, education, we have to consult the offices of vigilance and information, the Junta de Buen Gobierno cannot command alone, because it is watched by the towns, for that vigilance is there, they watch over to make sure we are respecting the agreement that we have with the zone.

The work of the Junta was like this from 2003 to 2008. On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 those changes were made and 24 authorities were chosen for the Junta who are going to work permanently, because before the four municipalities took shifts and it was a great deal of work, the changes in shifts sometimes took months, two or three months, and when there were pending issues it did not get into the knowledge of those who arrived to the new shift. When the 24 elements were chosen only for the Junta they organized into three shifts of eight *compañeros* each shift and each shift lasted for 10 days. That is what they agreed upon to carry the process more continuously, to not forget when our shift came again, there was only fifteen days time to go see our work and then we returned, we were almost permanent.

These changes were made to better the way of seeing the activities that were being realized, because there are jobs which are pending and cannot be done, the Caracol was organized like this, we worked like this until 2011. The work began to be seen, began to be organized by work area, divided among 24 *compañeros*, but in that there also were failures because there are *compañeros* who cannot follow-through in those positions, they failed in their shifts, they could not fulfill for some necessities or sicknesses, but we went carrying the work of health, education, everything was done with meetings together with the committees also.

Any doubt that we had in the Junta office and we could not resolve alone, the necessity was seen to meet with the committees, with the councils, with the coordinators of the areas in which

it was seen that organization was lacking and like these everyone planned to see how we could give follow-up or how we could improve. Agreements were always sought, everyone together, no one did on the criteria of only one person, of only one authority, like this it was done in all the areas. In justice as well, if there is a problem that we see that we cannot solve alone or could bring us problems, we have to ask information, vigilance, for support, everyone together discussing it, analyzing it, if it is good like that or it is bad like that, to arrive at a good solution that does not give us problems.

That is why the vigilance office is also there, the vigilance personnel are support bases of the people. All the towns also have to take shifts, all the towns have to pass in shifts so that the towns also know how the Junta's work is being done, because they have to arrive to inform in the towns.

## **Ceferino (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Ricardo Flores Magón)**

About the way how we want to carry the work, many times only the Junta cannot do it, although it crosses our mind, although it comes to mind, it has to be on the base of coordination with the councils, with the committees, so that idea which we think can be done, like this we see in some cases.

For example, in the positions, in the responsibilities, there we see the difficulties that there is much work to do, the time when I was in the position we saw that at times the elements of the Junta fail and the work exists. For example, in that time there were no clinic drivers, the Junta had to be the driver, had to be the cook, had to go get wood, had many things to do and aside it had to do its work in the office also, we had to study the work that remained pending or other work in the municipality that had not been able to be resolved, as if the time was not enough. It crossed our mind that we did need the support of another driver on the side because sometimes we had to bring an urgently ill-person at midnight, the Junta had to go bring them, we arrived at three or four in the morning. That crossed our mind, that someone was necessary to do that, but we could not solve it, it arose but it could not be done.

I saw in that time that there was a great deal of work that year because there was no driver. Right now I see that they now are having drivers take shifts for the clinics, but their work is on the side, that one does not work in the Junta, aside from that is washing their car, checking the tires, filling the tank with gasoline. It is improving a bit more in that case and I think like this little by little it is going to get better, provided that we are thinking and seeing what the necessities are that are going to arise, because the work in the zone or in the municipality little by little is increasing. Little by little more compañeras are going to be participating because the work is being born.

One example of my shift: there was a job to diagnose what sickness is most frequent in the municipalities and it could not be determined in the Junta, nor with the information office, I had to ask for support if it would be done or not. With the support of the command the information was requested from the municipalities, some municipalities did not act, some municipalities gave that response, they consulted the people what sickness is most frequent, because there was a typhoid outbreak, but the councils did not do. So all the work is done when it works well, it is like a machine, when a machine does not work a piston or a cylinder in a car does not go up

and down, it has no force. That is what happened in our authority, although the Junta thinks or wants to put its proposal for approval with the assembly sometimes it cannot be done and it is left like that but it is a necessity.

That is what we see, that the coordination among all is very important along with taking ourselves into account among all to be able to take out the new proposals and ideas on how to be able to work. The important thing is not losing contact with the towns because in these times of work, I hear that there are things which were done with analysis of the people and now they can be done without consulting the people, they can change a few letters without the people knowing it, so that is a problem also that we can uncontrol the people, because when we teach the people, we explain to them and when suddenly we leave the people to one side, they talk, they discuss.

That can bring nonconformity or they talk bad about the authorities, and many times it is necessary to explain it to the people, the Junta has to be clear with the seven principles. It is convincing the people not defeating them with force however an authority may, the reason has to be explained for modifying some rules or some agreements, it has to be explained to the people so that the people do not lose spirit, do not become uncontrolled. If it is not consulted with the people there nonconformity is born and then the people go about demoralized, that is why I say it, it is necessary to always be stuck to the people.

There are towns also that want to do a thing without the majority, so also it is necessary to explain that it cannot be done, some cases happened to us in that way, there are towns that come to the office and even raise their voice against the authorities but we cannot accept what they want to do because it depends on the majority. In that it is necessary to be clear, but it is explaining to the people and trying to convince them, bring them to understand the reason for why these things are done.

That is what I think, compañeros, and that is what I try to explain of the seven principles, it is what I understand, a bit of what I learned. I did not learn much but I only worked three years and little by little I was realizing that right at the time the job could not be done easily because we entered as new people without support. But now it is different, there are compañeros who stay still one year accompanying the new authorities, as if yes more or less one is supported, but when we began it was not like this, just with the support of the committees because they were there, with them we were supported and little by little we were realizing how we have to work.

## Questions

*Does the team of the Junta de Buen Gobierno have rules for the Junta which say how it must function there in its Caracol?*

In the modification of work, rules were made on how it was going to work, what sanction was going to be given to someone who did not comply, what is the responsibility within the office. We had those rules which were planned in an assembly of the commissioners and agents and it began to be organized how the Junta de Buen Gobierno was going to function. For example someone who does not come on the date set for their shift, is punished with management, they have to do two days of management or two days of work in the area of the Caracol.

*What happens when someone is in their role as the Junta and falls into the error of putting back their drink, is that included in the rules?*



On my shift it has not happened but if that happens the person is expelled from their position as an authority. The person who falls into the error of drinking alcoholic beverages cannot be an authority. They cannot be an authority, that is what the rule that the people made says.

*As the Junta de Buen Gobierno there are 27 compañeros and compañeras, how is it that they practice the saying which says that they govern in collective?*

The way in which we are working is not separating ourselves from the people, this is how we always do in matters of rules or activity plans, of work, the information has to arrive to the people, the authorities have to be present in the plans, in making the proposals.

In the Junta there is someone who represents each area, those compañeros bring the information and then discuss all together how it should be done, and if they cannot do it alone those from a shift convene a meeting of all the members of the Junta. The 24 members have to be there so that all know how each area is, what needs to be done in each area, but the 24 authorities from the Junta have to be there, one shift cannot decide when it is seen that the agreement cannot be made with one shift alone.

*Could you give an example of how it is that you have given a solution in collective, as an authority which governs in collective? For example, what have you done so that the agrarian problems go along being resolved?*

That was being done in assemblies which were convened with all the agents and commissioners. When many problems were presented and we saw that we alone could not solve, the necessity was seen for all the local authorities be present so that we all can analyze together and the solution can be seen on how to be able to control the people. Some rules were also made on the handling of land, but all together with the authorities, proposals were made, always the proposals first with the presence of the Junta, the committees, the councilmembers, the commissioners, and agents, all together we made the proposals.

After the proposals each commissioner, each agent, took them to their town and then in their town each town began to discuss if the proposal was good or if something needed to be added, or something needed to be taken out, the town analyzed it. After analyzing, the town was given a date for when that analysis of the towns will be regathered and then the proposals that were made in accordance with the majority left in one proposal; if the town indicated that the proposals are good and if some letters there changed also there comes what the town thinks to add a bit in the proposals that the authorities made or some town thinks taking a bit from the proposals that the authorities made, like this all that analysis is gathered and the rules are made.

Like this more or less there was a step that helped the Junta a great deal because we are not going to be doubting when it is necessary to resolve something, because the people already arrived in their knowledge and supported us a great deal to carry that process of the agrarian problems. But it always was with the people who helped us a great deal with giving it solution, because they were the ones who analyzed it, we simply made the proposals and they discussed it, analyzed it, and returned to get on in the zone and the whole plan came out on how the work is going to be done.

*How do you turn in the report on the Junta's work? How do you report on the resources?*

We make the report each year, through meetings of commissioners and agents the reports are made. We as the Junta carry also a semiannual record of how the resources are being spent, that spending record is going to be carried little by little, at the end of the month all the spending summary is gathered and a meeting is convened, or the date is already set from the beginning because there are normal meetings every six months. In that meeting every six months all the

agents and commissioners come, there it is informed how the Junta de Buen Gobierno has functioned, of the resources and also of some actives which were done. Like this we inform the towns, the information arrives to the towns through the commissioners, agents, and councilmembers too.

*Who approves that the report on accounts and the general report are good, who sees if there is not a little hand that goes in there?*

In our time which we worked in the Junta there was no one who checked the report, only the whole team of the junta, but each shift passed a copy of the spending reports to the information office; we planned all the purchases too with the information office, with them, buying some food or expenses for some commissions was seen. All together we decided with the information office, also with the presence of vigilance. The three offices met, there we made the agreement on what is going to be bought or if there is going to be a commission on how it is going to cover its expenses, and then upon returning inform the Junta of the expenses that were made.

