

# REPORT OF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION BRIGADE IN SANTIAGO XANICA, OAXACA- MEXICO

## INTRODUCTION



*Santiago Xanica.*

The European collectives Nodo Solidale (Italia), Zapatista "Marisol" of Lugano (Suiza), and Nomads of XM24 (Italia) that make up the PIRATA Platform (Internationalist Resistance and Self-Initiative, Weaving Autonomies), organized a brigade to observe the violation of the rights of native peoples in the municipality of Santiago Xanica, Oaxaca, México, in which activists from France and the Spanish State also participated. From Monday March 14 to Monday March 21, 2011, the brigade went around the municipality and outlying areas, taking audio and video testimonies from the parties affected by the violations.

The work consisted of interviewing members of the local organization and some townspeople, going over documents, and holding gender oriented talks with women.

All the participants are part of the social movement, so we organized the brigade and wrote the report collectively and horizontally, as comrades in struggle, and not as Human Rights "professionals". Even so, the information was compiled and testimonies were taken in the spirit of telling the truth directly, objectively and according to the consensus of the people.

## OBJECTIVES

The task that the International Brigade set for itself has been to listen, understand, relate, and publicize what is happening in the municipality of Santiago Xanica, located in the Miahuatlan District in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. In recent months the townspeople of Xanica have been denouncing outrageous violations and abuses by PRI party members and power groups against the local Committee in Defense of Indigenous Rights (CODEDI Xanica)<sup>1</sup> and the general population.

Historically, the native Zapotec people of Santiago Xanica have suffered constant repression, militarization, and dispossession, all fomented by national and international capital. There are now three highly significant problems that affect the community: the tourist and development projects that the State and national and international businessmen seek to implement in their territory; the invalidation of their elections according to traditions and customs of the municipality; and the arrest and imprisonment of political prisoner Abraham Ramírez Vasquez<sup>2</sup>, who remains in jail since January of 2005. In view of this situation, we decided to write and distribute this report to state and federal institutions, human rights organizations, the civil society, the social movement, and to both independent and official communications media.

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<sup>1</sup> Member of the Magonista Zapatista Alliance (AMZ) and one of the founding organizations of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO).

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Ramirez Vasquez, a member of CODEDI, was arbitrarily arrested in the municipality of Santiago de Xanica on January 15, 2005, after being shot by the State Preventive Police, on charges of aggravated murder and kidnapping. This was also true of Juventino Garcia Cruz and Noel Garcia Cruz, free don March 17, 2010, a year after having served their unjust sentence.

Another reason that we are doing this work is to show our solidarity and the affection we have for the peoples struggling to defend Mother Earth, conserve their traditions, and develop autonomy.

## CONTEXT

The community of Santiago Xanica is situated 1240 meters above sea level in the Zapotec Sierra Sur in the state of Oaxaca, two hours away from Santa Maria Huatulco by dirt road. The municipality where Xanica is the municipal seat has around 2800 inhabitants, at least half of whom live outside the community. The municipality includes several extremely small villages known as *rancherías* and three somewhat larger villages known as *agendas*: Santa Maria Coixtepec, San Antonio Ozolotepec, and San Felipe Lachillo. Most of the workers of Santiago Xanica fall into the following groups: service providers in private homes and hotels in Huatulco; workers on coffee plantations and in the cornfields; vendors of local products outside the community; and migrants, whether seasonally or for good.

The community's true wealth is water, which is abundant in the mountains and scarce on the coast; the hotel owners of Huatulco began piping river water in 2005.

Since ancient times, the community, like many others in the state, has governed itself according to the traditional system of responsibility positions in which the authorities are elected in a General Assembly. In order to perform this service to the community, one must live in the town and must have previously demonstrated his or her concern for the needs of the community, serving in other positions, such as *topiles*, *mayordomos* and *regidores*<sup>3</sup>.

Traditionally, the persons who hold these positions do not receive a salary; the work is voluntary, a form of service to the people.

The *Cabildo*, or Municipal Council, is made up of around 50 people, who take weekly shifts in groups of 18. .



