

# THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOTION

## **Mexican Civil Society: leverage of initiatives, actions and political strength**

If we could say in an only single word what is the pulse that male and female citizens have about politicians and political parties it would be: disenchantment. The expression of this is particularly evident in election periods, with different degrees of abstention that in some cases surpasses 60 percent. And in daily life it is expressed in apathy to take part in the solution of civic and social problems.

One of this event's causes is that policy is basically focused to become business, to the pursuing of posts for the rulers and social representatives' personal enrichment by embezzling public funds.

Politicians have become the new media performers: they have developed a technical capability for selling themselves as products, as if they were a soda, a car, or a suite. Such conduct has generated a culture in which form is more important than basic matters; the making up of ideas is more important than to undertake a firm compromise before the citizenry.

Policy has been captured and put into jail by marketing, which sells everything to the highest bidder, and designs both the message and the image, in order to call the attention and thus favoring the consumption of empty images. Policy has also been reshaped into a disqualification art, in order to show the opponent's "weakness" and thus emphasize personal po-

litical strength. Then, while the opponent's incapability and usefulness is shown out, a false image of worthiness and intelligence is constructed as well. So, in Mexican policy the image of a "winner" is not related to his/her proposals' consistency, but to his/her capability of managing to either appear as a victim in some cases, or as a big cynical or opportunist in others, vindicating any social demand as an initiative of his/her own.

This process becomes more complex when politicians turn public political matters and proposals into merchandises, something to negotiate among them: "I back you up in this item, so you support me in that subject", though most of the times such movements are not strategic, but simply encourage someone's prominence and egotism, and strengthen his/her links with the groups that put and sustain him/her in charge.

Such political marketing culture has become pervious and deepens into a perverse relationship between politicians and citizens: "If you want me to support you, you'll have to give me that... or allow these permits... What will I have in exchange if I back you up?" And in most of cases one day of political circus to make us feel winners means huge money investment.

This political breakdown has its costs, being the gravest one the progressive tear-

ing of the social tissue in communities and social groups, to the point that most of them are dominated by marketing environment, which provokes a permanent sense of suspicion and distrust among political actors.

### **Society's responses**

In such context of decomposition, civic social organizations and some individual political actors have shaped a new identity of civic society facing the changes brought along by political alternation, and the new roles in power's division and local powers as well. One of its crucial features is that civil society is a wide range of plural, diverse and independent actors, all of which are constructing the citizenship with its different views and varied agendas. Another characteristic is our new ways of acting: based on territorial and thematic criteria, articulate the civic society's participation within different initiatives to change or propose civic policies.

Besides, new ways of communication has been established, not just with the Executive Power but with the Judiciary and Legislative as well, with which it has been opened spaces for dialoging and inter-

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changing proposals in order to influence. And this process has developed both, in the municipal and federal levels.

Civic society's organizations have demonstrated with facts that there is a well informed citizenry with a high degree of professionalism for designing, monitoring, supervising and evaluating local, national and international civic policies. We have been conquering a place to be part of public space. We have gone from being a proceeding democracy to a participative one.

The organizations' developing of such strategy has not been easy due to the political class patrimonial culture. However, together with other actors as academics, politicians and social and business organizations, we have constructed new spaces for social dialogue, to elaborate social and economic responsible policies.

We believe that it is not enough the citizenry to grant leadership into governors and representatives; now it is essential that power to be the response to public well being necessities, where everyone, according to his/her responsibility, contribute to the collective effort.

We, the civil society's organizations, are passing from being groups that used to play a roll of resistance —that necessarily must to continue— to play a brand new strategic roll: *the vocation of influencing on the decision making and public policies as well*. We have learned that we have a huge responsibility for democracy not to be reduced to an electoral issue, but transformed into a new way of sharing public power and the future of public policies as well, so these can be democratic, human and fair.

Among the characteristics that civil society's organizations have had along history is our vocation to develop motion through innovative initiatives, and to facilitate citizenry construction as well. Thus, all action always requires the

## PLAYING THE FLAG ■ Magú



active participation of the citizenship in order to reach both immediate and long term results.