On each shift the accounts go being turned in because entering into the shifts a secretary and a treasurer are chosen, who carries the money in hand, the record, not all of us together control it. The person is entrusted with a quantity, an example, 10 thousand pesos, a *compañero* is in charge of administering it for the ten days, and that *compañero* is the one who is in charge of carrying the economic record, of expenses. At the end of it we see how much was spent and if a *compañero* is missing one-hundred or two-hundred pesos well it remains as his debt because he was in charge of administering it for the 10 days. It is what we did on each shift to see if the accounts were squaring up, it did not accumulate until the end, but rather each shift we went checking if the 10 thousand pesos square up with what is left in the 10 day shift. The purchases were always made by agreement of the three offices.

*Has it functioned well like this or is there a story of some failure, how have you done it?*

In this time there were some comments about how in some of the reports some of the purchases were very expensive. After those comments it began to be sought how to better the way of administering the resources, that is why now a support group has been organized which can review the reports or which does the reports to verify with the assembly that the report is indeed done well, that there is no failure. Without them, without the verification, in itself I think that doubts arise, we might think that it is bad or sometimes the accounts are bad, but when there is someone who looks at them, who checks them, then the people trust that the account is reviewed.

*Who makes up that commission and how long has it been functioning?*

It has only been two months that this commission has been functioning, the young people from the nuclei of resistance compose it. First the *compañeros* were trained to carry that work, there were *compas* who were training, they were prepared for the math and we say that they are ready, the teachers who taught them said, "this student is now ready," they left a list where it says what the advances that the students had are.

This year when we gave our report, since we said in the beginning it is necessary to talk straight, one must not be ashamed because we are sharing our experience, the report came out bad, the account did not square up, but that is a matter that can be a failure of ideas or a lack of experience. But we talked straight, we meet with the maximum assembly, we said that the account did not come out, it was short, are you going to give us a chance or how. The maximum assembly said yes, it's okay, keep going, do it calmly. We did it again, but still it was the same, it still was short, so other groups of *compañeros* were formed who are the previous authorities, they began to check the report, there it was once again determined that in itself there was a

failure in the numbers, in everything then, as of now that is pending revision, but their account came out with less short than the one that we made. There they realized that it is lack of work skills per se, it is not that a hand entered, but no matter, the account is like that, so it was that better for the *compañeros* who already are prepared in math to be responsible for this work now. We are going to see how it works also.

Everything that we do is a step, it is necessary to see if it works or if not it is necessary to change it. That is why now two months ago those *compañeros* entered into their roles, they are taking shifts just like the Junta, two come from each municipality and they take a shift for 10 days. We more or less taught those *compañeros* how it is that we have begun, because they are trained to do the account but not to do a work report, that they do not know. We are like this as of now, that is why what we are doing right now is that they are the ones who control the economy. If we are going to buy something they are going to take that quantity of money, they keep the record and then at the end of 10 days they say, “we spent this and this is missing.” If it is missing they must pay for it because they are the ones who administer it now, but it has not happened yet during these two months that they have been working. We see that it is an advance for us as the Junta as well because we are no longer very involved in controlling the money, they control it more and they save us the work because we have a ton of work to do. Like this we see that more or less it goes along working well, but I do not know up until what time it is going to work.

*Where was the idea born that there be a nucleus of resistance?*

I think that the committees formed them, it has been being prepared for a long time, they formed it and proposed another idea that it is necessary to prepare them for the math.

*As the Junta, the old juntas which already left, like those who are there now, does an idea not come to you on how to carry out the work of autonomous government for the future?*

The old authorities, those of us who already passed through the Junta, that idea still had not come or we could not reach that idea to form the youth as a nucleus of resistance. Now in this period of authorities, committees as well as autonomous councils and the people, and with the help of the leader *compañeros*, it is there where they began to form them and then like this the young *compañeros* who now are working began to function. But in the time in which we passed being authorities, that idea had not yet reached us, so this idea to begin this work is very new.

*How many male and female delegates are participating in the Junta?*

In the current Junta it is half *compañeros* and half *compañeras*, but at times there are problems, the *compañeras* arrive and then after two, three, or four months they abandon the work, because they say “well I don’t know how to read,” “I have a boyfriend, I am getting married” and they leave. That is the problem that we have, but the rule in our zone is to share, for example, in each meeting six *compas* are named, they would be three men and three women, but sometimes it does not come to pass because the women’s dads or husbands sometimes tell them no, or due to other family problems, but also the *compañeras* sometimes they do not respect their right, those are the problems that we have.

What is normal is for it to be 50% men and 50% women, but this barely exists in the case of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. Now we are working in the Junta, I think that there are only about four *compañeras*, in the beginning they came in like that, half *compañeras* and half *compañeros*, but now little by little they are going away and someone else had to be found, but instead of a women a male *compa* was found because no one wants to enter into that work, but for lack of explanation, we have to try once again to put the *compañeras* in that work. The *compañeros* are

the majority that there are now in the Junta, because there are only four compañeras of the 24 members that we are in total.

*Where was the idea born that it is necessary to organize the compañeras so that there are female commissioners and agents?*

It was born in with the change of authorities, because sometimes the authorities, if they are only men, so what teaching or what practice do the compañeras carry, because we said clearly that the work is collective between men and women, also it is said that women have their rights, but if they only know of their right but do not carry it into practice, where are their rights? Like this the necessity was seen for the compañeras to have to work and also do every type of work together with the compañeros.

*According to what you shared with us, we heard that Francisco Gómez is the municipality with less participation of the compañeras, what solution has been thought of for how to support the compañeras so that they come to be councilmembers in Francisco Gómez?*

That problem is not because the compañeras have not been named, it is 50%, if 6 people are chosen, they have to be three men and three women, it is the idea of all the authority compañeros and compañeras in the town, they have always been named like this.

Unfortunately due to non-fulfillment sometimes the compañeras leave their positions, but it is only in the Council and in the Junta, where the compañeras are working more is in other work areas, like education, health, in agroecology, in all those types of work in the three areas. Only where we are failing a little bit is in the Junta de Buen Gobierno and in the autonomous councils.

The solution which we have thought is to promote the participation of the compañeras, that is of all the members of the Junta and the committee, each time that meetings are done they explain to the other compañeras that it is their duty too to have meeting with the compañeras in each town to explain about the compañeras' right, that not only the men have the right to be authorities, the reasons are explained why it is necessary for the compañeras to have a position and their rights as compañeras. It has always been said that the compañeras have all the same rights as men, because we always have said that the work is collective between men and women.

*Have you not come up with a way how to do it so that the agreement that there be half men and half women as authorities be fulfilled?*

To promote the participation of the compañeras another way was sought, we think that it is best for the Zapatista support base compañeras to pass on, we were working like this for more than a year, all the towns passed shifts as councils, but they are not councilmembers they are Zapatista bases.

For example, if in a village there are 20 compañeras there are going to be four shifts, five compañeras each Friday are working in the office as the council, then next Friday five other compañeras come from another community, like this all the towns passed so that the compañeras were learning little by little how that work is done.

There was a failure in this way of promoting the participation of the compañeras because we did not communicate which bases were going to be responsible for the next shift, but right now we are realizing that we are going to start anew because it is going to be better for all of us to participate because some day they are going to be Council and like this they already have knowledge of the work that is going to be realized.

A way was sought for our compañeras to participate in the municipality of Francisco Gómez, it is being done like this, it was suspended for a time but just now we saw that better for it to begin anew. In that work almost all of the compañeras are participating, it still remains pending,

it is going to pass another shift but they no longer are the compañeras who began, they are other compañeras. We are doing it like this so that all the Zapatista base compañeras have to pass as authority, it is like a school and it is so that they learn how the work of autonomous government is.

We also want the compañeras to participate because sometimes there are problems with rape, that type of problem, and we think that a woman has the right to say what it is that she thinks about these problems or what it is that must be done. Also sometimes the compañeras have more bravery than us, sometimes they have more ideas than us. That is what is being done in Francisco Gómez, but right now it is suspended.

Response of another compañero: We are here to share experiences, to seek methods to resolve problems, to seek ways, to create. Sometimes bad ideas are made but what we want is to create good things like in this case of the compañeras who do not accept being councilmembers because they are afraid because they have to be all alone.

The compas created this way so that the compañeras learn, that if there are 30 support base compañeras well 5 must come at the time of their shift in the Municipal Council, so they are learning. The next shift another group of compañeras from another town comes and like this all the towns go taking shifts and like this the female compañeras go along waking up, if not, when are we going to take off the blindfold that the compañeras have on their eyes?

It is a way that they made there, that is why here we are going to share the experience because they might go practice it in other places, it might go much more better over there. For example that, it is said that the compañeras do not participate but yes they are participating, there is a way how they came up with it, the failure is of the council compañeros who did not shout to their base to tell them that it is now their shift, but that now is a very small failure. It is a way how to encourage and like this they are going to go along participating, like this the compañeras are going to take the path.

*Regarding the new methods for doing the accounts well, where do these compañeros get a certain number so that they can do the accounts, with which data are they supported?*

The accounts are done with the receipts of the entries and exits of money. For example if there are 50 thousand pesos than the compa whose turn it is to handle that money for 10 days, if three or four thousand pesos are spent they have to give a report on what the expenses were with the receipts from what was spent, or if in the committees there was no expense but it has to inform how much the food was, the account is squared up with what there was and what was spent. It has to be seen if it really squares up, because not only does the administrator see it or the one who is carrying the account, but rather they do it together with Vigilance and Information because they too have their list of what is the quantity that they are handling.

All of the money that is an entry has to be with a receipt, if a solidary brother or sister comes to give a donation it has to be with a receipt because they have to deliver or say to their collective or their organization the quantity that was turned in. A copy of the receipt stays in the Junta and in Information, that is why there is no loss with the money entries, the Junta handles the exits with the committee which now is doing the practice for turning in the accounts, if it is a purchase it is validated with invoices or simple notes, but we handle simple notes more.