*Copalita River.*

Since 1985, however, with the flow of governmental economic resources into the municipality, the Municipal President, City Manager, Council members, Alternates and Department Heads have begun to receive salaries. Then —we were told— service on the Municipal Council ceased to be simply a community service and began to be a job. The number of people was reduced to 30. But authorities are still elected by the General Assembly and in order to be elected, they must have served in a series of positions through the system conventionally called *usos y costumbres*, or traditions and customs; this requirement, however, is not being respected.

This form of electing authorities has been, and still is, very widespread among the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca; in June of 1998 it was legalized in a statewide constitutional reform. Since then, Santiago Xanica is one of 420 municipalities out of a total of 570 that elects its authorities according to traditions and customs.

Despite Constitutional recognition, granted in order to prevent another uprising like that of the Zapatistas in Chiapas in 1994, the elections according to traditions and customs in Xanica, as well as in other communities, are subject to harassment and invalidation whenever an authority is elected who is not submissive to business interests in the area. Violations of this right occurred in Xanica in 1998, 2005, and in the last election that took place in the people's assembly of December 5, 2010.

## THE INVALIDATION OF THE LEGITIMATE ELECTION HELD ACCORDING TO TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

On August 29, 2010, the popular Assembly was convoked in Xanica and attended by all adult citizens in order to elect a new Municipal Council, given that the three-year term of the former municipal Presidency, headed by Mr. Jaime Sanchez Cortez, had come to an end. At this time, another group of townspeople

<sup>3</sup> In the indigenous communities of Oaxaca, the *topiles* are in charge of town security, a temporary position; in Xanica, they are also known as ministers. The *mayordomo* is usually in charge of the town's sacred festivities. And the *regidores* are the authorities who make up the Municipal Council, or *Cabildo*.

affiliated with the PRI party presented their candidate, Mr. Ciro Flores Garcia, a man who was born in the town but who had left more than 20 years ago and has never held a position of responsibility or performed any service in the community; in other words, in keeping with the traditions and customs, he did not meet the requirements for becoming Municipal President. According to the testimonies of the inhabitants of Xanica, Ciro Flores Garcia was illegitimately presented by Sergio Antonio Garcia Cruz, the authority imposed during the three-year term from 2005 to 2007, who has been facilitating the privatization of the territory of Xanica ever since then and who is directly responsible for the repression against CODEDI<sup>4</sup>.

The group in the assembly that defends community traditions and customs did not accept this candidacy because the necessary requirements were not met. The PRI group, on the other hand, refused to present another candidate that met the requirements, and this brought the Assembly to an end. For the first time in Santiago Xanica, the General Assembly for electing an authority was postponed.

On October 3, 2010, the people met once again on the basketball court across from the old church, to hold the Assembly. Once again, the people affiliated with the PRI presented Ciro Flores Garcia. As part of his campaign, he passed out food and household supplies, lollipops, and clothes, and brought in clowns in an effort to attract as many people as possible in true patron-client fashion common in the electoral campaigns of the institutional political parties. Furthermore, the same day, two State patrol cars were stationed a few kilometers outside of town on the only dirt road leading to Xanica.

Once again the assembly rejected this imposition and set a new date for resolving the issue.

The comrades denounce the fact that the PRI campaign tactics of bringing in truckloads of people and passing out food and household supplies, gifts, clothes, and lollipops corrupted the local social and political relations. The situation also forced the movement supporting traditions and customs to partially modify their practices; for example, they had to meet in private homes to choose their candidate, thereby resting importance and centrality from the popular assembly.

On December 5, 2010, in a tense atmosphere, the third General Assembly was held to elect the Municipal President, City Manager, Council members and Alternates. The group affiliated with the PRI finally presented a candidate that met the minimal requirements, Artemio Gonzalez Garcia, and the elections were held. Mr. Jaime Castro Hernandez, supported by a Broad Front including CODEDI Xanica and other citizens, won with 290 votes against Artemio Gonzalez Garcia, who obtained 276 votes<sup>5</sup>.



Giant tablet page with election results of December 5, 2010.

In Santiago Xanica, according to traditions and customs, a vote is cast by drawing a vertical line on the page of a giant tablet under the name of the publicly chosen candidate.