Such civil society's characteristic has generated new ways of participation and also expertise to allow the citizenship to control public affairs such as budget supervising, a fair trade and commerce, local and federal legislative proposals on subjects as gender, Indian peoples' rights, environment, and the monitoring of the three of legislative, executive and judiciary policies. We can say that in this period citizenship has pointed out strategies aimed to the acknowledgement of the cultural scope, the gender balance struggle, the urging of food sovereignty and a sustainable humanistic development.

### Opportunities and risks

On this frame, I do remark the notion that public and political fields are not exclusively for politicians and parties, but require the social and civil organizations inclusion, and that of all society's sectors as well.

That is why it is very important to analyze and built scenarios in order to face and try to prevent the risk of, contrary to contribute in the reshaping of a new political culture, keeping doing the same things and neutralize initiatives under the logics of suspicion.

At present we are facing the risk of going gravely backward in power alternation, after the few institutional steps given, and of having to construct again both electoral truthfulness, and some of local powers' dialog spaces, within institutions of both federal and state's governments, and the legislative and judiciary powers as well. Besides, we face the rising of the so called organized crime's power, that gener-

ates fear among citizens and public opinion, which get paralyzed and do not dare to make any denounce in order to live "peacefully".

In addition to these risks, there is the growing power that governors and representatives have permitted to mass media, particularly to Televisa and Televisión Azteca, which have gradually taken the roll of judges and decision makers about what issues should be included in the national agenda. Before these kind of powers —so called at present "factual powers"— both the political class and the civil society's organizations face a situation in which there is no dialog links among the different actors as to generate a sufficiently strong force capable of halting the organized crime, the media show and the mafias that profit with terror and the involution of our democracy.

We must accept that the citizenship's apathy towards policy is also a challenge for us. We can not stay like simple witnesses of citizenry's disenchantment. Part of our mission in the country is to promote and generate an environment in

which we may recover the citizenry's participation as the axis of any public issue. We do must keep and fortify electoral democracy, but at the same time constructing participative democracy in order to ending the monopolization of policy from the part of authorities and parties. Without the strengthening and developing of participative democracy the country is one step before the involution of democracy.

To prevent such involution, we need to invite all the social and political actors to debate the national agenda proposals, in order to identify common subjects and commit ourselves to fulfill them.

### **Citizenship Agenda**

We find ourselves before the possibility of building a scenario for the election year 2006, if we profit from the opportunity of generating dialog spaces and influence public opinion about those subjects we estimate as needed to strengthen democracy. The election timing offers the opportunity of reorienting the country towards proposals where collective balance, justice and well being are our citizenry agenda's axial issues.

We must actualize our agendas in order to be in tune with the present political timing, and open dialog spaces among the different sectors for generating commitments and agreements on the country's strategic issues, such as the following:

1. *State reform.* In the last five years we have lived in an atmosphere in which political alternation seems to be the only thing to aspire to in Mexico. For some political sectors it seems like if the Mexicans voting right and this vote in itself were enough; as if the citizenship attendance to the ballots every three or six years was enough,

and like if we give a white check to rulers an representatives.

This attitude has been cause of serious splitting offs between politicians and civil society. Politician's immobilization and their manipulations have made clear to citizenship that their means don't bring about new options to the country.

Before this situation, the citizenship has pointed out the country's need of basic agreements in order to change the institutions and their authoritarian ruling. Now we have to redesign the new architecture of institutions and the game rules as well, to set up democracy in the country. We need to create conditions for all political, social and civil actors bringing forward of proposals that lead us to a democratic regime.

We have to push on a great movement of all civil society's actors, promoting a permanent campaign in order to develop the State Reform issues, covering local issues and subjects that contribute to the new institutional design. We must demand the State Reform to become one of the main subjects of electoral battle.

It is necessary to conceive a State Reform that point out the need of guaranteeing the respect and prevailing of all the people's human rights, as the spine of political and governmental labor.

Let us demand the inclusion, in the following period of sessions in Congress, of a transitory amend that command a total review of the Constitution, thus to guarantee the inclusion of all of the citizen's proposals.

We have to demand to future Congress's groups coordinators the compromise of working like a brand new Constituent Congress that fulfill the needed deep reforms for establishing a democratic regime.