## **Caracol IV: Whirlwind of Our Words**

Morelia

# Creation of Autonomous Government

## **Gerónimo (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Lucio Cabañas)**

When the autonomous municipalities were declared many of us did not have experience for how to be an authority, some did have it but others did not, some had been authorities in official communities but others had not. When it was said that we have to work in autonomy, what was it that we did? What we did is that a meeting was convened for all the towns so that it could be discussed, first the name, what the municipality is going to be called, and then that the authorities were named, the various authority positions.

In that time parliaments and members were named, do you see that it is different how we have been working in the various caracoles? In Caracol IV instead of calling them autonomous municipal councilmembers, in the first times when we began we called them parliaments, members of parliament. How were those groups of *compañeros* and *compañeras* formed? That group of *compañeros* was formed by the president, who is the one who leads, the secretary, the treasurer, the honor and justice commission, land and territory commission, and also the elderly council; that is what the group of authorities who were named in the beginning were made up of.

How were they named? They were named through the assembly, it is an example like we are now. Each municipality convened an assembly of all the base, so in a direct manner that group of *compañeros* was chosen to do the work of autonomy.

What work are those *compañeros* going to do?, because we practically did not have the knowledge, maybe some did have it, but a majority did not have it, what we are going to do. We are going to work in autonomy, we are going to self-govern, the how is the question that arose, what is it that we are going to do? As if nobody knew the answer but as time passed, when those authorities were already in place, then the problems came. Really there were problems in each one of our towns, in our municipalities.

What are the problems that in that time those who were authority confronted? In that time the principal problem that was confronted were alcoholism, family problems, problems among neighbors, and some agrarian problems. So what did that group of *compañeros* do when a problem presented itself? What they did is they discussed. First comes the complainant and it is heard what the problem is that he or she has, when they had listened the other party is called in, both parties are listened to. What that group of *compañeros* did is listen, it was first heard what the problem is that these brethren have and at the same time it was heard who is right. When the complainant is right then they have to talk to the other person with whom the complainant has a problem. What the authorities did in that time is they gave ideas, or rather they convinced the two parties to arrive at a peaceful solution.

That is what the authorities did as well with other types of problems, in agrarian matters they did it, they also convinced the brethren to not fight over a patch of land. If the person really is



taking their land well it is necessary to make the one who is taking land understand that it should not be like that. What it is, is.

The parliament practically did not do that work, the president of the parliament and the honor and justice commission did it, together with the land and territory and elderly commissions, because we also formed a group of elderly compañeros. It is like this how it went working in those times and then two years after the declaration of the autonomous municipalities we again changed the name, then instead of parliamentary council we called it municipal councils, as of today we continue to call them that, municipal councils.

In that time, in 1997 more or less, there were municipalities which were the first that declared, they had already advanced, one of them is the municipality 17 de Noviembre, which is a municipality which has already begun more to work while the other municipalities are lacking. So when coordination began between authorities there were councils in other municipalities which had not been worked much, they had been worked but a little. Further on there were meetings between authorities and also in coordination with the committees, so all the municipalities were reinforced more, all the municipalities formally named all their authorities, they named their autonomous councils.

When all the municipalities then had their autonomous councils and all who composed it there began to be other work, more work began with other commissions, no longer did they just dedicate themselves to matters of problems but they worked more for the development of the municipalities.

What was done was to divide the work, the very Municipal Council its principal role is to promote the development of the municipality, of course, in matters of problems it is there too, it cannot stay behind. The work was to promote the development of health, education, but there was not much, the work in education and health was very little, in 1999 was when the new autonomous education was created, it is there where the municipalities began to work more.

Like this it was all working until the time came for the creation of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. When the Junta de Buen Gobierno was created being the authorities of the municipalities which we are, we were named to take that work in the zone. Our municipalities named us to occupy that position, but in the same way we do not have experience to work and know what it is that is going to be done. The necessity was seen to learn other things because in the Junta de Buen Gobierno the work that has to be done is different, the work that the councils are doing is different.

When the Junta de Buen Gobierno was created, we as autonomous councilmembers took the double responsibility, being the council within our municipalities and at the same time being the authority-member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. We worked like this, in my case I was working for four years, I was a member of the Junta four years and I saw how the work began.

My first experience as the Junta de Buen Gobierno was to coordinate all the commissions because in that time the health, education, and production commissions had already begun to work, as well as commercialization which is part of the production commission. We formed the commissions, so each municipality had its commissions, had a zone commission, municipal commission, and also had commissions in the towns. The commissions were named through the assembly, those who had a position on the commission were not because they wanted to be a commission, although they wanted to or did not want to it was like that, it was named in the assembly. I was responsible for coordinating the making of the commissions and then seeing how to work on the projects, because it is one of our jobs.

Another one of the roles that we have as Junta de Buen Gobierno is promoting and planning the collective work in the zone and municipalities, checking that the autonomous municipalities have level development, preparing development projects and seeing serious problems that the municipality cannot resolve or is not their responsibility. One experience that we had as members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno was to resolve serious agrarian problems.

The brethren from San Fernando, official municipality of Huixtán, came to the Junta, they came to complain because of agrarian problems which were huge that they were already at the point of serious things happening, even a killing was going to happen, when the brethren arrived they told us of all their problems. As the Junta we know what is our responsibility, it is to resolve the problems of whoever it may be, without distinction, coming from wherever they may come, so we called the other group which are the brethren from Chanal, we called them and dialogued. We heard what those brethren said and then we went to the place of the acts; when we had investigated everything which had happened, what was happening there in the place of the acts, now we did analyze who is right and who is wrong. In that case, thanks to the intervention of the Junta, a satisfactory solution was given to that problem, bloody acts were avoided, we feel that it was an important achievement for the Junta.

The same happened with other organizations, we do it in that way, when a group arrives to complain we call the other group, we dialogue. We as the Junta never impose the solution but rather they have to give it the solution, they have to be convinced. With the mediation of the Junta de Buen Gobierno other land problems were solved satisfactorily and in the end they remained peaceful. Like this we resolve different types of problems, like family problems, although it is no longer our responsibility as the Junta de Buen Gobierno to resolve family problems but when they ask us we resolve them or if we don't we send them to the municipality, because the municipality also has to do its job. When a problem is not within the responsibility of the Junta it has to be sent to the municipality, this is how we work in matters of justice.

In those two problems, as the Junta de Buen Gobierno, we believe that we had success because we avoided greater problems. We also have resolved problems among juntas, for example if there is a problem that is happening in our zone but that compañero who has the complaint is from the other Junta. What we did in other cases is meet with the compañeros of the other Junta, we did the investigations. If the one who causes the problem is from this zone well even if he is going to make the complaint there he has to come here, they send him to his zone. We also, if there is a problem that is not our responsibility to resolve, if it is la Garrucha's, for example, we send it there. One example is an agrarian problem that there was, I think that was in 2003, it was an agrarian problem with a certain Gerónimo de Meza, as the Junta de Buen Gobierno of Morelia and Garrucha we met and we formed the agreement and in the end like this we solved that problem, we did it for there not to be misunderstanding among us.

There also are legal problems, there are compañeros who are accused of serious crimes but when it is not true, when they did not commit the crime we are going to help them, but when they did commit it we also have to recognize their mistake. When they did not make the mistake, since like them we do not have knowledge in law, what we did in that time was to have coordination with the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, also a group of compañeros was named in-charge of that. Like this we were working a good time but then, as there are not many in charge of human rights, it remained like this until now, we do not have persons in-charge of autonomous human rights. Now what we do in matters of legal problems, be it of murder or rape, is that we see it in coordination with the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center.

## Questions

*The problem of alcoholism which was presented in the beginning how is it right now in your zone?*

In that time, in the beginning of 1994, right after the war, some came in with fear, the war began and we all piled together. Some did do it consciously but others out of fear, so those who did it with fear per se were not happy doing the work, what is it that they did? Although we had the order that we should not drink booze they did it secretly. We did not punish them, that is why we have the elderly commission, they are the ones in charge of telling them that why are they doing that, it is explained to them what the harm is that they are causing in themselves. So those who obey well practically they are going to continue and those who do not well they fight. That problem of alcoholism exists everywhere, but we as a group of the organization say clearly that it does not exist, we have it prohibited. Of course it could be that someone out there hidden under the bed puts back some booze, but if one does not see that they do it what's to be done. Of course if someone sees them they are punished. What type of punishment do we give them? It has to be collective work, if it is in the town it has to be work in the town, we are not charging them money nor are we putting them in prison.

In matters of drunkenness if someone falls into that error the first thing that is done is that they are given an attention call. If they do it again they are given a sanction in the community, the drunk compañero works for five days. The third time 10 days of punishment in the municipality are applied and if it is the fourth time they come to the Caracol. Then if that compañero does not come to reason, does not obey, does not leave it, our own compañeros have arrived at Garrucha, it is because they do not leave what is drunkenness.

*What do you do, how do you solve if there is a problem like murder?*

Fortunately I have not had to resolve a problem of murder, but when they are legal problems, when that fucker is already a defendant per se because he is not a compañero, or be it others who come to complain, the problem is seen in coordination with the human rights center. We coordinate, well they know the laws and they see it, if it is that they have committed the crime they have to pay their punishment. That is what has been done.

*What is the elderly commission and what is its role?*

The elderly commission is a group of elderly people, men and women, which is formed within the municipality. Its role is to orient so that we do not fall into mistakes, be it in mistakes of drunkenness or others, because in life there are many mistakes that can be made.