Upon seeing that they were in the minority, the PRI supporters, led by Sergio Antonio Garcia Cruz, tried to grab the tablet in order to annul the assembly. There are photos and videos that prove the aggression, as well as hundreds of witnesses. Despite the violent attitude of the PRI members, the election was held and the new Municipal Council was chosen.

For the election to be recognized, the State Electoral Institute (IEE) requires the signature of the outgoing Municipal President, in this case, Mr. Jaime Sanchez Cortez. On a number of occasions, he had said that he

<sup>4</sup> This is a reference to the police attack that took place in January of 2005, in which eight Xanica citizens were wounded; Abraham Ramirez Vazquez, Noel and Juventino Garcia Cruz were arrested, and the town was violently searched by police forces. It is also a reference to the arrest of Cesar Luis Diaz, former APPO council member for the Coastal Region, in June of 2007.

<sup>5</sup> An official document signed by 394 people certifies the election results. .

would recognize any election result, but when the time came to sign the paper validating the election of Jaime Castro Hernandez, the ex-President refused to sign, thereby endorsing the PRI group through its acts. According to the testimonies taken, Jaime Sanchez Cortez had ruled with the same attitude displayed by Sergio Antonio Garcia Cruz, and his action against the legitimate election seems to bear this out.

The testimonies reveal that the requirement imposed by the IEE is a violation of the system of traditions and customs, in which the maximum municipal authority is not the Municipal President, but instead, the General Assembly; the Assembly alone must validate the election results.

In the end, the invalidation was endorsed by the IEE, which accepted the demands of the PRI-affiliated group as legitimate, thereby scorning the mechanisms and rules of the elections by traditions and customs in spite of the evidence presented to the Institute by the winning group. We would mention that the IEE did the same thing in 46 other municipalities governed by the traditional system of responsibility positions, thereby giving rise to or reactivating local and intra-community conflicts. In the specific case of Santiago Xanica, an IEE functionary proposed the validation of the elections in exchange for a “donation” of \$500,000 pesos, thereby proving the level of corruption that exists in state institutions<sup>6</sup>.

Due to the IEE’s failure to recognize the Assembly’s decision, the level of tension in the town has risen, generating confrontation, attacks, threats and increased militarization. On December 24, 2010, the PRI supporters did everything possible to boycott the town festival, throwing stones at the musical group that was invited, turning out the lights, and starting a fight. At the end of it, one person<sup>7</sup> had three knife wounds and the festival was suspended.

We also took testimonies regarding another confrontation that occurred in the community church, which has been used by PRI supporters as a pretext for bringing charges against the group defending its traditions and customs. On March 16, 2011, after charges were filed by the PRI supporters, a State patrol car came into the town and parked for two hours in front of the church, investigating the incident and taking down license plate numbers.

At the same time, Xanica townspeople have charged that the PRI- affiliated group has apparently hired assassins to ambush the comrades in the forefront of the struggle for the recognition of indigenous rights. In particular, from 5 to 8 comrades have been threatened with death and disappearance by Domingo Garcia Mijangos<sup>8</sup>, a collaborator of ex Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, and by his accomplices: Jorge Franco Vargas (ex Secretary General of the state government), Bulmaro Rito Salinas (ex functionary), federal PRI congressman Hector Pablo Puga Leyva and local PRI legislator Mercedes Rojas.



*Moments during the voting on December 5, 2010*

Since then, the broad-based movement that defends its traditions and customs has sought dialogue, negotiation, and a peaceful solution despite attacks, threats, and pressure exerted against its members. The solutions now being officially proposed to avoid the radicalization of the conflict are the integration of

<sup>6</sup> Denounced by the elected authorities of Santiago Xanica in a press conference held on February 4, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Juventino Lopez Gonzalez, 36 years of age, was slashed three times in his shoulder and back.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Domingo Garcia Mijangos – according to testimonies – organized a number of people in the region to participate in a Peace March in June of 2006, in order to discredit the APPO and build support for Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Furthermore, he is the advisor to the PRI municipal presidencies in indigenous towns.

some PRI supporters into the Municipal Council, the imposition of an outside municipal administrator, or a new elections in which the IEE plans to use the ballot box system, or in other words, the secret vote in polling booths. These proposals would do away with the system of traditions and customs, violate the autonomy of the people, and would fail to recognize the legitimate General Assembly vote of December 5, 2010.