2. *Struggle against violence.* Mexico is living a worrying unsafe situation. It is documented by thousands of testimonies of family assault, kidnapping, drug trafficking victims, children prostitution, and in some regions from whole peoples being hostages by the so called organized crime. Day after day we witness how our legislations protect delinquents, allowing them resources for reducing their sentences with declarations like administrative faults or not grave faults.

However, we have to focus the problem of violence not just as a crime issue, but as an expression of social and ethics decomposition provoked by the growing inequality within the whole country.

It is clear that not any budget would be enough for fighting against crime if we circumscribe at police force's ground, without counting on a strategy to prevent crime and to redistribute wealth.

To reach so, we have to generate the conditions for creating enough and fairly paid jobs; we must guarantee that any citizenship's denounce be truly investigated and resolved, thus to give justice back its duty and that way it can plenty develop. To create atmospheres to enhance the citizenship's interacting, where everyone may feel confident and respected in case of any violation attempt on the part of authorities or the organized crime. We have to settle down ways for socializing all kind of tools that promote the defense and fulfilling of general human rights.

3. *Bi-national Civil Society.* In the last decades, migration has changed many of the country's communities, towns and cities values.

According to official numbers, nearly 400 thousand Mexicans migrate

yearly to de US, looking for elementary surviving conditions. It is known that more than 16 thousand million dollar are remitted to Mexico yearly, a figure higher to that of some Mexican states' budget.

Besides, many of the country's communities and towns also channel those funds received from the migrants' families to the development of public works. It's been settled down programs such as the "3 to 1", in which for every peso put by a resident in the US, both the state and federal government put another one each.

It is clear that this phenomenon can be seen from different points of view, but here along we want to focus it as a support given by the community resident in the US: nearly 20 million Mexicans are organized in several ways: by federal entity, by Indian people, by community and town or by club, in order to defend their human rights there, and in many occasions also for organizing the remittances to be send to Mexico.

Besides, after several attempts, it's been reached that the Mexican residents abroad may exercise their domestic political right of voting in the 2006 election.

Nevertheless, Mexican civil society's organizations with a few exceptions have not still created a dialog bridge for the interaction with the US residents in order to find out common interest subjects.

It will be very important the building of a common agenda for Mexico's local and regional development; and it would also be meaningful to establish a closer relationship so Mexican residents in the US understand clearly the way we live the country's authoritarian ruling, and to settle down a lobbying agenda in the US.

# PATZCUARO'S CITIZENRY DECLARATION\*

June 18, 2005

**U**s, male and female citizens representing a hundred civil society's organizations and organisms from different entities and regions of the Mexican Republic, met in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, on the occasion of the *State Reform and Citizenry's Agenda National Encounter*, after three days of debating, on June 16-18, in diverse discussion groups on the State Reform, by consensus have decided to release the following:

## Political Declaration

After almost five years from July 2, 2000, very few has been advanced on the country's democratization process. The rarifying of political atmosphere, in which conflict, stridency and discredit lead—even within parties—, and informative manipulation plus the local, state and federal authorities' limited response to satisfy the main citizenship's demands, is dragging the country along towards a strong institutional crisis.

In many a way, and in almost all fields, the old authoritarian system keeps its judiciary and institutional network; this is evident in its attached political practices. After many efforts, we have obtained the ballot's results to be respected, which is a citizenship's triumph, and since then electors have voted for a plurality of parties. But that healthy diversity has run into unbending structures that won't allow the conciliation of legitimate demands from the different society's sectors.

The increasing of inequality, the alarming insecurity indexes, the constant deterioration of environment, the cultural patrimony destruction, the vanishing of our natural richness, the precarious democratic governing, the use of justice for discredit the political opposition and to criminalize social movements, the increasing corruption, the mix of dirty money with politics, the strengthening of real powers and the resisting—sometimes violently—of political actors before the transforming criticism, are risking our sovereign state's objective viability.

This situation manifests itself in a wide and deep citizenship's mood of disenchant and paralyzing, which is propitiating the reappearing of a strong non-participation in the election processes, in the abandonment of participation in public issues, and in the increasing of situations that propitiate violence, confrontation and the social tissue's rupture and decomposition.