# Territoriality

Caracol IV de Morelia is currently made of three municipalities:

- The municipality Lucio Cabañas, with its regions which are Miguel Hidalgo, Emiliano Zapata, Puente, Ernesto Che Guevara and Primero de Enero, with its municipal seat in the Puente region; and also shares territoriality with the official municipalities which are Teopisca, Matenango de Valle, Chanal, Comitán, Huixtán, Oxchuc, and part of Ocosingo.
- The Autonomous Municipality 17 de Noviembre with its three regions: Aliado, Tierra, and Independencia. It shares territories with the official municipalities of Altamirano, Ocosingo, Chanal, and Las Margaritas. The municipal seat is in 17 de Noviembre outside of the Morelia Ejido.
- The Autonomous municipality Comandanta Ramona, with its four regions: La Montaña, San José en Rebeldía, Santo Domingo, and Olga Isabel, with municipal seat in Olga Isabel.

This is how our municipalities and our regions are distributed, it is what they currently are but there have been modifications previously. First, when the autonomous municipalities were created there were seven municipalities: Lucio Cabañas, Ernesto Che Guevara, Primero de Enero, 17 de Noviembre, Vicente Guerrero, and Olga Isabel.

Six months after the creation of the Junta de Buen Gobierno other regions were annexed to the seven municipalities, which are La Montaña, San José en Rebeldía, Santo Domingo, and Genaro Vázquez, and later on another region was incorporated which is Emiliano Zapata. Like this we have gone constructing in the Morelia Caracol.

That is what happened before but now there are three municipalities and their regions. We did it like this because of how difficult it is to do the work or because there are many municipalities in which there are not many compañeros, some cracked and to take the positions it was already very difficult. What we did was reduce the number of municipalities and now the regions are there per se.

The other motive for which we changed to three municipalities is that in the Morelia Caracol there were a ton of agrarian problems, so then it was very difficult to defend oneself in matters of coordination, when we united into three municipalities it made it easier for us to defend ourselves from those problems with other organizations.

## Another Compañero

One of the main reasons for which there were seven municipalities and now there are three is that there were many land problems, above all with ORCAO, but not only. But also there were other reasons which should not happen but happened, for example: there was an autonomous

municipality, Emiliano Zapata, but it turns out that there were only 45 compañeros in that autonomous municipality.

It was understood that the projects for the autonomous municipalities have to be level, but in practice it was not being done level, because for example, in the municipality 17 de Noviembre there are more than 600 compañeros cooperating plus their children, they had the same project in Emiliano Zapata where there were 45 compañeros. At the moment when the project distribution is done if it is divided by parents of the family as cooperators it does not come out equal.

It was necessary to see all these things, the percentage, when there is collaboration in the zone each municipality had to give the same, but it turns out that some municipalities give more, the municipality that is smallest also has to give the same, it had to collaborate the same as the big municipalities, that is it was not in balance. It was done like this with the projects, that is why it had to be modified.

But due to what was seen there have to be more members in a municipality was because of the land problem. For example, in a village where the land which the compañeros bought is, there are between 20 and 17 compañeros, against the ORCAO folks who are 150 or 300, but those few compañeros are one municipality, so the defense of the land cannot be done like that. That was the reason that it was seen to decide that more compañeros have to be grouped together so that less municipalities remain but yes they can defend the land.

So it is interesting that we realize that the plans that are made in the beginning can be modified as many times as is necessary, according to the necessity of how it has to be done. It is not because it was born like that and like that we are going to stay, there are things which yes and things which no. For example the seven principles of lead by obeying, I think that we are not going to change it, I think that it is the opposite, we are going to have to add because they are principles which cannot go off over the course our lifetimes. It is one of the reasons that before there were many municipalities, now there are few municipalities.

## **Relationship with Other Social Organizations**

### **Johana (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)**

As the Junta de Buen Gobierno and autonomous councils we have barely had a relationship with other organizations, rather they have confronted us, like the organization ORCAO. They have confronted us because they want to take from us our lands that as support bases in resistance we recovered in the year 1994. Where they have confronted us the most is in the Autonomous Municipality Lucio Cabañas, in the region Ernesto Che Guevara, Primero de Enero, and part of the municipality 17 de Noviembre.

In the autonomous municipality Comandanta Ramona we also had a problem with the organization OPDDIC. This organization tried to plunder our lands from us, OPDDIC was supported by the federal government through the agrarian reform and their organization, and tried to annex recovered land in the Mukulum Bachajón ejido.

But we do not neglect the solidarity and support of many brothers and sisters who accompanied us in those difficult times, various international organizations mobilized to put the brakes on this war of plunder. Here in Mexico many brothers and sisters also supported us and volunteered themselves as a civil encampment for peace, also the international compañeros who came to the caracol, in coordination with the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center. Thanks to those brothers and sisters who mobilized at the national and international level the brakes were put on the plunder that we were going to suffer in those moments.

The organizations that continue to affect us are ORCAO and ORUGA, which is a new organization and its strategy is based on buying leaders of our organization with the support of the official government. They manage projects with this purpose and as an organization they are affecting us because they publish that the leaders of our organization are now receiving projects, but we know that is not how it is.

## **Roles of the Junta de Buen Gobierno**

In terms of plans and agreements, the Junta de Buen Gobierno is in charge of promoting the various agreements which are made in the zone assemblies. The Junta de Buen Gobierno is in charge of seeing that the plans and agreements from the zone assembly are fulfilled, that is one of the duties of the Junta de Buen Gobierno.

Another role that we have as the Junta de Buen Gobierno is coordinating between authorities from the municipalities and regions to realize the agreements which are planned and coordinated in the zone assembly. The towns have to know whichever plan or agreement of the zone; the regional councils and municipalities are the ones in charge of talking to the towns, the people have the final word, here the people command and where the government obeys. As authorities of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, municipal and regional persons in-charge, we cannot realize any plan or agreement if the people are not in agreement, that is why before making a plan or agreement first the towns are asked.

### **Fermín (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ Comandanta Ramona)**

Our role as the Junta de Buen Gobierno is to convene normal and special assemblies. As delegates of the Junta de Buen Gobierno we convene a special assembly in coordination with those from all shifts to agree on the points or plans which are presented in each zone assembly for its potential solution, authorization, and consultation in the towns. We think that the zone assembly is another decision-making body for decisions which the members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno cannot make, because in the zone assembly the commissioners and agents of the towns and support base members are always present.

In these assemblies it is made known of the advances in the work plans which we do as members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno and of the commission which we are responsible for doing or coordinating, because the members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno were commissioned in various work areas, like health, education, production, communication, and ecotourism. We do the zone assembly every two months, but in the short term important points can come up which need to be talked about or planned among authorities of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, municipal and regional councils, so we convene quickly a special assembly, above all if there is an important point to plan.

Another of the Junta's tasks is seeing for the development of the municipalities, towns, and communities in general. As the Junta de Buen Gobierno it is our obligation to balance level development in all the work areas, like education, health, production, and communication. Before the Junta de Buen Gobierno was created there was a uneven development, national and international civil society who supported our cause supported more the well-known municipalities, closer, and the further away ones were left in abandonment.

Before the NGOs gave support to the municipalities which they knew more, that is why now, so that there is not that problem, the Junta de Buen Gobierno is the one that has to give the proposals, the one that has to command what necessities the people have and the people have to come. The Junta has to inform in a zone assembly how many donations arrived to the Junta de Buen Gobierno and on what those donations are going to be spent, but it is already an agreement of the zone, it is an agreement of the municipalities in which that money is going to be spent

But it was not always like this, in the period from 2004 to 2008 the resources were divided up by municipality and there were municipalities which has less collaborating inhabitants, they were responsible for the same as the municipalities with more population, so we realized that is not balance. Then later, thanks to the fact that they oriented us this was changed, now there is balance we are thinking that it now be done per collaborator, for example if a municipality has 600 it has to make the account of how much that municipality is responsible for and one with less also it is responsible for less.

## Questions

*How many members make up the Junta de Buen Gobierno and the autonomous councils?*

There are 12 members, six *compañeros* and six *compañeras*. Within the Junta de Buen Gobierno each one of the regions has its representative on the Junta, the selection has to be in the municipalities, it is chosen who is going to do the work in the Caracol or in the Junta de Buen Gobierno. The autonomous councils depend on each municipality, for example the municipality Lucio Cabañas, which has five regions, to name its municipal councils those regions have to meet and have to see who is the one who is going to be an authority, and have to contribute one from each region.

*How many members of the Junta are there in total?*

Sometimes per se we are not good mathematicians, in total there are 60 members who have to work, but it is going to be rotating every week in five shifts of 12 members each one.

*Of those 60 members of the Junta are half *compañeras* and half *compañeros*?*

Yes were are in half, no one is more, no one is less.

*How are the *compañeros* who work as members of the Junta de Buen Gobierno supported?*

The support for the *compañeros* members of the Junta depend on each municipality. Each municipality names its delegate for the Junta and each municipality makes a proposal on how the help can be. There are municipalities that help them in their work in the milpa, sometimes in the scrape once a year, also it is supported in that they remain free of other work because they just decide to work in the Junta. That is, just support in the municipalities.

*Does everyone complete the whole period of their position or are there some who leave work part-way through?*

There are some who leave it and do not fulfill the three years of their position. Of the *compañeros* who we are now passing to work there are some who per se do not decide to do this work that the people entrust them with, sometimes in one year they go away or go outside of the organization, sometimes they decide like that. Some support base *compañeros*, like parents of a family, to not let their sons or their daughters go out, it is also what is happening. There are others who per se neglect to do the work, they say that they do not know how to read or write, but they are lies and per se they do not come to fulfill the three years. Those who complete the



three years are those who per se have that idea, that conscience, who have to know how to do and learn there, be it that we know or do not know how to do it but we have to confront it and we are going to confront it.