## THE INTERESTS BEHIND THE ELECTION

*"It's shameful to buy people, because people have no price."*  
(CODEDI-Xanica member)



Periodico Critica, 1<sup>st</sup> two weeks of February, 2011

### 1. CODEDI's position

The members of CODEDI-Xanica have told us that the battle being waged in the town involves more than the election of the Municipal President. For them, and for most of the townspeople, it involves respect for the decisions of the people that have been made in keeping with their traditional rules.

They say that it involves the defense of their traditions and customs against the infiltration of political party practices and capitalist social relations that tear apart the community-based social fabric.

This is a struggle that includes all the rights of indigenous people, from the possibility of studying, speaking, and having their own news media in the

Zapotec language<sup>9</sup>; the right to claim ownership of an ancestral territory, care for it, and leave it to their sons and daughters; the right to have their own cosmovision; the right to continue the practices of *tequio*<sup>10</sup> and other forms of community support; the right to have their fiestas without having them turned into cheap folklore for tourists' video cameras; the right to cure themselves with medicinal plants; the right to food sovereignty and non-dependence on governmental programs; the right to non-interference by political parties in the political affairs of the community and to the avoidance of the division, transporting of people for political ends, corruption, and objectification of social relations that this interference entails; the profoundly democratic right to subject authorities to the will of the people, or in other words to rule by obeying; and the right to the application of the San Andrés Accords.

As an International Brigade, we wish to add that the women with whom we held gender discussions and meetings play a central role in the organization of the people. They are organized in a weaving and embroidery cooperative in order to sell their craftwork and build economic and social autonomy. These women were protagonists in the discussion tables of the APPO, in the takeover of Channel 9, and in maintaining the barricades. They experienced the fierce State repression in the flesh many times, and they have encouraged and participated in the Indigenous Communications Group and Radio Roca. Furthermore, they have held positions in the Municipal Council<sup>11</sup>.

The leading role they are playing is something new and necessary in their traditions and customs, and is the result of years of experience with CODEDI and with women working on gender issues.

To sum up, the struggle for the recognition of the Municipal President Jaime Castro Hernandez is just one stage in constructing the most favorable conditions for developing autonomy in the Zapotec town of Santiago Xanica. This is a universally recognized right in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, as well as in the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>9</sup> The community Radio Roca had to interrupt its transmissions due to harassment by the Army. One of CODEDI's projects is creating favorable conditions for getting it back on the air.

<sup>10</sup> A form of community work.

<sup>11</sup> The women comrades tell us that one woman in the organization became Secretary to the President, and despite rumors spread around town, stayed in office until the end of her term. She was the first woman on the Municipal Council in Xanica.

## 2. Special interests of the political parties

The PRI group is interested in attaining paid positions. Ever since federal and state funds began to flow into the area, the municipal posts offer a good salary compared to the extremely low income of most people who live in the state.

The testimonies reveal that officials not only hope to earn the \$3,000 or \$5,000 pesos a month paid to municipal officeholders, but also to benefit from resources for municipal projects that come from State or Federal Division 33 and 28 funds. Holding public office is a way to do business through local power boss networks.



*Xanica Municipal Palace.*

One example of this “take the money and run” attitude is the robbery of \$4,700,000 pesos, that disappeared in the triennial balance sheet of Municipal President Jaime Sanchez Cortez, funds that should have been used to pave the road to Santiago Xanica. The authorities involved tried to cover up the robbery by documenting expenditures with accounting figures and photos of works underway in territories other than the road to Xanica. Furthermore, investigations of the construction firm show that it is a phantom business<sup>12</sup> that simply doesn't exist. Another \$1,300,000 pesos are also missing from the balance sheet for a housing project that was never built; moreover, the municipality has a 6-year debt of \$1,400,000 pesos to Banobras for the urbanization of the municipality and for productive

agricultural projects. The evidence was gathered and taken to the federal Senate and House of Deputies and to the Oaxaca State Legislature in order to demand supervision by Federal and State auditors.<sup>13</sup>



