**Comandante Ramona**

Comandante Ramona was an indigenous woman from Mexico who fought for the liberation of her people. She began her journey to fight for liberation after leaving her home for economic reasons. Once she left, she realized that she and other indigenous people, particularly women, and particularly those located near or in Chiapas, Mexico, were unfairly disadvantaged compared to the people in Mexico that had government or corporate ties. Rather than rolling with the punches, Ramona made it her purpose to change the consciousness of the people surrounding her in the same way that she had come to understand that these conditions were unfair. This is how she became involved with the EZLN, the Zapatista Liberation movement, which sought to create more equal conditions for the people living in Chiapas.

Ramona says, "I left my community out of necessity in order to find work; there was no longer any way to earn a living there. When I went elsewhere I became aware that things aren't the same as they are for country women. There I began to understand and become conscious of the differences, and so I became interested in the organization (EZLN), and that women also need to organize." (*Double Jordana*, pg. online)

Ramona did many things to lead and assist the EZLN. For example, she headed the New Year’s rebellion in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1994, which protested a free trade agreement that disadvantaged small businesses in favor of large corporate gains. She participated in peace talks later that year in the same location to argue for the rights of indigenous people. (Davidson, online) Many members of indigenous communities were receptive to Ramona’s efforts.

One of the reasons why Ramona was so readily accepted as a public figure is because of the majesty of her words. Here is just one of the many speeches that she gave to encourage resistance among the people of Mexico:

To the people of Mexico: Brothers and sisters: Through my voice speaks the voice of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Today we have come this far, to the center of this country that is called Mexico, to say to you, to all the Mexican men and women as many words as we the Zapatistas have. In and of itself our Zapatista word is very small, but its stride is very large and it goes very far and enters many hearts. These hearts that listened to us are of men, women, children and elders that want a democratic, free and just country. These hearts are those which helped us to arrive at the Zocalo of Mexico City. These hearts want the same things that we Zapatistas want and that we all want. We want a Mexico that takes us into account as human beings, that respects us and that recognizes our dignity. Therefore we want to join our small Zapatista voice to the large voice of all who fight for a new Mexico. We arrive here in order to shout, together with all, that no longer, that never more will there be a Mexico without us. We want this, a Mexico where we all may have a place with dignity. Therefore we are disposed to participate in a great national dialogue with all. A dialogue where our word will be a greater word in many words and our heart will be a greater heart within many hearts. For this national dialogue we are going to travel a lot and we are going to take many steps. We are prepared to do everything in order to take these steps. But we need all of you to help us, all of the Zapatistas, to travel, as you have helped me to travel here. Mexican brothers and sisters: I am the *Comandante Ramona* of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. I am the first of many steps of the Zapatistas to the Federal District and to all the places of Mexico. We hope that you all go with us. This is our word, brothers and sisters of Mexico. Thanks.

(<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1996/19961012.en.htm>)

The EZLN has come far because of the efforts of Comandante Ramona, a small but forceful indigenous woman who had the courage to stand up for herself and her people.

Cites:

Text written by Rachel Schy http://womenstudies250.wikispaces.com

Perez U., Matilde and Laura Castellanos, interview with Comandante Ramona and Ana Maria, originally Publisher in *Double Jordana*, March 7th, 1994,<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/~hmcleave/bookalone.html> Davidson, Phil, Obituary for Comandante Ramona, *The Independent*, January 9th, 2006 <http://news.independent.co.uk/people/obituaries/article337439.ece> Speech by Comandante Ramona, For the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee - General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, October 12, 1996. (<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1996/19961012.en.htm>)