We have an agreement that if a delegate of the Junta de Buen Gobierno does not follow-through, does not come the their shift, the one who has to substitute that delegate is the council of their municipality, if they are from the 17 de Noviembre, Lucio Cabañas, or Comandanta Ramona municipality, well that space is not going to remain just like that. The problem that there is for which they did not come does not matter, the Municipal Council has to have one week of shift on the Junta, although it is not their obligation but since the delegate from their municipality did not come well the council has to fulfill.

*In the municipality is there also a rule to sanction when they do not follow-through?*

First it is called to attention, they are always given an opportunity three times. If the compañero does not come they are going to ask why they did not come, what is the problem. If it is for sickness it is justified that they did not come, if it is because they did not want to come, they got lazy, their attention must be called for a first time. The second time they might have to pay, but first it has to be seen well what the motive is, what the problem is. Problems arise per se, if someone does not want to do the work or they might leave because they do not want to do the work, but also maybe because their idea and their heart are not no longer there, sometimes it has come out like that.

*Can you do all the work with 12 members of the Junta? Because in Caracol II there are 28 members and sometimes we feel the work a little heavy.*

There is much difficulty to do all the work that the Junta de Buen Gobierno needs to do in each municipality, out of necessity as of right now we are bearing with it like that but also there is need to make a proposal, that idea in which we are going to construct, the local authorities which must be in the assembly have to see first. There is that difficulty because each delegate, compañero or compañera, has their own commission aside from the shift that they are going to be covering each week, so there it becomes more difficult for us. That is what we are confronting up to where we are able but still there are ideas on how we can take those steps forward.

*What is the ecotourism work which you mentioned?*

In our zone there are two hot springs, one is the El Salvador hot spring, which is in the municipality Comandanta Ramona, there the compañeros are taking shifts, and the other is the one in Tzaconejá, during Easter week they also take shifts.

*The delegate compas how long is their shift?*

We change every week, one Sunday we enter and the next Sunday it is handed over to the next shiftmember. The agreement is that the shiftmember who is already there has to leave on Monday, they cannot leave at the same time that the other enters. Why? The shiftmember who is already there has to be there two or three hours, even up to a day, because the pending issues or work reports which are pending sometimes are not clear to the shiftmembers who are going to stay, so that shiftmember who is about to leave has to be there as a responsible person. Then when the Junta who has to stay says to the compañeros from the previous shift that they are now free, that they can now go, until that moment the shift that is to leave has to leave.

*What is the method which is used for the selection of delegates?*

The method for the selection of delegates is that the support base compañeros from the municipality have to meet and the municipality has to promote their meetings. An example, in Lucio Cabañas there are five regions and each region has to choose five representatives. Those five

representatives have to present themselves to the municipality and the municipality is the one who is going to take them to the zone assembly to choose their delegate for the Junta de Buen Gobierno, but democratically the people have to be the one to name them.

*The grain bank and the gravel are on a recovered plot? Do you have machines or how do you do that work?*

It is within a recovered plot, from an ejido, but the gravel selling is in the hands of the Junta de Buen Gobierno so the percentage has to come in the Junta. We do not have machines, the constructor or the one who is going to come to the Junta to buy has to scrape, be it with a tractor or with I don't know what, but we just are going to send our commission for it to count how many trips they are going to take a day, we are not going to make other responsibilities more to watch over and know how many trips are taken a day.

*When you spoke about balance among the municipalities it was focused more on the dividing-up of donations, but it is just necessary to balance in the aspect of economic resources, for example in the collective work, how is it balanced when work is needed or in the naming of authorities, the members of the Junta?*

Balance is what was said before, that is according to the number of collaborators in a municipality, in the division of a donation or in the collective work it has to be like that, it is that there is no other way, it has to be like that, also in the naming of the authorities it depends on the number of compañeros in each municipality.

For example to choose delegates of the Junta in a region, let's talk about Aliado, that region is a small region, Independencia has more compañeros, so the obligation is that Aliado must have its representation on the Junta de Buen Gobierno, its compañero, its compañera, but we cannot tell it to give six because it is small, since Independencia is bigger it must take another little bit more to be able to help those compañeros. But it does not mean that Aliado should not give a representative, if we do it like this we are leaving that region out, it has to have representation from all the regions.

# Participation of Women

## **Jessica (Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ 17 de Noviembre)**

In the positions of the municipality, like the council and on the Junta, us women are working together with the compañeros, six compañeros and six compañeras in the zone and municipality. For the Junta to push for the participation of women it promotes women's encounters, we have not done one in the zone but in the municipalities we have. At times the Junta makes the proposal to do an encounter of compañeras, like for example on March 8<sup>th</sup>, and in each municipality the male and female councilmembers organize it, together, the Junta is the one who gives a little bit of food, like sugar, beans, or a little bit of rice. It is like this how the Junta is promoting the participation of women. In the encounter they do a cultural event, sports, so that like this the compañeras lose a little bit of fear, so that they are encouraged to participate and go out of their houses a little, so that they learn to get to know other places and other compañeras from other communities. It is like this how we are promoting.

# Elaboration of Projects for the Development of the Municipalities, Regions, and Towns

It is the obligation of the Junta to elaborate projects if a community lacks development, but to elaborate the project the Junta has to convene a meeting with the councils and their commissions in various areas, like health, education, and production. They make a meeting and the Junta tells the commissions that they have to go on a visit to ask what necessity the towns have. The commissions go out to the municipalities, they get together their local commissions and they ask what is lacking in the community. When they have a list of necessities in their towns once again they meet again to write the project, depending on the need in each town.

When the project is already written, the Junta de Buen Gobierno has to find an NGO which can help them make that project work and in that case we make with a counterpart which is, for example, Enlace Civil, we present to them that we have this project and that Enlace is in charge of looking for the resources to make that project work. All of the written papers on the project are turned in, Enlace sends the fund, the resource that we are going to spend to do that project, but also the town tells the Junta to have clear accounting, that there not be any swindle there. The town is the one who approves and like that signs an agreement with the financial organization with the commitment that they are really going to realize that project that the town asked for. The most urgent necessities in the new villages are water and electricity.

We also have made mistakes, because sometimes there are NGOs that already have the project elaborated and sometimes as the Junta we do not analyze it and we do accept it, and sometimes that project is not really a need of the people. At times only because we want to accept, for example an ecostove and composting toilet project passed, we approved it and really there are towns that do not use it and towns that do. The town that does not use it because it is not really their necessity per se, they constructed it and it now remains abandoned and they do not make that work function, but there are compañeros who do like it because it makes organic fertilizer, that is why there are some who do make it work, use it.

To elaborate projects we now have a group of compañeros who are trained to learn to elaborate projects so that we no longer need outside of our autonomy, but rather our compañeros themselves are now practicing how to elaborate projects.

## Questions

*Are all the towns in your zone working with projects?*

There are some collectives which are already very advanced, but it is really an effort of the people. For example, there are compañeras who have a 40 thousand peso store, but it is their effort, they did not need a project. There are some towns which do have projects but the majority is pure effort of the people.

*Are the towns in your zone which have female commissioners and agents a majority?*

Yes, in this case all of the towns have their commissions, their agents, and their commissioners, all the towns have it.

*Approximately how many female commissioners and agents are there in the whole zone?*

We do not have the quantity but yes the majority of the towns already have their own authority compañeras.

# Role of the Vigilance Commission

The Vigilance Commission is the one which is in charge of seeing if the Junta really is administering the people's fund or the small donations which other brothers and sisters give us. When the Junta informs us of their work, of their expenses, vigilance too has to know what was spent, how much is left over and how much there is, and has to be in the zone assembly to give faith to the towns that really that expense was made and how much it is that is left over.

Before the Vigilance Commission was like the councils, the members of the commission entered into the position of vigilance for three years, but then it was modified because sometimes they did not follow through. It was changed, from 2003 to 2008 functioned like this, from 2008 onward the duration of the position is three months, but they are pure support bases who are taking shifts, on each report two vigilance shifts pass. The vigilance commission is made up of support bases from each region, for example in the municipality 17 de Noviembre there are three micro-regions and each micro-region has to send their representative, *compañero* and *compañera*. That is how they are taking shifts now in vigilance but they are support bases who are watching over the Junta if really they are doing their work well.

## Questions

*What does that word micro region mean?*

I am going to answer with an example. In the municipality 17 de Noviembre there are three regions, there is Independencia, Tierra, and Aliado, that is region. Micro region is what there is, for example in the region Independencia, there are far-away towns and for them to not have to spend so much on fare to go right to the seat, there are micro regions, five or six towns, that is why we call it micro region. It is like that how we are made up.

# **Caracol V: Which Speaks for Everyone**

Roberto Barrios



# **Formation of the Junta de Buen Gobierno**

## **Valentín (Former Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Vicente Guerrero)**

I was named as councilperson in 2003, what I understood in that time, well I did not know very well my position, we entered into the work as governments but we did not understand well. We began to arrive at the municipal level, there we began to receive our position but as we made the work rotations I did not pass continuously to the work that I was responsible for. We as the municipality Vicente Guerrero were 22 members, there were 11 women and 11 men also.

It began to go well, more or less like two years, but the problem that we had was that the time between shifts was very long, for example, I passed just three times, we were almost doing it each year and we almost did not learn from governing. In other municipalities they might not have had that problem because the number of members depends on the municipality. We began to govern and some did the work well but others did not, it is as if it is fear, that is why they did not do the work.