*Official photos of works never undertaken in Santiago Xanica.*

According to testimonies taken in the town, there are two families that enriched themselves at the expense of the municipal government: those of Sergio Antonio Garcia Cruz and Jaime Sanchez Cortez, the last two municipal presidents. They are the same families that sparked divisions in the town and that act as government operatives for doing away with the traditions and customs of the community

## 3. In the clutches of national and foreign capital

In order to understand the economic and political interests that are intent on wiping out autonomous organization in Santiago Xanica, it's important to note that the town is surrounded by natural resources.

<sup>12</sup>The files denouncing these robberies are in the hands of the people who made the accusations. The International Brigade has a video and photo report of the copies.

<sup>13</sup>The request for the intervention of the Federal Comptroller was presented on June 24, 2010 and answered affirmatively on July 28, 2010 by the President of the Vigilance Committee, file #

UAC/DGACC/DAC/SADC/310/1681/2010. The request for the intervention of the State Auditor's office was presented on January 27, 2011 and as of yet there has been no answer.

Above and beyond the segment of the population that sees public office as easy access to economic resources, it's important to unmask the fact that provoked divisions have to do with the economic and political interests of actors more powerful than the two previously mentioned families. These actors are the lobbies that, arm in arm with politicians of all parties, intend to make huge profits from business operations in indigenous territories. They are the ones who benefit from neoliberal policies such as the Plan Puebla Panama (now called Plan Mesoamerica), which translates into projects in the Zapotec Sierra Sur, such as the Copalita- Tonameca Basin, the tourist projects on the Chacahua-Huatulco Coast, the Paso de La Reina Dam and Reservoir, the Huatulco-Salina Cruz turnpike, the concessions to transnational mining companies, and the plunder and privatization of the territory in general.



San Jeronimo river.



Piping water Río Copalita



Government programs

Especialmente en el área que incluye el Municipio de Santiago Xanica y sus alrededores, estos consorcios de grandes compañías buscan implementar proyectos de turismo e infraestructura como la mercantilización del Río Copalita (excursiones de aventura, rafting en aguas blancas, eco-resorts forestales); la apertura de una nueva carretera desde La Venta hasta los municipios de Ozolotepec y desde allí hasta Xanica y Santa María Huatulco; la realización del proyecto de turismo ecológico en Agua Caliente en San Mateo Pinas y el pavimentado de la Carretera Huatulco-Xanica-San Mateo Pinas para crear un acceso fácil para turistas y fuerzas militares; el tuberado del agua del Río Copalita para el beneficio de los hoteles en Bahías de Huatulco (ya parcialmente concluido en 2005); la privatización de la fuente que es el origen del Río San Jeronimo para las industrias de embotellado (Nestlé y Coca Cola, entre otros); el establecimiento del control federal sobre cientos de hectáreas de terreno forestal a través de pagos por servicios forestales; la perforación del subsuelo en la búsqueda de depósitos de uranio; la mercantilización de plantas medicinales a través de patentes por parte de la industria farmacéutica, como en el caso de botonchihuite, una hierba utilizada para curar disentería y malaria.

La existencia o planeación de tantos proyectos que implican un saqueo flagrante es prueba de la excepcional riqueza natural de las tierras ancestrales del pueblo indígena zapotec de Santiago Xanica, quienes las han cuidado hasta ahora. Es evidente que el conflicto político provocado en la comunidad, los proyectos de desarrollo, y el apoyo gubernamental están dirigidos a impedir que el pueblo defienda y cuide su territorio por el interés de unos pocos.

## REPRESSION AND MILITARIZATION OF THE TERRITORY

*"Yes, today's wars are not only fought to conquer a territory and receive tax payments from the conquered forces. In the current stage of capitalism, it is essential to destroy the conquered territory and to depopulate it, in other words, to destroy its social fabric. I'm talking about wiping out everything that lends cohesion to society."*

(Subcomandante Marcos, "Notes on Wars," Letter 1 to Don Luis Villoro Toranzo, 2011).

### 1. Military-police presence

As is true in many parts of the country, the alibi of the War on Drugs is used to justify the militarization of the territory and the imposition of a state of permanent exception designed to annihilate citizen participation in movements for change, particularly in those processes arising from below and outside of formal State structures.

The same thing is happening on the coast of the Sierra Sur, and the same pretext has been used to militarize

the region with the hidden purpose of dismantling unions and indigenous and campesino organizations that defend their rights, and on a more general level, intimidating the civilian population.

After passing through the stationary Army checkpoint on the way into Pochutla, our Brigade was blocked at a mobile checkpoint of Battalion 26 of the Marines of the Mexican Navy at San Jose Cuajinicuil, on Monday afternoon, March 14, 2011. Around 50 marines searched our vehicle, checked our documents, and asked where we were going and why. They also asked about the whereabouts of a CODEDI comrade.

Community people told us that the Marines have been setting up mobile checkpoints since the end of February, 2011.

The Marines are not the only armed force present in or around the municipality. From August 10 to 15, the Army was camped near Santiago Xanica, and at the end of October it came back, setting up camp in the center of town. It is common knowledge that for years there have been incursions into nearby communities in search of arms and drugs, in which houses have been searched and campesinos' possessions stolen. This was the reason that the entry of military forces into Santiago Xanica was impeded several times (from April to October of 2009) when troops were apparently looking for the community radio in order to shut it down.

We remind you that Santiago Xanica suffered a violent invasion by police forces on January 15, 2005, when hundreds of federal and state policemen entered the town to search, threaten, and humiliate the townspeople. Another violent entry by police forces in lesser numbers occurred on June 18, 2007, when CODEDI member Cesar Luis Diaz was arrested. Ever since then, the military and police presence has been constant, with different levels of deployment and incursion into the territory.

In addition to the Army and Marine checkpoints, we have recently received news of mobile checkpoints set up by the State Preventive Police, always along the only road to Xanica, where, according to the testimonies, the agents rudely ask about the whereabouts of CODEDI members or of people from the broader group defending elections according to traditions and customs. And finally, the same people have told us of bi-monthly military helicopter flights. While the International Brigade was there, we could see and hear military aircraft crossing the skies on the morning of March 16, 2011. According to CODEDI activists, such flights, along with patrols, not only serve to intimidate the people but also to escort technicians surveying the terrain in search of uranium deposits.

With so many armed forces deployed in the territory, it appears that repression is imminent, and that an invasion and search of the town is likely under pretexts provided by the PRI group. The police presence in the center of town on March 16, 2011, and the deployment of the Marines of the Mexican Navy are ominous indications of such an invasion.

## **2. Social criminalization and risks**

The aggressive actions of the group of PRI-affiliated townspeople, designed to create conflicts through heightened provocations, serve as a pretext for the intervention of public security forces. Such actions, planned from above to create divisions and intra-community confrontations, are a sign of an incipient paramilitarization of the territory, as shown by the instrumental use of political parties as shock groups.

We've been told that local newspapers and radios are dealing with the Xanica conflict by giving coverage mainly to the PRI groups and painting an unreal image of an armed community linked to a guerrilla group or to drug traffickers. In general, Xanica residents are criminalized as "violent APPO members." Collusion is clear between radio announcers and commercial newspapers with ties to business and PRI interests in the area.

The CODEDI comrades told us about the direct strategy of Gabino Cue Monteagudo's "government for change" of disrupting alliances between social organizations that were formed in years past by conceding privileges and government positions to several of these organizations.

They say this strategy is aimed at isolating struggles in order to weaken them and crush them with less difficulty. In these circumstances, they said, it is much more difficult to weave alliances, and so, in this phase, the people of Xanica can only count on a few historical allies in their struggle. Furthermore, they said, the new Gabino Cue government has made commitments to businessmen to put an end to marches, highway blockades and encampments.

What does remain after months in the APPO movement are five arrest warrants that are still in force against CODEDI members; it is feared that these could be reutilized at any time as a pretext for jailing the most active comrades.

### 3. Abraham Ramirez Vazquez, State hostage

The Brigade visited and interviewed Mr. Abraham Ramirez Vazquez, a political prisoner and adherent to the Other Campaign, in the San Pedro Pochutla prison in Oaxaca, on March 14 and March 21, 2011.

Abraham Ramirez Vazquez is one of the founders of CODEDI and was arbitrarily arrested in the municipality of Santiago Xanica on January 15, 2005, after being shot in the leg by the State Preventive Police, under charges of aggravated homicide and kidnapping.



At that time, the recently formed Ulises Ruiz Ortiz government did all that was necessary to impose PRI leader Sergio Antonio Garcia Cruz as Municipal President despite the fact that he had a criminal record and did not meet the requirements set by the town Assembly. Abraham and CODEDI firmly opposed this imposition, which led to the repression unleashed against them. The aggravated homicide charge brought against Abraham was fabricated; he was accused of the death of a policeman who was killed a kilometer and a half away from the site of the confrontation between the police and Xanica townspeople. A reconstruction of the facts could easily have proven the innocence of the defendant, but neither the former government nor the present one has any interest in resolving the matter and freeing Abraham.

It is important to note that Abraham Ramirez Vasquez has continued his struggle in prison, denouncing abuses in the prisons<sup>14</sup>, writing letters of protest and solidarity with the social movement, and continuing to perform his tasks in the organization.

In recent weeks, Abraham has received several anonymous phone calls, and according to the townspeople, the calls could be linked to the political conflict occurring in the community.

The case is now at a standstill both politically and legally, despite the installation of a negotiation table with the Gabino Cue Monteagudo, in which functionaries made it clear that there was no political will to free Abraham with an exculpatory sentence that would expose the injustice that he has suffered and the complicity of the judicial system with political power. The government had said it would offer a legal resolution, accelerating the process to demonstrate Abraham's innocence. But in truth, there have been no substantial advances in the process, and as of now, the defense has not been granted a reconstruction of the facts in Xanica with the defendant present.

According to Abraham's family members and CODEDI members, the government continues to utilize the political prisoner as a hostage. The government's intent is to divert people's efforts into the struggle to free its prisoner so that they will cease to defend their territory that business interests intend to take over. They also fear that a harshening of the conflict could result in Abraham's immediate transfer to the high security Miahuatlan prison, as was the case on January 31, 2009<sup>15</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

*"Resistance is everyday poetry that shares the sweetness and bitterness of each day's affection with nature."*

(Jaime Martinez Luna, *Eso que llaman comunalidad* – That thing they call communality)

<sup>14</sup>The San Pedro Pochutla Prison, like most prisons in Mexico, is overpopulated, and all prisoners live in inhuman conditions that wear one down when faced with a lack of adequate health, hygiene, lodging and food.

<sup>15</sup>Abraham was imprisoned at Miahuatlán until April 18, 2010.

In the context of the war now being waged in Mexico (disguised as a battle against drug trafficking) by the government and power groups against the population in order to take over territories and resources, indigenous peoples are one of the groups most direly affected.

The testimonies taken in Xanica shed light on part of the scenario that is now experienced from Ciudad Juarez to Chiapas.

Ever since the repression that was unleashed against the mobilization of the peoples of Oaxaca in 2006, and despite the arrival of Gabino Cue's "government of change" in the state of Oaxaca, the war against the peoples continues to be waged in different ways, all of which are aimed at annihilating social organization, fomenting conflicts between people that live in the same community, and facilitating the implementation of neoliberal projects.

The aggressors have different faces and the same goals: to destroy/depopulate the territory in order to rebuild/repopulate it according to capitalist interests.

In the municipality of Xanica, the PRI continues to be used against people's traditions and customs. Party actions are guided by private, strategic interests that have to do, above all, with the plunder of the natural resources of this wealthy region, making it clear that power and the powerful cannot allow the election of an authority who is not submissive to business interests in the area.

As an International Brigade, we state that the defense of the system of traditions and customs is just and legitimate. For the indigenous peoples of the Oaxaca region, the system of responsibility posts is not only constitutionally recognized, but also represents the right to self-determination and the construction of autonomy within the territories.