The stagnation of economics, the growing dependence and the total dismantling of whole productive sectors, and the inner trade and salary contraction, make questionable the present marketing's economics method. All of this obliges us to question its fundamentals, as well as the roll that State must play to guarantee development before the dominion of marketing logics.

Before this fallible State situation, both the parties and government have aban-

\* Declaration subscribed by 103 civil and social organizations and 210 individuals.



done society and haven't been capable of loosening judiciary and institutional interests and limitations that keep the country in a serious democracy involution and in a deepening economic, political, social, environmental, cultural and educational crisis.

Mexico is a complex nation, with a rich historical trajectory, and with huge physical and human richness. It is a nation of plural ethnics and cultures, that besides counts on big intellectual, scientific, cultural and artistic resources. However, the scarce profit of these is far from bringing benefits into society. It is necessary to reevaluate cultural and educational fields into a vision that integrates diversity along with rights and cultural liberties, and production capability and accessing to these goods and services.

By all the above, conscious about the roll that the people's emanated-from sovereignty has always to play but even more in the present situation, we have decided to raise it as a unifying flag of the Mexican State's citizenry's motion.

Such reform implies, according to our view, a Republic's constitutional refunding: of its general judicial-constitutional basis, but above all of its values and social economic development path. It comes from the urgent need of guaranteeing the respect and validity of *all human rights for all the people*, as the spine of all political and governmental labor.

It also requires the constructions of a truly ruling by law State to be raised instead of factious and authoritarian practices. An integral revision of our main juridical instrument will allow to wide out our institutions' democratic legitimacy, making them suitable to the demands of functionality, transparency and participation in public decision making.

At the same time, we are obliged to clarify our still unpunished dark past of State repression, that has led to many of the present abuses.

Besides, it is necessary to strengthen plurality in political competence, accepting the homologation urgency and respectability of legal frames from the part of both electoral authorities and political parties.

A systemic reform like this would eliminate legal emptiness, redundancies and contradictions, and at the same time it would harmonize the authorities' responsibilities and would actualize the citizens' rights.

Personae's dignity is the ethical fundament and the criteria source to reach the refunding of a State fortified and capable of facing the leading marketing logics.

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We pursue a lay, social democratic State, based on the respectfulness of our society's diversity and plurality.

Conscious about the huge effort and complexity of our purpose, in this encounter we have agreed, from the social movements in which we participate, a **Minimum Agenda on the State Reform**. This has been constructed from our point of view as male and female citizens, with a gender, sustainable and equitable development perspective.

Since more than four decades before, Mexican contemporary civil society has

been on a citizenship's construction process both individual and collective. The main purpose of such effort is to pursue the creation of a participative democracy before the ineffectiveness of present representative democracy.

Thus, we recall to the whole citizenry to debate and reflecting on this Agenda in order to enrich it with their visions and suggestions. Also to start concrete actions for promoting it and making it real within a truly "citizenry in motion" process from both private and public fields, and from every corner of the country as well.

We must prevent every involution of democracy but basically we must work for another possible future for both our country and worldwide; a future in which all Mexicans be included—even beyond our borderline. Thus, to build a future of equity and wellbeing, of democratic instauration and consolidation, of respect and human rights' exercise, of cultural diversity, in order to reach a Mexico's different insertion and contribution within the global world.

Consequently, we urge to the political class and the political parties as well to understand that beyond the next government change, what is concerned is the nation project we aspire to and its viability. We recall them from here to fulfill this urgent duty, and to open the space to agree and concrete a real State reform through an honest, inclusive and plural dialogue, whose result is the construction of a common project for all and everyone.

We want an integral reform, not just legal and judicial but also that implies a new way of exercising public power, in which citizenry is effectively represented and where it actively participate.

Sooner or later the reason's strength and the citizenship's volition will make us to understand that this is the only possible way for transiting into the future.

# POSITION BEFORE THE INCOME TAX REFORM

México, D.F. 13 de julio de 2005



1. For working class the minimum wage had meant one of the basic labor rights clearly established in the Mexican Constitution. However, due to the economic reality and the wages' restriction policies imposed by both the government and the business sector, the working class and its male and female workers have been systematically stricken.

From many years ago on, the minimum wage hasn't been enough for covering the worker's basic needs, because at the same time the prices of products and services that workers need for living a worthy life as social subjects increase along to the raw materials' inflationary scale rhythm, and to that of the input and productive process as well. The workers' wage is a victim of

political manipulation, having become the present economy ideology adopted by government, which at last decrees if worker's real wage should or should not be increased.

2. The last 25 years it's been maintained as a governmental policy the inflation control and low labor costs, under the pretext of pushing up exports and attracting foreign investment. A situation that keeps workers earning a constantly deteriorating rachitic wage, thus social benefits have become indispensable for their income complementation.

3. The approved Income Tax Law (ISR) reform is regressive with respect to labor human rights, because the changes passed will systematically harm the worker's rights conquers, since

through this reforms they renounce to those rights conquered historically by means of union struggles such as bonuses for annual profits, Christmas, vacations and others that were tax free for many years. Notwithstanding these bonuses are complementary to the low wages earned by workers, as the Federal Work Law stipulates: *workers won't renounce either to wages earned or bonuses and other benefits derived from their service lending, in whatever form or denomination* (Art. 33).

4. By virtue of the wages policy adopted by our country, the United Nations for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee has recommended to Mexican Government to do *efforts for preventing the progressive deterioration of minimum wage and that of its*

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power of purchasing (recommendation made in 1993). In the same line, the diagnostic of Mexico's human rights situation recommends *modifying the salary policy matters, in order to reduce the family's deterioration level; and besides to come to a gradual but sustained rising agreement of legal real minimum salaries, so they may recover their roll of social guarantee.*

5. In the Economic, Social and Cultural International Agreement signed and ratified by Mexico, the States-parts compromise to *adopt measures both separately and by international cooperation and support means, specially those of economics and techniques, until the very last of their resources,*

*in order to gradually reach, by all suitable means, the plenty effectiveness of all acknowledged rights.*

6. Clearly with the ISR law reform it will be the workers again, particularly the few who have a formal job, who pay taxes by sacrificing their benefits, while nothing is done for the businessmen to pay the millionaire debts they have with the Treasure ministry.

With this reform the Government (that at international level appears like a human rights protector while domestically its actions and facts constantly violate them) disobeys the recommendations and observations of ONU international organisms such as the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee and the International Workers Organization to guarantee the fulfillment and protection of those rights.

All of this tells a lot about the country's present situation in terms of human rights. It shows again Vicente Fox Government's lack of compromise to guarantee the labor human rights, beyond simple political and diplomatic declarations.

By virtue of the above, we demand the derogation of the ISR law reform because it goes backwards of labor human rights. Besides, as it has been placed in transitory articles it lacks of suitable legislative mechanisms, all of which is responsibility of both representatives and senators.

Besides, we demand the Federal Government not to hinder the benefits reached by workers, and to fulfill its obligation of guaranteeing and promoting labor human rights reached through the International Economic, social and Cultural Agreement in order to its progressive and universal fulfillment.

Reflection and Labor Action Center  
(CEREAL), National Civil Human Rights  
Organisms Network "All Rights for All",  
Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Center and  
DESC Space.

treaties; but though NASPA is based on NAFTA and its supposed huge success, it is particularly a brand new political pattern aimed to prevent the roll of Legislative power and that of the society, in order to, by means of administrative actions and Executive decrees, and their alliances with the three countries' huge transnational monopolist groups, subordinate the main security decision policies to the Government (or ministerial) bureaus, as well as those of economic strategy to business tri-national (transnational) by sector.

Such project is illegal and illegitimate not only judicially but constitutionally and in terms of International Right as well, first because sovereignty, at least formally in Mexico, is patrimony neither of the President nor of his ministries or that of the powerful economic or political groups' managers, but of people and its representative institutions; and, in an extreme case, on the people's constitutional right to change the Government.

If passing over the written law or to distort it is a characteristic shared by G. W. Bush and V. Fox —and a little less by P. Martin— and of course by groups enriched behind many of those governmental policies, now with NASPA they have chosen to act with the discretion and impunity that permit the weakened Mexican institutionalism with the majority of politicians centered in the election's fair and Mexican society's lack of information and discussion.

## The supposed reasons

Formally it's been hoisted political and economical causes to launch NASPA. Among the political ones they reiterate the need to face the US insecurity after the 11 Septem-

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