## **Ana (Education Former. MAREZ El Trabajo)**

In the beginning the municipal councils were the ones who governed in the Junta, the councils took shifts of one month and as in each municipality there are several teams of authorities, that is they are incorporated into a group in each municipality, so then for the next shift it could be that there is no longer the council but rather another member can lead there, be it the justice commission, the women's commission, the agrarian commission, according to who is responsible for going, they were going along rotating in each municipality.

We began to govern ourselves like this in Zona Norte and then there were problems. The problem that there was is that the municipalities were being abandoned because if the council was governing one month in the Junta well the municipality is abandoned, of course there were the other members but the maximum head is the council, without the council there was difficulty coordinating with the other authorities. That is the difficulty, the abandonment of the municipality, the coordination was not very good because there was a great deal of absenteeism from the council and each while it had to go to the meeting, it had to make its report, it had to leave, the municipality was mainly abandoned.

Another problem is that when it was already governing in the zone the account not longer came out because many of us did not know math, they could not read and write, sometimes when they were going to buy something they forgot the change, different things that happened there. The problem of administration was the buffer that the first authority of the Junta encountered when they were governing in the zone, it happened like that in 2003 and until 2008. The compañeros as they saw that difficulty decided to change again to better the form of governing.

## **Alex (Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. Region Jacinto Canek)**

The compañeros made the work since the Junta de Buen Gobierno began, it was five years, the agreement was that each municipality name 22 delegates who were going to pass through as government, but where were they going to come from? They were going to come from the Council and the rest of its members, like its secretary, its treasurer, and its substitute, and other authorities which exercised in the municipalities.

In the five years that passed as government they encountered difficulties, that is why they thought about looking for what is the best way to do the work. A general meeting began to which the councilmembers and local authorities went, where it was discussed how it is necessary to improve the work, so the agreement was made that they have to look for three delegates per municipality and that they are the ones who are going to have as a job to pass through as delegates of the Junta.

In 2008 it began to work like that, those delegates were looked for and when they were named another general assembly met where the delegates were presented who were looked for in the municipalities. There the coordination began, how those compañeros are going to work who were already named as delegates to exercise their position, it was like this how that difficulty was resolved that those compañeros from the first Junta team had passed.

Since the year 2008 they began to pass five delegates per shift and they had to be four months on that shift, but before the four-month shift was finished and it was time for them to go, at three months the other relief shift had to come who had to stay and cover. It was done like this so that the new shift would be one month with the shift that was going to leave and would begin to pick up all the work, the idea on how the work is done, so that they get the pending issues and continue to do the work even if a shift is leaving.

In the beginning it went advancing like this but in 2010 we began to see another difficulty because some passed one shift and did not keep coming. We saw that the number of delegates to be on-duty in the Junta began to drop, so again another meeting was convened, a general assembly of the authorities in which it was reminded that they had municipalities in which their delegates were no longer complete, it was said that they had to again name in their municipalities, they had to look for the relief compañero who was no longer exercising their position. Also in 2010 it was seen that there were other compañeros who stopped covering their shift, would it be due to the four months the compañeros feel it very heavy passing their shift? We began to think, to analyze, and we came to the agreement that we are going to lower the shifts of delegates to two months, so that the compañero who is going to pass their shift does not feel so heavy passing four months. They began to be made two months for 2011 but again we saw that they were not covering the shifts as it should be. We again convened a general assembly, we again reminded the authorities of the municipalities that they had to keep looking for their delegates so that they go and cover their shifts.

Also it was seen that we have to help more the compañeros who come new entering into the shift, there are compañeros who were exercising their work since 2008 up to now and there are new compañeros. We think that we have to help the rest of the compañeros, now what we do if a new one is going to enter is that one or two compañeros have to be there, those who already

have the idea on how the work is done, to teach it to the rest. This is how it is being worked now, if two new ones enter, one enters, the one who already has the idea on how the work is done.

## Questions

*Are the delegates balanced between compañeros and compañeras?*

When the delegates were presented in a general assembly in 2009, there were more compañeros than compañeras, there were 6 delegate compañeras and the rest were pure compañeros.

*How long does each period of the Junta de Buen Gobierno last?*

The work period is three years.

*How many delegates are there on each shift? What work areas are handled within the Junta de Buen Gobierno?* The number of delegates that pass through in each shift always varies, there were shifts in which 6 passed through, there were shifts in which 7 passed through. When the shifts passed there was not someone to take each area, we all had to take it collectively. We are all involved in taking the various areas which are worked, like education, health, commerce, agroecology, transit, women, communication, justice, zone work, and the civil registry.

*It was mentioned at the end of the government there was a detail, that the account came out wrong, who detected this error, the team of authorities itself or the people?*

It was the teams of Junta delegates themselves and the information commission that is accompanying the delegates.

# Relationship with National and International Social Organizations

## Gerardo (Junta de Buen Gobierno Delegate. Region of Felipe Ángeles)

We as delegates are in the relationship with social organizations, those which are now NGOs, are not the ones who give projects. The relationship with these organization is in a direct way, which means that when they want to ask some questions to the Junta they come directly. Sometimes those who are coordinators of their organizations or collectives come, those who are internationals have come to ask how our autonomy is advancing in education and in health, and also they ask other questions like what pertains to politics, but it is not the Junta de Buen Gobierno's job to respond to that. As the Junta de Buen Gobierno we can only respond how is our autonomy advancing.

When the social organizations come and we then explain to them how education is, how health is, we tell them how that work is structured, how it is formed, they also share with us how they are struggling in their countries, when they are internationals; also national compañeros tell us how they organize. They inform how they are advancing, how they are doing it, because they too have protests, when they go out to march in various cities, like that too they explain to us.

Also there are some errors that have been made with the various social organizations. Roberto Barrios got involved in a problem because it one did not imagine just how the struggle must be done, there was a great deal of trust. There were other brothers and sisters from another part of the world, from the other side of the ocean, what happened there is that there was a unity pact with a municipality that was called El Trabajo, and those brothers and sisters sent to do a shop that is a house within our Caracol and that is what brought us the problem.

What happened with those brothers and sisters was that as if they were wanting to cover all the areas, which they were going to pay for, they were going to resolve all the necessities that there were in the areas of education, health, and all that. Because of that our Junta de Buen Gobierno, all of us that were doing the work, including the information commission, came to enjoy the cold of this Caracol Oventik for one year, the compañeros from Zona Altos came to us, we fulfilled it because we wanted to learn, to keep learning within this construction of autonomy. That happed from not knowing just how to do, to have the relationship, how to do the work, there was a great deal of trust and hopefully it has not happened in other caracoles, but it left us a good lesson, a good experience for all of us who are doing this work.

Also there were difficulties with other brothers and sisters, some of the first caravaners who came when the militarization was here in 1994, 1995, 1996. Do you remember that Roberto Barrios too was under military custody? Some of those compañeros too were acting like huge fuckers and it is how sometimes it happens in the communities, they meet with the young people, with

the children, giving out candy, cookies, that went bad for us but we try to fulfill the punishment and here we continue struggling with that task that is left for us.

## Questions

*Are there advances in the collective work, for example in health, education?*

In these moments yes it is working well. With regard to education we have made meetings with the formers, with the education commissions, and zone coordinators, when there is work among the delegates and the formers we ask what the work is that they want to do. If there is a meeting on health, on education, among the delegates we form ourselves in a team so that we can accompany the formers. It is advancing little by little, it is not that we are saying that there is a great deal of advance but yes we are putting in practice how to do the work in collective.

*Those formers are the ones who give workshops or are they autonomous formers?*

They are the autonomous formers, those who come from each municipality.

*How are the compañeras chosen who are participating as delegates, do they choose among men and women or only among women?*

In the municipalities assemblies are done, it is there where the delegates are named, but it is mixed with men and women, it is depending on the town what compañera they want to name to be an authority.

*How was the Junta of the Zona Norte left when it came to Oventik? How was the work left there, did it remain closed?*

No one stayed there, only when there were meetings did the compañeros arrive and those who are on guard. If the compañeros had some necessity they had to go to Oventik, but although the Junta office was located in Oventik our work field continued being our Caracol.

What happened is that when there were points to discuss in the zone two delegates had to go with a information commission to accompany them and do normal or special assemblies, the work field is there in our zone. It continued functioning in the center but then just a commission would go there to do the work, they could take all the information where they were, the Caracol continued being taken care of.

*How does the Junta interact with the municipalities and the towns?*

Through meetings, special assemblies, where councilmembers and authorities from the towns come, as are the municipal agents and commissioners.

*That house that the compas from the other side made, did they not consult with the bases, only the authorities gave permission to make that house?*

Just like I was telling you, the Del Trabajo municipality had to carry the problem a great deal due to the fact that there was a unity pact with those brothers and sisters, but I was not there yet, it was above all militiapersons, but also our compañeros who were in the CCRI or they might have failed, because in spite of it was center it got to a meeting center. I do not think that they had built their house there just like that, but nor what I can clarify for you, I only know that it is that there was a unity pact because the Caracol is in the territory what El Trabajo municipality.

# Territoriality

## **Adamari (Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Rubén Jaramillo)**

Caracol V is made up of nine municipalities and two regions:

- The first municipality is Vicente Guerrero which is located in the official municipalities of Palenque and Ocosingo, adjacent to the state of Tabasco and the country of Guatemala, adjacent to the autonomous municipality Ricardo Flores Magón of La Garrucha, adjacent to the autonomous municipality Del Trabajo. The municipality Vicente Guerrero.
- The municipality Trabajo is located in the official municipalities of Palenque, Salto del Agua, and La Libertad, adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of Vicente Guerrero and Francisco Villa.
- The municipality Francisco Villa is located in the official municipality of Tila. Adjacent to the official municipality of Palenque, Tila, Tumbalá, and the municipality of Macuspana belonging to the state of Tabasco. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities Del Trabajo, Campesino, and La Paz.
- The municipality Campesino is found in the official municipality of Tila. Adjacent to the official municipalities of Macuspana and Tocotalpo in the state of Tabasco. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of La Dignidad, Benito Juárez, and Francisco Villa.
- The municipality La Paz is in the official municipality of Tumbalá. Adjacent to the official municipalities of Salto Del Agua, Tila, Yajalón, and Chilón. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of Francisco Villa, Benito Juárez, and with the Morelia Caracol zone.
- The municipality Benito Juárez is located in the official municipalities of Yajalón, Tila, and Tumbalá. Adjacent to the official municipalities of Chilón and Simojovel. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of Acabalná, La Paz, and Campesino.
- The municipality La Dignidad is located in the official municipality of Sabanilla. Adjacent to the official municipality of Tila. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of Rubén Jaramillo, Acabalná, Campesino, and the two regions Jacinto Canek and Felipe Ángeles.
- The municipality Acabalná is located in the official municipality of Tila. Adjacent to the official municipality of Sabanilla. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of Benito Juárez, Campesino, La Dignidad, and Rubén Jaramillo.

- Rubén Jaramillo is located in the official municipalities of Sabanilla and Huitiupán. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of La Dignidad, Acabalná, the region Jacinto Canek and Felipe Ángeles, and adjacent to the Oventik Caracol.
- The region Felipe Ángeles is located in the official municipality of Amatán and adjacent to the municipalities of Solosuchiapa, Amatán, and the municipality of Tacotalpa in the state of Tabasco. Adjacent to the autonomous municipalities Rubén Jaramillo and the region Jacinto Canek.
- The region Jacinto Canek, is located in the official municipality of Tacotalpa belonging to the state of Tabasco and adjacent to the autonomous municipalities of La Dignidad, Campesino, Rubén Jaramillo, and the region Felipe Ángeles.

## Questions

*Why are there two regions aside from the municipalities?*

Because those places are very far away from where the other municipalities are, they are very close to Tabasco, since those regions are very far away they are just called regions, and the compañeros who there are in those two regions are very few. *What do you do to coordinate with those that are very far off?*

Our zone has two centers. One is where our caracol center is located, which belongs to the municipality El Trabajo. The other center that we have is located in the municipality of Acabalná. These are the two centers that we have, in those two centers zone meetings are done, one meeting is done here in the Caracol and the next meeting is done in that other center, or rather it is rotational.

# Roles of the Autonomous Council

## Salomón (Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Benito Juárez)

The Autonomous Council is made up of one councilmember, one substitute, and one secretary. It is worked coordinated with the various authorities, like the health commission, education commission, and women's commission, well only like that are the agreements made, it is worked in coordination. We convene meetings in the municipalities with the authorities and in the communities to lay out proposals and work plans, that is how the work is done, always through an agreement of the meeting.

We accompany the commissions in various work areas when they realize a meeting to deal with issues in their areas. They organize collective work in the municipality and the person in-charge has to see what is being fulfilled and what has advanced. The Autonomous Council coordinates with the Junta de Buen Gobierno when there is a matter that cannot be resolved in the municipality, also it participates in the zone meetings so that they have knowledge of the agreements that are taken.

The Council must inform the Junta de Buen Gobierno of the work that is being done and must also inform the local authorities of the work that was done during the time that it was in the position. It does visits to the communities to observe how the work is going and to encourage the compañeros when they are low on spirits. It resolves the problems that are presented in the communities belonging to the municipality, depending on the severity or the possibility to resolve.

As Council this is the work or is the commitment, but it is only to represent the people because everything has to be from the people, we have to serve it not serve ourselves, everything is for the people, if it was not for the support bases well we do not arrive here, they have the work and because of them we are present.

There are many commitments that are necessary to do when the compañeros visit us well we are there and we have to receive the compañeros and compañeras. There is no hour, there is no day, provided that they have their necessity, if we can resolve it, we resolve it, if it cannot be resolved we inform the Junta if it is a bit more serious of a problem

In this way we do the work. How are the problems resolved? There have been problems in the municipality, problems with land, problems with threats, problems with electricity. I think that in all the towns these problems exist because not only those of us who are support bases live, more when we live in the official towns where the enemies are, where those who govern are, where the paramilitaries are, that is why those problems exist.

We have to see the way in which we have to govern, although really it is difficult to learn because, as some compañeros say, there are no instructions. There is not a way to be guided, there is no writing where we are guided, but we have to remember how our ancestors served



when they were not named by the officials but by the people and they served the people, there was no salary; corruption began, disservice began when the salary came in.

In this way is what little I have been in my town, in my municipality, it is what I have been able to serve although still we continue learning, it is not that we leave it because we are already old. We continue learning with everyone. I think that it is the role of the different levels, as well as the commissioners, the agents, they too have their role but also they are missing how to resolve a problem. Yes it is missing because we are not prepared because we as peasants focus more on the countryside, our law is the machete and the lime, and the pozol that we carry, I don't know if I am bad, *compañeros*, but that is what I am able to share with you.

## Questions

*Are there compañeras within the Municipal Council, in each level of the authorities do women participate?*

Yes there are *compañeras*. When I was named they also named a secretary, she had very good participation but I do not know if because of the problems in her town or for a family problem the *compañera* left. But yes there is participation of the *compañeras*, although little but there is, as we all know, there is a lack of encouragement, there is a lack of promoting that the *compañeras* learn to serve themselves, to govern themselves, we are clear, we cannot lie. There also was a *compañera* councilmember who just the same could not come, she is the former councilmember of the municipality La Dignidad, due to that problem that is happening with the recovered land she could not come with us.

*When the compañera left to replace was another compañera named to cover that space?*

There was no other *compañera*, yes it was agreed upon, it was discussed that the assembly rename but then none of the *compañeras* wanted to, so it was another *compañero*, but the same the other *compañero* did not attend much, it is that it is a lack of responsibility. Yes there is a lack of *compañeras*, it is necessary to promote and it is necessary to encourage them and I think that it is our job also to keep encouraging the *compañeras* so that there are more *compañeras* in the work, so that there is equality, because that is what there should be.

*What relationship is there between the council and the local authorities in the towns, that is the commissioners and the agents with the municipality? What is that relationship that takes place when there is a problem?*

If the agent sees a problem and cannot resolve it he or she goes to the Council. That has happened to me, I have supported an agent to resolve a problem when it can be done, according to how it is. First it has to be investigated, it has to be seen, each problem it is necessary to investigate it if it can be resolved or it cannot be resolved, it has to be posed with the local authorities. If it cannot be resolved a report is made and it is sent to the Junta.

*What collective work is organized as a Council?*

There is collective milpa work, there are small land parcels, that is what is organized and the *compañeros* work there, all the *compañeros* participate.

# Role of the Delegates of the Junta de Buen Gobierno

When the delegates are there at work they administer the resource that the zone has and the donations in the various work areas. We make a report each month and an annual report, we inform the authorities in an assembly. If there is a job which is necessary also we do a coordination with the municipal and local authorities to do it. We also attend to the *compañeros* in the municipalities and the solidary brothers and sisters who come to the Junta de Buen Gobierno when they want to work in the municipalities, visit, or turn in a donation in the Junta. When there are assemblies or meetings with the authorities we lay out proposals if there is some job that the delegates want to do, that is the role of the delegates. Also when there is some brother or sister who comes to turn in donations it then depends if he or she wants a thank-you letter, the Junta has to make that letter. Also they coordinate the collective work in the zone. That is how the delegates are working, doing the work together in collective.

## Questions

*A women's area was spoken about, what would be their roles, who are the ones who are in that?*

There is a women's commission in each municipality, when there are meetings, there the delegates are always present, it accompanied to do a job. The women's area is similar like health, education, is structured, the women's area is structured like that, not only is it for the project but it is for all the work that is wanted to be done. Maybe there are some jobs, very few, were only *compañeras* work, but it is almost in all the collective work that men and women always go, it always is with the participation of the *compañeras*.

*Could you mention some of the work that has been done specially for the *compañeras*?*

The *compañeras* have a project with an organization from Norway, they have a project to do collective work.

*At the zone level, municipal level, or in each town, what collective work is there?*

We have work in the zone, just the same the towns have collective work. In the zone is the cattle collective work, in the municipalities there are some who have general stores, clothing stores, it is depending on the work that the municipalities wanted to do.

*When the Junta de Buen Gobierno receives donations from national and international solidary brothers and sisters how is it decided what it is that is going to be done with that donation? How does it decide to receive that donation or not? Is it consulted in the town or how do you do it?*

When there are donations, we know well that the Junta cannot self-command, as we say, if we want to do work it is necessary to always consult with the towns, among men and women. That donation has to be consulted with the people just how they want it to be given use, so the people are the ones who decide. An example of what was begun to do with the donations is to make a collective work in the zone, of cattle.

A recovered land was in possession which was in the autonomous municipality El Trabajo, in a village which is called 20 de Junio, it is a plot recovered from a rancher, on that plot there were no big trees more than pure grass. Before having the cattle project what was seen is that there we are going to try, by agreement of a general assembly of authorities first a corn and bean collective was made. It began and the agreement was made, it was consulted in the towns and another special meeting was convened to see what the people thought, what they said on the proposal was that it was taken out with the authorities who went to that general assembly. The people said that we are going to do it because it is necessary to do a collective and the work began to be coordinated.

They began to coordinate to see how many compañeros are going to first do the work, it went being thought what is necessary to do that work because one month was left, in that month that it was being planned to do the work it was then time to topple the brush and plant the corn and beans. We are going to do the work in the corn collective and the bean collective, so it was sent to plow the land where the collective was going to be done, when the land was ready 10 compañeros per municipality attended to begin the work, in that week the corn and beans were planted.

