

SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF “RULE BY OBEYING/ MANDAR OBEDECIENDO” OF THE ZAPATISTA ‘GOOD GOVERNMENT’ AND OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

(*Based* on a speech by Comandante Tacho at the Second Encounter of the Zapatistas with the peoples of the World 2007, and on the National Congress of Indigenous Peoples statements).

1. To lead by obeying /Obedecer y no Mandar: the people are the ones that decide, those that lead do not make laws or give orders. The movement is led by the people, not the spokespersons or representatives.

2. To represent; not replace / Representar y no suplantar: neither the government nor the leaders can decide for the people, the people/community retains the power to decide. The leaders can propose, but not decide or impose their ways. Representation is about giving voice and reality to what the people has previously decided through an open and popular assembly.

3. To work from below and not seek to rise / Bajar y no subir: the work of those in government is not to gain greater influence or power over other members of the community, but to work actively to maintain equality and horizontality. The leaders must engage with, and be accountable to, the community at all times.

4. To serve; not self-serve / Servir y no servirse: those in government must do political work out of ‘conscience’ and not out of desire for personal gain. This has also been formulated as “everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves” / “para todos todo, para nosotros nada.” Those in the ‘Juntas of the Good Government’ and the community workers/promoters do not get paid for their work (not in the form of money). Their community takes care of their needs and do their communal work for them.

5. To convince; not conquer / Convencer y no vencer: Decisions are not made through a majority vote but in an open and popular assembly. The point is to create consensus (or as close to consensus as possible) through respectful dialogue. This also means the creation of Consultations (questionnaires) and forums that make possible community participation.

6. To construct; not destroy / Construir y no destruir: legitimate authority should only seek to construct/create community and community power, and not destroy it by fomenting divisions or centralizing power in his/her own hands. A good leader builds social relationships. A legitimate authority facilitates the government’s ‘power-to’ serve, and not ‘power-over’ the people. Government is the organizational structure that the community creates to take care of its own needs.

7. To propose; not impose / Proponer y no imponer: The leaders can propose what needs to be done, but the people must decide at the end. The leaders cannot impose their decision for ‘the benefit’ of the community. The leader, as intelligent as she/he might be, cannot ‘think’ for the community. The people know what they want and are capable of learning from their mistakes too.