During the past week that we spent in the community, it became clear to us that the presence of the political parties is designed to corrupt and affect the historically constructed social fabric. The ability of the people themselves to run their own elections can be a tool that allows them to overcome the political parties, demonstrating that another way of living and experiencing reality is possible.

As CODEDI members say, the loss of *tequio* and community work projects in general are things that erode autonomy and the very concept of the communality of the peoples, creating relations that are only based on money.

We don't think this form of self initiative is good in and of itself, since it is in constant evolution, as seen by the recent possibility of women to be elected as authorities. In these times of totalizing uniformization and strong global instability, it is one more example of a model of social organization that, on one hand, is congruent with its own traditions, and, on the other, is able to overcome the limitations and flaws in the tradition itself.

The vote on December 5, 2010, also expresses the popular will to reject the robberies committed by the PRI and its local representatives for years.

And so we demand that the appropriate authorities, that is, the federal Senate and House of Deputies and the State Legislature, follow up on the denunciations made on June 24, 2010.

We also wish to denounce the role played by the State Electoral Institute (IEE) in the entire matter, which shows the support of business and political interests for the PRI. The IEE scorns the mechanisms and rules of elections conducted according to traditions and customs.

And so we join with CODEDI and other townspeople in publicly denouncing the complicity and abuses that this Institute is committing against the people of Xanica. We, like the majority of the residents of Santiago Xancia, consider the proposal to validate the elections in exchange for a "donation" of 500,000 pesos an obvious, unacceptable attempt to corrupt the community.

We also wish to make public the death threats now being received by some CODEDI members and by the broader group that supports the town's traditions and customs. We hold the PRI and Messrs Domingo Garcia Mijangos, Jorge Franco Vargas, Hector Pablo Puga Leyva and Mercedes Rojas responsible for anything that may happen to the comrades. We also hold ex Oaxaca Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, current Governor Gabino Cue and the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, responsible for implementing

and financing neoliberal plans.

As participants in an International Brigade and the bases of its member organizations, we will stand by the dignified people of Xanica, watching to see that these threats are not carried out.

In the same vein, we also call on the national and international civil society, human rights organizations, and all social organizations in Mexico and the world to be on the alert for any developments in the situation.

We further demand that the government explain the presence of the Marines of the Mexican Navy and the reasons that they are engaged in police functions at a distance of several kilometers from the coast on the road to Santiago Xanica.

And last but not least, we repeat our demand for the unconditional freedom of Abraham Ramírez Vazquez of CODEDI-Xanica, political prisoner of the Other Campaign. As we have repeatedly denounced at the national and international level, we know that the charges against Abraham were fabricated simply because he is a social activist who defends the rights of his people and staunchly opposes the plunder of the territory by business interests. We agree with CODEDI that Abraham is being utilized as a hostage by the government to deter the struggles of the people of Xanica.

Likewise, we demand that the government and ministers of justice carry out the reconstruction of the facts in the town of Santiago Xanica and the presence of Abraham himself during this reconstruction in order to definitively prove his innocence.

As we mentioned previously, this denunciation report, in addition to being addressed to the mass media and Mexican authorities at all three levels of government, is also addressed to human rights organizations, social movements and networks from below and from the left, national and international independent communications media, and all people who move and act in solidarity with peoples in struggle for their rights, customs, lands, and natural and human resources in conjunction with peoples in the farthest corners of the planet who are in day to day resistance against neoliberal capitalism and its forms of domination, plunder, contempt and repression.

We hope our work will help to lift the voices and magnify the sound of resistance being carried on from below with tremendous dignity by the people of this town.

Our deepest thanks to the organized townspeople who welcomed us in Xanica.

Written on March 22, 2011, in Santiago Xanica, Oaxaca, Mexico

**LA PIRATA PLATFORM**, made up of:

Nodo Solidale Collective- Roma, Italia - Mexico  
Zapatista "Marisol" Collective - Lugano, Suiza  
Nomads XM24 - Bologna, Italia  
and activists from France and the Spanish State