

Letter To Mumia Abu-Jamal

April 24, 1999

For: Mumia Abu-Jamal, American Union

From: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Mexico

Mr. Mumia:

I am writing to you in the name of the men, women, children and elderly of the Zapatista National Liberation Army in order to congratulate you on April 24, your birthday.

Perhaps you have heard of us. We are Mexican, mostly indigenous, and we took up arms on January 1, 1994 demanding a voice, a face and a name for the forgotten of the earth.

Since then, the Mexican government has made war on us, pursues and harasses us seeking our death, our disappearance and our absolute silence. The reason? These lands are rich with oil, uranium and precious lumber. The government wants them for the great transnational companies. We want them for all Mexicans. The government sees our lands as a business. We see our history written in these lands. In order to defend our right (and that of all Mexicans) to live with liberty, democracy, justice and dignity we became an army and took on a name, a voice and face.

Perhaps you wonder how we know of you, about your birthday, and why it is that we extend this long bridge which goes from the

mountains of the Mexican Southeast to the prison of Pennsylvania where you are incarcerated unjustly. Many good people from many parts of the world have spoken of you, through them we have learned how you were ambushed by the North American police in December of 1981, of the lies which they constructed in the procedures against you, and of your death sentence in 1982. We learned about your birthday through the international mobilizations which, under the name of "Millions for Mumia," are being prepared this April 24.

It is harder to explain this bridge which this letter extends, it is more complicated. I could tell you that, for the powerful of Mexico and the government, to be indigenous, or to look indigenous, is reason for disdain, abhorrence, distrust and hatred. The racism which now floods the palaces of power in Mexico goes to the extreme of carrying out a war of extermination and genocide against millions of indigenous. I am sure that you will find similarities with what power in the United States does with the so-called "people of color" (African-American, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, North American Indians and any other peoples who do not have the insipid color of money).

We are also "people of color" (the same color as our brothers who have Mexican blood and live and struggle in the American Union). Our color is "brown," the color of the earth, the color from which we take our history, our strength, our wisdom and our hope. But in order to struggle we add the color black to our brown. We use black ski-masks to show our faces, only then can we be seen and heard. Following the advice of an indigenous Mayan elder, who explained to

us the meaning of the color black, we chose this color.

Old Don Antonio, this wise elder, died in these rebel Zapatista lands in March of 1994, a victim of tuberculosis which gnawed away at his lungs and his breath. Old Don Antonio used to tell us that from black came light and from there came the stars which light up the sky around the world. He recounted a story of a long time ago (in the times when time was not measured), when the first gods were given the task of giving birth to the world. In one of their meetings they understood that the world needed to have life and movement, and to have life and movement, light was necessary. Then they thought of making the sun in order that the days move and so that there would be day and night and time for struggling and time for making love, and the world would go walking with the days and nights. The gods had their meeting and made this agreement in front of a large fire, and they knew it was necessary that one of them be sacrificed by throwing himself into the fire and himself become fire and fly into the sky. The gods thought that the sun's work was the most important, so they chose the most beautiful god so that he would fly into the fire and become the sun. But he was afraid. Then the smallest god, the one who was black, said he was not afraid and he threw himself into the fire and became the sun. Then the world had light and movement, and there was time for struggle and time for love, and while it was day the bodies worked to make the world and while it was night the bodies made love and sparkles filled the darkness.

This is what Old Don Antonio told us and that is why we use black ski

masks. So we are of the color brown and of the color black. But we are also the color yellow, because the first people who walked these lands were made of corn so they would be true. And we are also red because this is the call of blood which has dignity, and we are also blue because we are the sky in which we fly, and green for the mountain which is our house and our strength. And we are white because we are paper so that tomorrow can write its story.

So we are 7 colors because there were 7 first gods who birthed the world.

This is what Old Don Antonio said long ago and now I tell you this story so that you may understand the reason for this bridge of paper and ink which I send to you all the way from the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

And also so that you may understand that with this bridge go greetings and embraces for Leonard Peltier (who is in the prison at Leavenworth, Kansas), and for the more than 100 political prisoners in the USA who are the victims of injustice, stupidity and authoritarianism.

And with this letter-bridge walks as well a greeting for the Dine (the Navajo), who fight in Big Mountain, Arizona against the violations of their traditional Dine religious practices.” They struggle against those who favor large businesses instead of respect for the religious freedom of Indian peoples, against those who want to destroy sacred

grounds and ceremonial sites (as is the case of Peabody Western Coal Company which, without reason, wants to take the lands and the land rights, and the history which belong to the Dine and their future generations.)