We were waiting to see what result it gave us, how it went for us, but then we the authorities were already thinking, they were already in their town seeing if a cattle collective is also good. It was being consulted in the towns because two proposals came out when the collective agreement was made, that is why first a corn and bean collective began to be made to see how it went for us. Two work periods were done of the corn collective, in the first a little bit was gathered, the same for the beans, afterward it was sold. We again planted for a second time, 10 hectares were sent to be planted but then we flat out did not harvest anything.

A general assembly was again done, we again thought how we are going to continue our collective. Each authority gave their point of view, how the collective appeared to them that we were doing of corn and of beans, because there we say that we now did not harvest anything. That proposal was again taken out, to retake what had been posed in a general assembly how the authorities had been thinking to do a cattle collective, because we say that the terrain is no longer usable to plant corn and beans.

The proposal was again taken to the municipalities, to the towns, with the authorities, explaining that the collective that we are doing is not advancing well. It returned to another special meeting where we gathered another time the people's word, where the authorities came and so it was seen that yes we are going to do that cattle collective. They began to coordinate the work, what work are going to do first, the agreement on how many municipalities we are going to resend the compañeros to now do that work. Like this we went step by step, as if it was not seen that yes we were advancing but there we went.

*When a donation is received or a project is received from national or international civil society or from the solidary brothers and sisters, is a receipt made where the Junta is going to sign that it was received or how is it done?*

The brothers and sisters who come to donate always ask for a receipt and the stamp of the Junta so that they can prove in their collective or in their group where each organization comes from that it was turned in.

*Does the Junta de Buen Gobierno stay those donations or are they shared with their municipalities?*

Those donations do not have to stay in the Junta because we know that whichever donation that gets to the Junta is of the people. We as the Junta, if we propose doing a work we consult

it with the people. Like this is how we are doing that work of cattle, we begin to collect the donations to begin with that work, but consulting with the people.

# **Role of the Vigilance Commission**

## **Arnulfo (Member of the Vigilance Commission)**

The period of the vigilance commission lasts three years, its role is to carry the record in our Caracol. All the compañeros, compañeras, who go along coming, go along leaving, we have to note in our notebook if they are authorities, if they are municipal agents, or from the commission, if they are a health promoter, from education, herbalist, midwife, or healer. All this we are noting, from what community or municipality they come, we ask them about their position, also with the national and international brothers and sisters who come we make the same, very well noted about where they are from, from what countries. Once we have noted all that we have a record card to take that card to the Junta de Buen Gobierno so that it can go to the office.

## **Another Compañera Member of the Vigilance Commission from 2009 to 2012 (MAREZ El Trabajo)**

As vigilance we are seeing pending issues, seeing the work that the delegates of the Junta de Buen Gobierno are doing, together with the information commission. We had our eye on the donations, on the entry and exit of money. In the donation we were seeing how the solidary brothers and sisters come to donate small resources, we had our eye on what quantity, we made them pass by our office and we asked them what they came for and wrote down the response. We asked if they brought something, it is not to ask but to make note of it, if they say that they brought a quantity it was noted and accounted, what was left noted is sent to the Junta de Buen Gobierno, like that upon storing it we also introduce ourselves together.

As well there we were seeing the exit of money, for example when there was much expense on education we were present, we saw what quantity is going to be spent, what thing is going to be bought, what material is going to be used in the construction of education, we went taking note rather a record of the material bought. We calculated how much is spent and what is the price of each material, if it is rods, if it is writing pads, we were making the calculus between the three groups, the quantity comes out, it is taken to the place where the purchase is going to be made. If a good quantity is taken, for example 5 thousand or 10 thousand pesos the delegates do not go alone nor with the information commission, the vigilance commission also accompanies to see if it is clear or if it is true that the work is being done, to be in agreement, but not only to come and say to the Junta de Buen Gobierno that someone is stealing, simply it is the work method that we are practicing.

Returning from the purchase the compañeros have to make their justification, so now the delegate is responsible. Then, together with the vigilance commission, the one who is present is going to clarify how the purchase was, what was done, if it is true that it was spent like that or not. The Vigilance Commission that was present clarifies it, so if it went like that well like

that is how it had to go, it is there where we remain a bit well with the work. If it is that the compañeros leave a bit early for the purchase, for example at four in the morning, since they go without breakfast, they do not eat before leaving, they have permission to eat even a taco, a soda, it is only that. If they go with breakfast, they already ate their beans, then they cannot eat anything, the only thing that they can buy is a soda to quench their thirst. They have to bring their note where it is clarified what thing was bought, to carry together the accounts of what was done, where the construction material is going to be bought. We are responsible for doing the work just one month, it goes rotating in the municipalities and upon doing the accounts they have to come out clear. What do we do to prove that the accounts come out clear? Within the justification it is seen in the accounts, if comes to be lacking that is the problem, even if we are afraid of doing the account but we have to do it well so that the work goes well. If it does not go well, if 100 or 200 pesos are missing. What is happening here? Where did the 100 pesos go? We say to ourselves, "I don't know, perhaps the delegate lost it, spent it or perhaps more was spent. There is where we have to scold ourselves, rather discuss why this has to happen, why it has to be that more is spent.

If the money is lost the punishment goes equal. If 100 pesos are lost, if the account does not square up, it has to be completed, the only way of completing it is to take the money in our pockets, counting the delegates of the Junta, the vigilance commission and information, it goes equally for all, no one does not pay, even if it is that they did not spend they have to pay.

We also have to watch over the caracol center, check that the garbage is not spilt. We also check that the militiapersons are looking after their work, we also have seen that there the compañeras do not participate much in militiawomen, but at times a municipality comes that does bring a compañera, not many compañeras come who are militiawomen but a group of militiamen come who bring a compañera, there others that bring only compañeros.

It is like this more or less how we see the work, perhaps the compañeras are not participating much, but I as a compañera feel that I have represented the rest of the compañeras. Perhaps a way of encouraging us is lacking but I feel that, as a woman here I am participating, although I have not participated in another place, I did not even enter as secretary of government, but I am here participating, demonstrating that as women we too know how to watch over. I was named in the municipality Trabajo, taking the vote of the compañeros and also of the compañeras to represent the rest who say that they do not know how to read.

## Questions

*Who made the agreement that it is necessary to resolve like that when money is missing in the accounts, the delegates or did it have to come from the base?*

From the beginning when they named us as the vigilance commission they clarified for us there in our town that we have to watch over our Junta de Buen Gobierno, that if something comes to be missing we had to pay it because that is the job, they send us just to watch over, to see.

*Has that problem with the accounts happened much?*

To not lie to you, it has happened, not daily, not each month, but it has happened. About two times I think that happened and it was done like that.

*In the vigilance group are all the towns in the zone participating or are they named by teams?*

It is named by teams, each municipality has to name three vigilance commissions but there are some municipalities which just have two, for example we from the municipality El Trabajo are just two and we pass through continuously.

*In the vigilance teams are you by half compañeros and compañeras?*

There is no division in the group, we work in a team. We there in the zone think if we divide it, it would be individualism, more better to take the practice because woman and man are equals. Just two of us compañeras have participated, one from Francisco Villa and me from El Trabajo. The work is for three years and we take shifts every month, right now my work goes finishing and other new ones are already named but still I do not know if there are women who are going to be vigilance commission.

*What is happening to the other municipalities which do not have women in vigilance?*

I think that promoting it is lacking. There are two of us women who are on the vigilance commission but yes there have been women who have participated in other work areas, where the compañeras do not participate in the zone, in the municipality. The compañeras who we have are working in our communities as a collective, the only thing that they are unable to do is leave their house, many things happen there.

*What has happened with the donation that you have encountered during your work?*

What we are responsible for seeing is that the quantity is complete, it is just checking that it is complete, that not even one cent is missing.

# **Rights and Responsibilities of Autonomous Authorities**

## **Karina (Women's Commission. MAREZ El Trabajo)**

The various levels of authorities must fulfill the work that they are responsible for doing in the various MAREZ as delegates, autonomous councilmembers, or local authorities in Zona Norte. We convene assemblies when it is necessary to discuss important matters or problems in the municipalities and we check the fulfillment of the agreements. We organize our towns to resolve the necessities, for example in health, education, agroecology, women, food necessities, everything that composes the municipalities. It is our responsibility to fulfill our work shifts during the period of government that we are responsible for. The various levels of authorities must be convened to a meeting, attending the special assemblies which the zone does for matters to be dealt with and also participate in the meetings of the communities and the MAREZ.

The various levels of authorities have the right to govern, to propose, to watch over, and to resolve problems. The various levels of authority have the right to be respected by our people. We have the right to demand from the people the fulfillment of the agreements that they have proposed. The delegates of the Junta de Buen Gobierno have the right to be supported by our town in food, health expenses, and in farmwork for the sustenance of our family, this is when we are covering our shift.

## **Alondra (Member of the Women's Commission. Region of Jacinto Canek)**

We as women also have the right or the duty to work together with our towns and also with our compañeras, encouraging them, that they too have that right to work. We as organized women, have our rights, our duties, nor do we have to stay alone at home. I always have liked working with all the female authorities of the communities and of my zone because there we learn, lose fear, do not hesitate. They sometimes tell us as women that we do not belong to that work, for example the collective like the corn one. There are various jobs that we too can do, for example we have a general store, we have chicken raising, we have various jobs in our community. Also we dare to go out. Why? Because if we do not go out well the rest of the compañeras do not learn, that enthusiasm to go out and learn with all the other compañeras is not given to them, because we see that many compañeras who go out and that is what we do. We also work in the field, with the families, with our compañeras, and that is all that we do in our region or in our town, and it is how we work united with the rest.



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