

lives, is one of the poorest in Mexico. Only 67 percent of the households in Chiapas have electricity, only 41 percent have access to sewers, and only 58 percent have access to running water. The level of illiteracy is also astonishingly high. Only 71 percent of children under the age of 14 attend school and only 70 percent of the people over 14 can read. In addition, Chiapas has a history of human rights abuses which includes summary executions and torture.

To bring attention to the precarious situation of the Indians in Chiapas, armed guerrillas of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation [EZLN] seized several towns on January 1, 1994. They killed policeman, ransacked stores, freed prisoners, kidnapped the governor of Chiapas, and stole dynamite. Accompanying the armed uprising in Chiapas was a car bombing in Mexico City and the destruction of electricity pylons in two other Mexican States, the EZLN claimed responsibility for both of these actions as well.

The Zapatistas stated that they were declaring war on the "illegitimate" Government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari; denounced human rights abuses, lack of opportunities and discrimination against the Mayan Indians in Mexico, and called for the building of socialism in the country.

The Mexican Government quickly responded to the unrest by sending in the army. They strafed suspected guerrilla strongholds, engaged in house to house combat with the Zapatistas, and seized many Chiapan villages. Violations of human rights, particularly against the indigenous communities, were reported during the fight.

The guerrilla leaders demanded the recognition of the EZLN as a belligerent force; a cease-fire by both parties; the army's withdrawal from all communities; the creation of a national commission to deal with indigenous issues; and the suspension of indiscriminate bombing. They also asked for land distribution, justice for the indigenous population and major democratic and social reforms on a national level.

On January 10, President Salinas agreed to the cease fire and sought a political, negotiated settlement of the crisis. The Mexican authorities created a Commission for Peace and Reconciliation to begin negotiations for a lasting peace. In addition, on January 27, the Government and eight political parties agreed on a Pact for Peace, Justice, and Democracy, which included a far-reaching electoral reform.

During the peace talks that took place from February 21 to March 2, the Government agreed to address the land, health, education and other material needs of the State's poor indigenous communities. Among the tentative agreements announced to the public on March 3, 1994, the Government proposed to give limited autonomy to indigenous communities; legislation forbidding discrimination against Indians; redrawing electoral boundaries to permit more indigenous representation; distribution of land from large ranches; and major public works to construct roads, schools and health clinics.

By this time, EZLN's demands had gained relative support throughout Mexican society and guerrilla's leaders announced that they would consult the local indigenous communities to see if the tentative agreements were acceptable. Tensions mounted after the assassination of the PRI's presidential candidate,

Luis Donaldo Colosio on March 23, 1994. On March 26, the Zapatistas suspended peace negotiations, accused the Salinas government of complicity in the murder of Colosio and stated that the murder was being used as a pretext for a military offensive against guerrilla strongholds.

Meanwhile, peasant groups in Chiapas were seizing thousands of acres of land, and landowners started to press for action claiming that they would take matters into their own hands if the Government did not take action to prevent seizures of the land in the area. In April, the EZLN claimed a local leader had been shot by a landowner, and a military roadblock in Chiapas was attacked by an unidentified group.

On June 11, the EZLN leadership announced that they were rejecting the Government's March peace plan. After the election of President Zedillo, the EZLN claimed that the gubernatorial elections were fraudulent, objected to the election of PRI candidate Eduardo Robledo as Governor of Chiapas, and threatened to renew the armed rebellion unless Robledo resigned.

Robledo offered to resign if the guerrillas leaders laid down their arms, and agreed to form a non-partisan State government. He appointed a PRD member as his interior minister and a PAN leader as his health minister to show his good intentions. Robledo also pledged to develop a pluralistic government, to address the serious needs of Chiapas, and to revise the State constitution and electoral law to make future elections more credible.

In February 1995, President Zedillo instructed the Attorney General to arrest the Zapatistas leaders on the basis of evidence that they were preparing for further violence in Chiapas and other States in Mexico. President Zedillo also stressed the importance of full observance of the law and affirmed that channels for the peaceful resolution of the conflict remained open.

Following the results of a national referendum the EZLN called in last August, which suggested that the Mexican people wanted the Zapatistas to lay down its arms and become a political force, President Zedillo called on the rebel army to take part in a national dialog for political reform. In September 1995, the negotiators reached a modest agreement that set an agenda for discussions of social issues that contributed to the conflict.

The United States-Mexico relationship has greatly matured over the last decade. Our mutual interests have expanded from strategic concerns to economic and social matters that are vital to each nation's domestic stability. Our commitment to a strong relationship with Mexico was embodied in the NAFTA agreement which acknowledged Mexico's eligibility to take advantage of free trade and the global economic marketplace. The American commitment to Mexico was reinforced by President Clinton's courageous move to open a \$20 billion line of credit to Mexico to rescue the troubled peso.

The financial package designed to hasten the stabilization of Mexico's economy will benefit all Mexicans by lessening the impacts of the crisis. As all Mexicans work to resolve the Chiapas problem, the United States should continue to urge restraint, respect for human rights and full compliance with the legal process. We should encourage Mexico to determine the best way to re-establish law and

order, to address social problems, and to work toward a new political order in Chiapas. We should support all efforts underway to provide amnesty for EZLN members who give up their weapons and agree to channel their demands peacefully within the political process.

The promotion of democratic values in Mexico increases stability and legitimacy in our valued southern neighbor. Domestic violence and insurgencies are among Mexico's greatest threats, and the United States should play a constructive role in encouraging peaceful democratic solutions to address these concerns. Despite rumors to the contrary, the State Department insists that the United States did not pressure the Mexican Government to take a harder line in Chiapas as part of the financial assistance package for Mexico. Nor does the United States Government provide military assistance to Mexico beyond some low-level training programs. United States State Department personnel have travelled to Chiapas to assess the situation there, but have never accompanied or advised Mexican military troops stationed there. I am comfortable that the above claims are correct.

I support the willingness of President Zedillo's administration to solve the conflict through dialog and peaceful negotiations and every effort of the Government to solve not only the crisis in Chiapas, but also similar social problems that affect other parts of the country.

BURIAL BENEFITS TO INCLUDE CERTAIN VETERANS

HON. BOB STUMP

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 19, 1995

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to expand eligibility for burial benefits to include certain veterans who die in State nursing homes. My distinguished colleagues, SONNY MONTGOMERY, TERRY EVERETT, and LANE EVANS, join me in introducing this bill.

Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs pays burial benefits for veterans who were either compensation or pension recipients, or who died in a VA medical center. About 2,500 veterans die in State veterans homes in a given year. About 12 percent of those—or 300 veterans—do not qualify for priority care in Veterans Health Administration facilities, are not service connected, or are not pension recipients.

This bill would provide, at an insignificant cost, more equitable and consistent coverage for our Nation's veterans receiving domiciliary, nursing home and hospital care at VA expense in State nursing homes.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join Mr. MONTGOMERY and me as cosponsors of this bill.