But this letter-bridge has more than just stories of resistance against North American injustice. In the extreme south of our continent, in Chile, the indigenous Mapuche women in the Pewenche Center of Alto Bio-Bio confront stupidity. Bertha and Nicolasa Quintreman are accused of “mistreating” members of the armed forces of the Chilean government. There you have it. An armed military unit with rifles, sticks, and tear-gas, protected by bulletproof vests, helmets and shields, accuse two indigenous women of “mistreatment.” But Bertha is 74 years old and Nicolasa is 60. How is it possible that two elderly people confronted a “heroic” group of heavily-armed military? Because they are Mapuche. The story is the same as that of the Dine brothers and sisters of Arizona—it repeats itself throughout the Americas. A company—ENDESA—wants the Mapuches' land, and in spite of the law which protects the indigenous, the government is on the side of the companies. The Mapuche students have pointed out that the government and the company with the military intelligence made a “study” of the Mapuche communities and concluded that the Mapuche could not think, defend themselves, resist, or build a better future for themselves. Apparently, the study was wrong.

Now it occurs to me that, perhaps the powerful in North America carried out a similar “military intelligence” study (frankly, this is a

contradiction, because those of us who are military are not intelligent, if we were we would not be military) about the case of the Dine in Arizona, about Leonard Peltier, about other political prisoners, about yourself, Mr. Mumia.

Perhaps they made this study and came to the conclusion that they might be able to violate justice and reason, to assault history and lose the truth, and that no one would say anything. The Dine Indians would stand by and watch the destruction of the most sacred of their history, Leonard Peltier would be alone, and you, Mister Mumia, would be silenced. (I remember your own words: "They not only want my death, they want my silence.")

But the studies were wrong. Happy mistake? The Dine resist against those who would kill their memory, Leonard Peltier is accompanied by all those who demand his liberty, and you sir, today you speak and shout with all the voices which celebrate your birthday as all birthdays should be celebrated, by struggling.

Mr. Mumia:

We have nothing big to give you as a gift for your birthday. It is poor and little, but all of us send you an embrace.

We hope that when you gain your freedom you will come to visit us. Then we will give you a birthday party, even if it isn't April 24, it will be an unbirthday party. There will be music, dance and talk, which are the means by which men and women of all colors understand and

know one another, and build bridges over which they walk together,
towards history, towards tomorrow.

Happy Birthday!

Vale. We greet you and may justice and truth find their place.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast,

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Mexico, April of 1999

P.S. I read somewhere that you are a father and a grandfather. So I
am sending you a gift for your children and grandchildren. It is a little
wooden car with Zapatistas dressed in black ski-masks.

Tell your children and grandchildren that it is a gift the Zapatistas
have sent you. You can explain to them that there are people of all
colors everywhere, just like you, who want justice, liberty and
democracy for people of all colors.

Letter To the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, USA

April of 1999

For: Mr. Tom Ridge

Governor of Pennsylvania

United States, North America

From : Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Mexico

To the Magistrate and Governor

Dear sirs:

I write to you in the name of the men, women, children and elderly of the EZLN. Most of us are indigenous Mexicans and we struggle for liberty, democracy and justice.

The purpose of the following letter is to demand justice in the case of Mr. Mumia Abu-Jamal, condemned unjustly to the death penalty in 1982. As you know, the judicial process against Mister Mumia Abu-Jamal was plagued with lies and irregularities: the police who accuse him lied about a supposed confession of his, one of the witnesses has changed testimony and declared that he was forced to lie or face prison, the ballistic evidence has proved it was impossible that Mister Mumia Abu-Jamal fired the weapon which killed the policeman. This should be enough evidence for a new trial, but even this recourse has been denied to Mister Mumia Abu-Jamal. If the Judicial system of

Pennsylvania and the governor are certain of the guilt of Mister Mumia Abu-Jamal, they should not fear a new trial which adheres to the truth.

I do not ask clemency, pardon, nor mercy from you for Mister Mumia Abu-Jamal. I demand justice, something which I believe is within your powers. No one within the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania or governor Tom Ridge has anything to lose. A new trial can bring the truth forward, and justice, supposedly, is all that should matter.

That is all. From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos