





## **APRENDIENDO A SOÑAR APRENDEREMOS A LUCHAR**

Soñando despiertos caminando dormidos, con el viento cantando en nuestros oídos, con la marea va danzando nuestro espíritu, nuestro espíritu iluminado el camino sin camino elevando nuestra voz con guitarras, caracoles y tambores, exigiendo respeto, elevando nuestras voces por nuestros derechos, **LIBERTAD DE EXPRESIÓN** acompañando a nuestras abuelas y abuelos en esta lucha, lucha por madre tierra por la defensa del territorio donde nacimos, donde vivimos, donde exigimos respeto a la vida, respeto a nuestra comida, a nuestro maíz, lucha por nuestros niños y niñas por este presente, donde decimos:

**YA BASTA** de tantos conceptos de nacionalismo porque aquí todos somos hijos e hijas de la tierra, nadie es extranjero y aquí estamos dispuestos a defendernos en conjunto, en comunidad, como lo hacen las hormigas en defensa de la vida. No se detengan, sigan. Sin importar de donde seas ésta es nuestra lucha en la entrada y en la salida, la lucha es de todos y todas. El Estado y las autoridades tienen la obligación de proteger y defender los derechos de los habitantes de su nación. Estos están garantizados por la Constitución. La ley básica de cada república debe garantizar los instrumentos y mecanismos de control, que deben desarrollarse mediante una legislación específica para hacer efectivo el ejercicio de estos derechos.

Se hace necesario reafirmar en absoluto el respeto a los derechos humanos, es un llamado a todos los procuradores de los derechos humanos a que cumplan su verdadera función efectivamente protectora de los mencionados derechos.

**NATURALEZA E INTEGRACIÓN** Conectando nuevamente con la gran familia que somos, alejando así ese pensamiento divisorio del patriarcado o nacionalismo, los conceptos de realidad, modernidad, transformación o evolución. Reconocemos puntualmente nuestra posición, nuestra misión, y propósito de estar aquí en el planeta tierra y es el de **PROTEJERLA LA VIDA**. Reconociendo las leyes de **MADRE NATURALEZA** por un mejor **MAÑANA** para nuestros hijos e hijas, por el respeto a nuestra Dignidad, integridad, sabemos que existen leyes, convenios, tratados, disposiciones y recomendaciones para la defensa y divulgación, promoción y vigencia sobre nuestros derechos fundamentales. Respeto a nuestra forma de vida, forma de pensar y nuestras prácticas de cosmovisión espiritual geopolíticas y convivencia pacífica, por eso somos Invencibles, como nuestros ancestros ante tus ojos Invisibles, ante tus sentidos Tangibles, ante tus intereses de supuesto desarrollo tecnológico industrial Ininteligible.

**EL PODER DE UN ABRAZO VERDADERAMENTE HUMANO NOS HARÁ LIBRES, EN LA VERDADERA UNIÓN DE NUESTRAS PALABRAS ESTÁ LA FUERZA QUE CAMBIARÁ EL MUNDO**

**SALUD PARA LUCHAR, LIBERTAD PARA ORGANIZARSE, LUCHA HASTA EL FINAL !**

English translation on the last page

**Artwork & Text: APORTE MOVIMIENTO RAIZ**  
**Reevolución Artística Integral de la Zona**

**by xaman~kid, guatemala 2021**

# Tren „Maya“ Made in Germany

The ‘Deutsche Bahn’ and the train of destruction



# **„We can give the project a thousand names, all of them will come closer to the truth than ‘Mayan Train’”“**

Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz

According to official discourses, infrastructure projects mean progress and development. The railway project “Tren Maya”, supposedly a harmless project of the Mexican government, keeps these promises only at first glance: with a distance of more than 1,500 kilometers, the new route will connect five federal states. Politicians and companies promise jobs, increased tourism and even ‘the path to modernity’.

The reality is very different. This megaproject means the destruction of the last jungles of southern Mexico, the violation of the rights of the indigenous population, with land grabbing and displacement, as well as an additional militarization in one of the most conflictive regions of the country. In return, few expect to obtain large profits and that is why they continue to carry out, without interruption, the „Mayan Train“ project. German capital and German companies are also involved in the planning, construction and commissioning of the „Mayan Train“.

The following research was conducted in connection to the Zapatistas‘ trip to Europe and after a description of the consequences of the project, it outlines the participation of DB Consulting & Engineering, the interest of SIEMENS and TÜV Rheinland and its connection with companies of the German arms industry. Towards the end there is a presentation of the resistance against the project and an interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz, who has been observing the project on the ground for years and examining in particular its geopolitical dimension. He emphasizes: „The biggest mistake is to see the „Mayan Train“ only as a train“.

*The full research, translations and other materials are available at any time at:  
<https://www.ya-basta-netz.org/tren-maya-made-in-germany-espanol/>*





*„Threats and harassment against people who defend human rights continue and, according to data from organizations of civil society, 24 defenders were killed. Defenders of environmental rights and indigenous peoples expressed their concern about the megaproject known as the Mayan Train. The president reacted by publicly accusing them of being „false environmentalists.“ Six UN special rapporteurs sent a letter to the government expressing a series of concerns about the Mayan Train project, some of them related to the right of indigenous peoples to land and health, and also the possible environmental consequences of the project.“*

**Amnesty International<sup>1</sup>**

*„The indigenous consultation process on the Mayan Train has not complied with all international human rights standards on the matter.“*

**United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mexico<sup>2</sup>**

*„In addition, (the consultations) are frequently carried out in contexts of threats, criminalization and harassment, damaging their free character“*

**UN-Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination<sup>3</sup>**

*„For neoliberalism, the only criterion is to maximize the profit of investors in the shortest time possible, but without considering the integral participation of the ejidos and indigenous Mayan communities that are the owners of the land.“*

**Pedro Uc Be, Human rights defender, activist, Poet<sup>4</sup>**

*„No more permits for extractive companies, which pollute the environment, biodiversity, and affect the health of the Mayan communities.“*

**Greenpeace, Viridiana Lázaro Lembrino<sup>5</sup>**

***„[...] Studies conclude that the Mayan Train will promote the degradation, deforestation and fragmentation of twenty-three Protected Natural Areas, among which are Protected Natural Areas of Quintana Roo such as Yum Balam, Manglares de Nichupté, Uaymil and the Reserves of the Sian Ka'an and Calakmul Biosphere, both World Heritage Sites [...] “***  
**Greenpeace<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International Report 2020/21, Länderbericht Mexiko: <https://www.amnesty.ch/de/ueber-amnesty/publikationen/amnesty-report/jahre/2020/laenderbericht-mexiko#>, [own translation], [last visited 30.07.2021].

<sup>2</sup> ONU México: „El proceso de consulta indígena sobre el Tren Maya no ha cumplido con todos los estándares internacionales de derechos humanos en la materia: ONU-DH“, <https://www.onu.org.mx/el-proceso-de-consulta-indigena-sobre-el-tren-maya-no-ha-cumplido-con-todos-los-estandares-internacionales-de-derechos-humanos-en-la-materia-onu-dh/>, [own translation], [last visited 30.07.2021].

<sup>3</sup> „Consulta de Tren Maya no respeta convenio que protege a indígenas: ONU“, in: Expansión Política (30.08.2021), <https://politica.expansion.mx/mexico/2019/08/30/onu-alerta-serios-vacios-en-consultas-pueblos-indigenas>, [own translation], [last visited 30.07.2021].

<sup>4</sup> Greenpeace Mexiko: „Organizaciones y ciudadanos rechazan el Tren Maya con una carta a AMLO“, <https://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/blog/8524/organizaciones-y-ciudadanos-rechazan-el-tren-maya-con-una-carta-a-amlo/>, [own translation], [30.07.2021].

<sup>5</sup> Greenpeace Mexiko: „Organizaciones y ciudadanos rechazan el Tren Maya con una carta a AMLO“, <https://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/blog/8524/organizaciones-y-ciudadanos-rechazan-el-tren-maya-con-una-carta-a-amlo/>, [own translation], [30.07.2021].

<sup>6</sup> „Greenpeace México hace un llamado a reflexionar sobre el voto. Pide analizar las propuestas sobre proyectos ambientales, in: La Jornada (26.04.2021), <https://www.lajornadamaya.mx/yucatan/170783/greenpeace-mexico-hace-un-llamado-a-reflexionar-sobre-el-voto>, [own translation], [last visited 30.07.2021].

# #LaGiraZapatistaVa #NetzderRebellion #RechercheAG #NoAltrenMaya

The Zapatista movement made up of indigenous rebels from Chiapas, in southern Mexico, began to quietly organize in 1983 to finally launch a revolt against neoliberalism, capitalism, and racism in 1994. Since then, they have organized according to their own rules, regardless of the state. They have been resisting colonialism for 500 years, and for 27 years also resisting the low intensity war against them - at military, psychological, economic, administrative and media levels. A thousand times they have been declared dead, but to this day they are still alive and rebellious. Within their autonomous structures, they themselves organize all areas of life according to basic democratic principles. At the same time, women's struggles play a central role there. Time and time again, they have given the impetus to networking and connecting struggles from the left and from below around the world. Starting with the meetings from all over Mexico in the rebel zone and the „Intergalactic Encounters“, which were an important starting signal for the movement against globalization and the formation of structures such as People's Global Action or indymedia. In 2001, with a delegation tour of Mexico, they mobilized millions of people. In more recent years, they have been invited to international meetings of women and have transmitted their experiences of self-management to thousands of people from all over the world in the „Zapatista school“. Their movement has continued to grow, they have expanded their autonomy, they have sown the seeds of rebellion throughout Mexico, and they are closely connected with all of Mexico's resisting indigenous peoples through the National Indigenous Congress (CNI).

In 2021, they will leave Mexico for the first time and begin a trip to the five continents. “We are Zapatistas, carriers of the virus of resistance and rebellion. As such, we will travel to the 5 continents.“ In the summer of 2021, a delegation of Zapatistas - most of them women\* - will arrive in Europe. We still do not know when, on which routes, with which ships, with which money. But we know: On this continent from which so much destruction and annihilation has emanated - and continues to emanate, on this continent in which we live - we want to welcome you. In a way that does justice to the persistent rebellion for life with which the Zapatistas have taught so many, time and again, that surrender is not an option. In this way we want to build rebellious relationships amongst ourselves. We want to connect the Zapatistas with all the resistances and rebellions that exist in this continent. With the resistance and rebellions that fight for life and against destruction, for equality among people, against oppression and exclusion. That is why we want to connect with you, to establish relationships with the people who are fighting, from the left and from below. And by this we mean that we enter into a real relationship with each other, because that is truly revolutionary in this cold, individualized and distanced world. This task is great, and yet it is only a small step on the road ahead. We invite you to participate with whatever comes to mind. What issues and struggles are so important to you that you keep them despite COVID19? Put your themes in relation to this trip, because the Zapatistas come to fight with us in struggles that are too important for a pandemic to stop them.

From: “The Zapatistas tour Europe”, on the website of the Ya Basta Solidarity and Rebellion Network, <https://www.ya-basta-netz.org/die-zapatistas-in-europa/>



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# Teil 1: „Train of Destruction“



Fig. 1: The destruction of the jungle opens the way for the Mayan Train - 800 hectares will be cut down for “section 1” alone.

## Part 1.1.: General introduction

The so-called „Mayan Train“ is a proposed infrastructure project planned by the government of Mexico, calling itself “left” and now „liberal“, which will cover a 1,500 kilometer stretch from Palenque to Cancún, connecting the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan and Quintana Roo. It is supposed to boost the (local) economy and tourism, and will cost about 150,000 million pesos (more than 6,000 million euros), which will be covered by public and private investments.<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 2: The 8 sections under construction. The „Selva Section 1“ starts in Chiapas, near Palenque.





*Photo 3: The Mexican army will manage the megaproject and will receive a large part of the profits. „The owner of the Mayan Train will be the army and the profits will be for the armed forces “also ensures the responsible tourist authority FONATUR. The photo shows President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (abbreviated and from now on mentioned as AMLO) (back) signing the decree that grants the military the administration of the train (in September 2020).*



And the train does not come alone: a highway project will accompany it in the state of Chiapas. The asphalt snake between Cancun and Mérida will be extended during the construction of the Mayan Train and will cross the jungle along the tracks of the train.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the state company that manages this and other megaprojects is under the direction of the Mexican army suggests other disturbing motives behind the Mayan Train. „Constanza Lambertucci, from the Spanish newspaper El País, notes that the president of Mexico has increasingly involved the armed forces in major projects of the government since he took office in 2018.“<sup>4</sup> There are several indications that the Mexican army cooperates with organized crime at various levels and is (co)responsible for countless human rights violations.<sup>5</sup> More detailed information on this can be found in part 6 of this text, „The german arms industry and the Mayan Train“.



*Fig. 4: The map is taken from Le Monde Diplomatique.<sup>6</sup> The planned airports will also be under the control of the army.<sup>7</sup>*

In the southeast of the country, the train line is being built through unique, protected ecosystems and indigenous territories. While the central government promises progress and jobs, the inhabitants of the communities where the rails are planned feel they are not being heard. As stated in this report, land theft issues, water scarcity, crime and environmental degradation will be exacerbated by the project in the region.

## Part 1.2: Destruction of the environment



*Fig. 5: 'Fattening' facilities in the Yucatan peninsula.*

There are several nature reserves in the Yucatan peninsula, among them Balam Kin and Balam Kú (Campeche); the Natural Park of Palenque (Chiapas) or Yum Balam, Mangroves of Nichupté and Uaymil (Quintana Roo). According to Greenpeace's head of climate change and agriculture in Mexico, Viridiana Lázaro Lembrino, the Yucatán Peninsula is under great pressure from various projects in the area, such as pig farms, wind farms, solar farms and now, in addition, the Mayan Train.<sup>8</sup>

Together, these projects have various impacts on the ecosystem and the local population.<sup>9</sup> To reduce or avoid the negative impact infrastructure projects have on the environment, there are various mechanisms in Mexico. Among them is the mandate of an environmental impact assessment (Manifestación de Impacto Ambiental, in short: MIA, in English: Environmental Impact Check). Only after such a study has been conducted can construction begin. In the case of the Mayan Train, the tourist company FONATUR commissioned a MIA of the construction project, which did not include the opinions and needs of the indigenous population.

The local population is very critical of this MIA. „Indigenous organizations complain that they did not have access to the environmental studies of the megaproject and, therefore, their right to information was violated. They also denounce that they are not included in the environmental impact assessment. This also violates their rights.<sup>10z</sup> „In addition, the MIA mentions that due to the Mayan Train project there will be construction works taking place in nature reserves, which is not allowed. Parts of the soil in the region is very porous. It is mainly composed of limestone, which favors the filtration of pollutants. There is also the unique 'cenote' system in the region, consisting of caves and underground rivers. At present, these underground bodies form the largest reserves of freshwater in Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

„First of all, it is unknown or there is no in-depth documentation of how the underground river network and the entire water system below the surface of the peninsula is structured „, says Octavio Rosas Landa, from the Faculty of Economics from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). At present, there is only knowledge of between 10 - 15% of the underground systems.



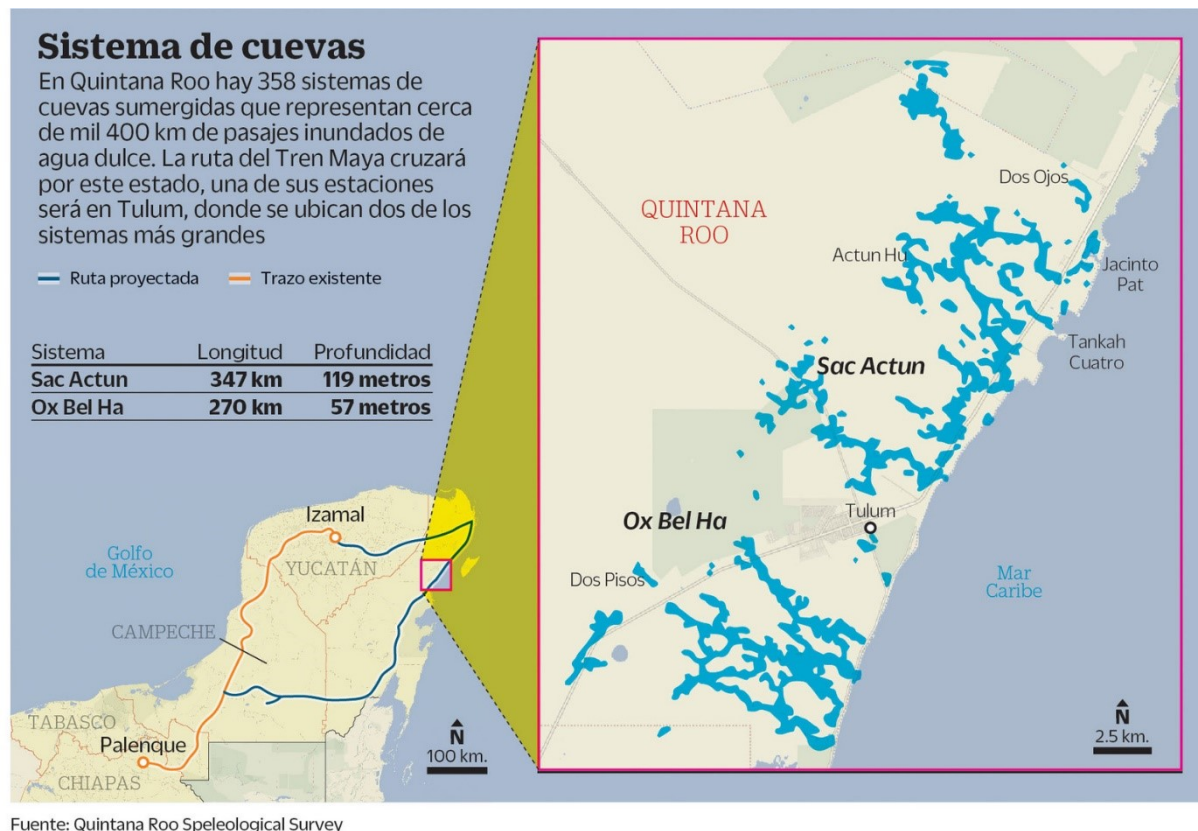


Fig. 6: „Underwater caves (cenotes) in Quintana Roo.

„It must be assumed that the more urbanization and construction of roads in karst areas,<sup>12</sup> the greater the risk of collapse“, as is indicated in the appendix of the research document on cenotes.<sup>13</sup> The karst soil puts the infrastructure project in doubt.

In the state of Quintana Roo alone there are 358 underwater cave systems that contain almost 1,400 kilometers of passages with fresh water. The Mayan Train route will pass through this state, and one of its stops will be in Tulum, where two of the largest ‘cenotes’ are located. In addition to the destruction of unique biosystems and endangered species living in these caves, construction will exacerbate water shortages by endangering underwater systems. It will also create safety risks along the route when a train and highway are built over these caves, many of which remain undiscovered: The ‘cenote system’ ensures the outlet of fresh water towards the coast, which is fundamental for the existence of mangroves. These, in turn, maintain a very important ecological balance on the coast: In addition to regulating nutrients naturally, these mangroves serve as protection against hurricanes. Due to its great impact on complex and sensitive ecosystems, the construction of the Mayan Train will also reduce the protection against storms and floods in one of the regions in the world most affected by tropical storms. ‘Cenotes’ are essential for the survival of mangroves, mangroves for the coral reef ...<sup>14</sup> Everything is linked to a greater system: jungle, mangroves, reef lagoon, coral reef. Everything in the end is connected and most likely it will be adversely affected by the Mayan Train.

The construction of the Mayan Train on this surface (over the underground ‘cenote system’), implies not only that accidents during its construction and after its completion will be difficult to prevent, but also that its construction will have a negative impact on the region’s bodies of water. The concrete consequences include water pollution and a threat of water scarcity, also mainly due to deforestation:

In December 2020, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) approved the impact of Phase 1 of the Mayan Train project. This also allows the deforestation of 800 hectares of forest.<sup>15</sup>

Environmental impacts will also be addressed in the next parts 2-8.

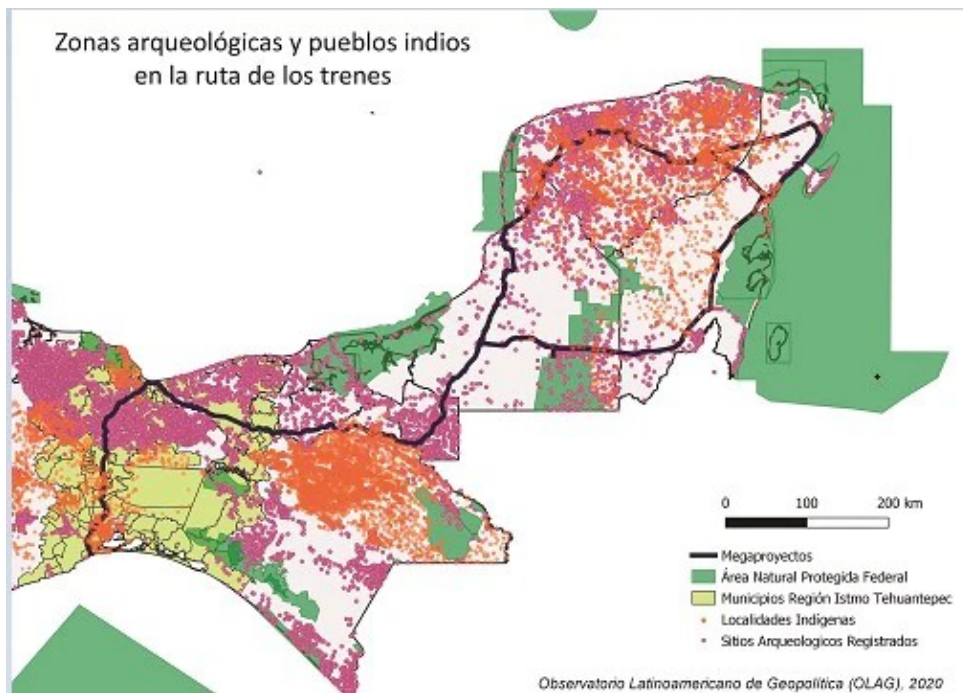


Fig. 7: The orange dots show indigenous communities along the route of the Mayan Train; the sites in pink are archaeological.

## Part 1.3.: Contempt for indigenous rights and threats to activists

Approximately 1,080,410 indigenous people from the Mayan, Ch'ol, Tzeltales, Chontales, Tzoziles and other indigenous groups live in the area where the Mayan Train is supposed to be built. The infrastructure project will pass near Zapatista autonomous territories, and in addition to affecting territories occupied by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, the project also affects areas of the state of Oaxaca where the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) is still present.<sup>16</sup> Both the indigenous population and small farmers in the region are negatively affected by the construction of the Mayan Train.

The „popular consultation“ (‘Consulta’), which took place despite much criticism in its build-up, was attended by very few locals. The United Nations Committee against Racial Discrimination (CERD) considered that the consultation ignored the agreements on indigenous rights: „In its concluding observations to the reports presented by Mexico - sent on Thursday - the Committee accused that, in most cases, the consultation processes in indigenous communities were not carried out with sufficient prior notice, they did not take into account the local uses and customs, and neither was provided clear, accurate and culturally appropriate information. In addition, these consultations were frequently carried out in contexts of threats, criminalization and harassment, damaging their free character”.<sup>17</sup> Robin Canul, a photojournalist and reporter from Yucatan, reaches the same conclusion and speaks of intimidation and misinformation.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 8, 9: Pedro Uc Be



Especially in Chiapas, indigenous groups demanded a consultation<sup>19</sup> - the fact that it was ultimately carried out under the aforementioned deficiencies and violations of indigenous rights is only the tip of the iceberg: Especially in regions where consultation was vociferously demanded, it has practically not been carried out until today: „Of the 79 polling stations that were installed in the state, only one was in the Palenque municipality and was located in the municipal seat, far from the places where [the railways of the Mayan Train] will be built” denounces Ángeles Mariscal.<sup>20</sup>

Pedro Uc Be is a Mayan land rights defender, writer, poet, translator, and teacher campaigning for the preservation of the Mayan culture. As a member of the Assembly of Defenders of the Mayan Territory of Múuch 'Xínbal and the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) he has worked for the protection of the lands of the Mayan peoples, criticizing the Mayan Train in this context. On December 16, 2019, Pedro Uc Be subsequently received a WhatsApp message with death threats directed at him and his family. The same message was also sent to his two sons and his former partner. They were told they had 48 hours to leave their community to avoid being killed. (Source: Front Line Defenders) <sup>21</sup>

At the same time, brave activists continue to resist the project and reject the consultations as inadequate. While the AMLO government highlights the supposed inclusion of indigenous people in the „megaprojects“, at least eight community leaders have been assassinated in the current presidential mandate while posing resistance to those same projects:

Samir Flores Soberanes in Amilcingo, Morelos; Julián Cortés Flores in San Luis Acatlán, Guerrero; Ignacio Pérez Girón in Aldama, Chiapas; José Lucio Bartolo Faustino, Modesto Verales Sebastián, Bartolo Hilario Morales, and Isaías Xanteco Ahuejote, all members of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI); Juan Monroy and José Luis Rosales in Jalisco, and Feliciano Corona Cirino from María Ostula, Michoacán - „Our comrades were murdered for opposing the war with which the bad government intends to take over our lands, mountains and waters, to consolidate the dispossession that threatens our existence as indigenous peoples”, declared the CNI in its fourth national assembly in December 2019 — and continued:

*“The bad federal government pretends to consult the people, supplants our collective will, ignoring and offending our forms of organization and decision-making, such as the vulgar deception of what it called „Consultation“, whose objective is none other than to impose by force the so-called Mayan Train, which hands over the indigenous territories to big industrial and tourist capital [...]. “<sup>22</sup>*

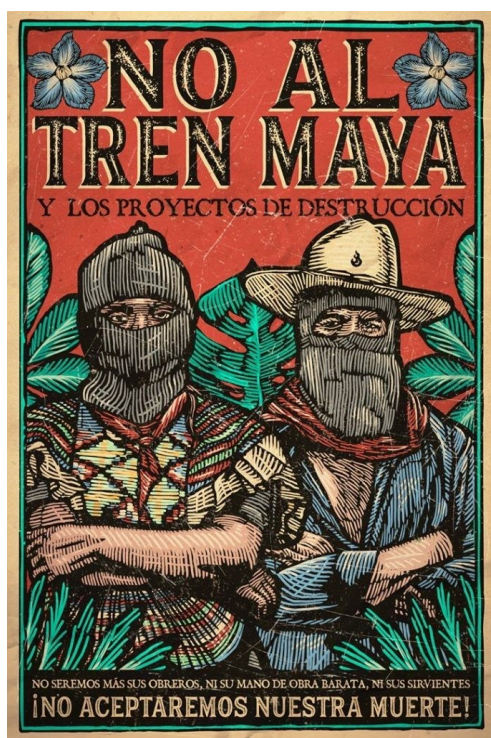


Fig.s 10, 11: Zapatista Resistance: „No to the Mayan train and the projects of destruction!“<sup>23</sup>

## Part 1.4. Militarization and migration

The increasingly aggressive approach of the Mexican government towards refugees from all over Central America can certainly be linked to the megaproject: „If you put the various megaprojects and projects of infrastructure on a map, you can see that they are building blocks for a ‚migrant barrier‘ designed to serve the geopolitical interests of the United States“, says Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz, professor at the Colegio de la Frontera Sur of the University of Campeche [Compare: Part 8: „Interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz“].<sup>24</sup>



*Figures 12,13,14: Units of the Mexican Army (left), National Guard (center) and Military Police (right) in the border region.*

During AMLO's term, the Mexican government, under additional pressure from the US government, ordered the dispatch of thousands of army and National Guard soldiers, some of them heavily armed, to the southern border between Mexico and Guatemala „to block the passage of Central American migrants in order to stop the border crisis in the United States. „<sup>25</sup> The fact that the Mexican armed forces are taking over the management and the profits of the „tourist“ Mayan Train causes people like Sergio Díaz to be worried about a violent escalation of the already scandalous human rights situation at the southern border. The geopolitical interests of the United States became even more clear after the „agreement“ between Mexico and the United States under former US President Donald Trump: After the policy of the United States would make a stricter immigration policy of Mexico a condition to retain punitive tariffs, <sup>26</sup> the Mexican government sent 6,000 national guards to the border with Guatemala in a first step, <sup>27</sup> recently a Mexican soldier shot a Guatemalan man without provocation.<sup>8</sup> The new US administration continues with the same policy, with the aim to already detain Central American migrants in southern Mexico. (See parts 2-7 for more information).

It is deeply worrying that the same Mexican army is now supposed to administrate an infrastructure project of this dimension, this close to the southern border and the Zapatistas' autonomous regions, which have been attacked by this army for many years in a war of „low intensity“.



*Bild 15: AMLO (left) und Trump (right) during the AMLO's first visit to White House - it was his first trip abroad as president.*



# 1..5. Urbanization and opening to global capital

Mexican presidents like to immortalize themselves in megaprojects. AMLO repeatedly emphasizes that the project is for the “development” of the region, *“in the most equitable way for the local population.”* 29 This statement raises the question of what is meant by „development“, since the indigenous population will not benefit from the construction of the train. Tourism would benefit large companies, not the local population. This is evidenced by observing one of the first historic presidential megaprojects: In the nineties it was in Cancún, in the state of Yucatán, where all-inclusive hotel complexes emerged at full speed. The downside of those tourist complexes is now also becoming a threat along the route of the Mayan Train: *„For many people from the smaller towns and communities around Cancun, that name [today] represents inequality, exploitation, environmental collapse and — due to the increasing militarization of drug trafficking —state violence and paramilitary violence. In 2019, there was an average of one murder per day in Cancun. In January 2020 alone, more than 50 people were killed“.*30

Like for example in Cancun, the Mayan Train is now presented as a pioneer of a “modern” way of life: the megaproject will make way through parts of Mexico that are inhabited but have not yet been fully incorporated into the state framework of Mexico.<sup>31</sup> The opening of these zones to international capital and to national investors from all regions of Mexico gives rise to a great variety of transformation processes.

[See Part 8: „Interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz“]



*Above: Photo 16: Cancun, in the extreme north of Yucatan, 50 years ago (left) Photo 17: ... and today (right.)*

*Bottom: Photo 18: Cancun, in the extreme north of Yucatan, 50 years ago (left) Photo 19: ... and today (right.)*

For example, in December 2020, AMLO stated his goal of initiating a „land use planning“ process. Government officials support him and want urban centers to emerge from the Maya Train stations. In this context, the land use rights of the local population could be modified. Indigenous organizations are against the project based on the impact that these so-called poles of development will have on their culture and their territories.<sup>32</sup> Between land grabbing, private investment and urbanization, it becomes clear how these infrastructure projects serve first and foremost to allow capital to access these territories.



For example, the Mexican Civil Council for Sustainable Forestry (CCMSS) criticized the federal government's project for promoting a scheme that favors urban populations and ignores the realities and rights of indigenous communities:

*“With this project, the State seeks the arrival of large investments to the region, under the assumption that salaried employment is the best way to attack poverty and marginalization. The percentage of the population with salaried employment would increase notably, as has happened before, however, this bet is based on a process of divestment and dispossession of the communities' lands, generating the conditions to accentuate a model that concentrates wealth and allows large companies and financial corporations, agribusiness, tourism and the real estate sector accumulate capital and perpetuate their dominance. All this in the Yucatan Peninsula, where 46.9 percent of the population identifies itself as Mayan”, further explains CCMSS.<sup>33</sup>*

This process has been described and conceptualized by D. Harvey under the term „accumulation by dispossession“. The term is based on capitalist practices such as the privatization of land, the displacement of farmer populations and the conversion of various types of collective property into private property rights.<sup>34</sup>

In the process, the Mexican government speaks of the Mayan Train as a catalyst for development and promises the local population more jobs, especially in the tourism and construction industry. Nevertheless, since the construction of the sections of the Mayan Train began, several groups of workers have denounced that they are not receiving their wages, or only part of what was promised.

For example, in August 2020, members of the construction company Ferrocarrileros del Istmo de Tehuantepec (FIT) and Section 32 of the Union of Railroad Workers of the Mexican Republic (STFRM) revealed that the Escalante y Gordillo company intends to cut their salaries by 30% in the construction of the railway line. Despite criticism and irregularities, President AMLO indicated in April 2021 that he plans to include migrants as additional workers on the Mayan Train, a sham considering that the infrastructure project also serves as a „barrier“ to northwards migration. There is also the question of how the Mexican government will guarantee that the rights of migrants are respected regardless of their economic needs. Due to its particular situation of vulnerability in a foreign country, migrant populations are less likely to be able to make demands concerning their labor rights.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.6. Gender

The project also affects the relationship between men and women. To understand how the impact of Tren Maya will be different for men and women, it is important to know the local context. We limit ourselves here to the situation of the population living from subsistence farming (including self-sufficient agricultural activities) on collectively owned land. The loss of these lands has different gender implications. More women are likely to be directly affected by the loss of firewood, water and medicinal plants, while men and women may be affected equally by loss of grazing land.<sup>36</sup> Today, women in many rural communities around the world continue to have the responsibility to do hard labor, produce daily sustenance and, to some extent, maintain the ecosystem and certain species of animals and plants that support agriculture, livestock, and forestry production. Despite the importance of women in maintaining the community foundations that make life possible, most women are not legally owners of the land and are not an official part of the labor force.<sup>37</sup>

The invasion of agricultural areas, allowed and facilitated by the construction of the Mayan Train, gives rise to more agrarian conflicts, as access to land becomes more difficult and, at the same time, more men are getting salaried jobs.<sup>38</sup> Thus, women have to invest more time in activities that they previously shared with men. Once two hands are removed from the family, the family's access to food is no longer ensured. Women are usually the ones in charge of the most reproductive tasks (agriculture, children, fetching water, etc.). Often it is the man who starts wage work and thus earns an income - in case the salary is actually paid. This creates a new income for the family, which can often be used to buy only the most basic food products, which was often grown by families previously. Now, it may also be that the man spends the newly acquired salary on other things, for example, on alcohol. With the prospect of a salary in the family, dependencies often arise that did not exist before and that places the woman in an often disadvantageous position.<sup>39</sup>

## 1.7. Drug and animal trafficking

The area where the Mayan train will be built is used by drug cartels to land planes loaded with cocaine, guns and money. Drug cartels, such as the Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, and the Cartel Jalisco-Nueva Generation (CJNG), are constantly present and there are permanent conflicts between them. The Mayan Train is an infrastructure project for the mobility of people and the transport of legal goods. However, it has been demonstrated that infrastructures for legal products also benefit illegal sectors. This is also most likely to be the case here, the likelihood that there will be an increase in crime including the trade of illegal drugs and protected animals is real: if the local population loses collectively owned lands due to land grabbing, and therefore lose their previous ways of making a living and their possibilities for subsistence disappear, participation in criminal activities is likely to increase. For some it becomes the only way to earn a living, so that often the people who are part of these transformation processes are criminalized.<sup>40</sup> Legal market chains can provide a structure for the illegal chain; that is why, for example, the influx of illegal jaguar-related products may be a side effect of economic cooperation between China and the countries of Central and South America. Poverty and high levels of corruption in the countries of origin may tempt or compel the local population to engage in illegal activities and contribute to the growth of this market.<sup>41</sup>

## 1.8. Deutsche Bahn, SIEMENS, TÜV-Rheinland

The new emblematic and neoliberal project of the Mexican government is supported and financed by companies from all over the world. Private and state companies from Germany have also shown great interest in investing in the project, awarding the first contracts and signing agreements. **In the following report, we will present 1.) the description of the negative aspects of the project, 2.) the participation of German companies and capital, concluding with 3.) the resistance against the project.**

## Part 2: DB Consulting & Engineering - The „shadow operator“



Fig. 20: A typical image in the online newspapers and magazines of Mexico: AMLO, a DB ICE train and the planned route of the „Mayan Train“, in a collage.

### 21. The green image of the Deutsche Bahn

*„We are passionate about shaping rail for the world of tomorrow.“*

This is stated by the official website of DB Engineering & Consulting GmbH.<sup>42</sup> But how should this world of tomorrow look like? It has to be „fair“, „social“, the German company states, and it should not just be about profits: *„For years DB has been involved in social projects in Germany and around the world. As a mobility and logistics company active around the world [...] it feels and lives a special responsibility for the development of society in its entirety. Based on the conviction that success cannot be measured solely in economic terms, DB uses its skills to be up to this responsibility.“*<sup>43</sup> DB likes to highlight its two faces to the outside world: First of all, the protection of the climate and the environment - DB CEO Dr. Richard Lutz says: *„We take responsibility and make the most climate-friendly means of transport even more [...] ecological and attractive.“*<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 21: „Germany fastest climate-protector“.



Secondly, this „responsibility“ must be „felt“ globally, as DB's social activities are not limited to Germany: *„from ecological practices in Australia, to support for schoolchildren in Sweden, South Africa and the United States, to planting campaigns in Singapore.“*<sup>45</sup>

Mexico is missing from this list of unlimited commitment. To complete the list, we add: the company also „lives“ this responsibility to people and nature in the future vacation paradise of Yucatan and in the jungle of Chiapas.

Or does it?

Although the consultation of indigenous communities has been carried out in an inadequate way, as has the evaluation of environmental impact [see part 1], the construction of the Mayan Train seems to already be a definitive fact. President from Mexico, AMLO, was equally confident and honest in September 2019 when he announced in Campeche: *„Come Rain, thunder or lightning, the Mayan Train is going to be built, whether they want it or not.“*<sup>46</sup>

Also in Campeche, Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz, a declared opponent of the project, investigates and points out: *„The construction of the Mayan Train seems a fact. What indigenous peoples decide will not matter. There was no prior debate about the project and its impacts. Consultation with indigenous peoples must include a whole process of intercultural dialogue that allows agreements and consensus to exercise the right to self-determination.“* [See: Part 8: Our „Interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz“].

What seems even more worrying is the simultaneous militarization that continues to drive the project in the south of the country: The army will manage the megaproject. The fear of a greater presence of the armed forces is especially palpable in the Zapatista areas of Chiapas, where the government has been applying a war strategy of „low intensity“. However, in recent weeks and months there have been new attacks by paramilitary groups in the region, with the armed forces of the state standing idly by: On May 8 of this year, for example, Pedro Lunez Pérez was shot dead by paramilitaries in the community of Coco, municipality of Aldama, Chiapas, *„while the National Guard and the state police were near the community of Coco.“*<sup>47</sup> Fear of a greater military presence and armed violence is just one of the reasons behind the widespread opposition to the project.



Fig. 22: Another collage from Mexican news outlets shows the Mexican president with high-ranking military personnel - and an Deutsche Bahn ICE train.<sup>48</sup>

## 22 Participation of DB Consulting & Engineering on the Mayan Train

The fact that the optimism of the Mexican president seems unbroken may in part be due to the promises from DB Engineering & Consulting GmbH. The participation of the German company in the Mayan Train provides legitimacy to the government's plans, especially in their own country, and at the same time helps to defame the project's opponents as „*opponents to progress and development*“. Recently, the participation of Deutsche Bahn as a sign of the progressive nature of the project was celebrated in a conference on the “bienestar” (wellbeing) of the Mayan Train project: “*Conalep currently made an agreement with our shadow operator, it is a company of the German state, it is Deutsche Bahn, the German train operator, which is advising us and it is called „shadow operator“ because it is supporting us with operational aspects precisely to start generating professional frameworks of another level*“, said Rogelio Jiménez Pons, general director of the tourist authority FONATUR at the corresponding press conference.<sup>49</sup> In turn, DB praises the „*professionalization*“ of the Mexican transport sector.<sup>50</sup>

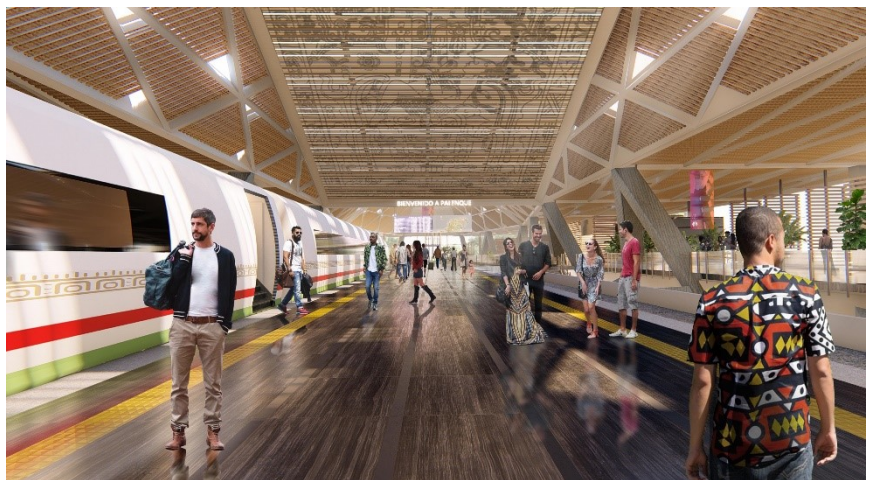


Photo 23, photo 24: In this „announcement“ of the project, the Mexican government presents its „vision“ of the Mayan Train: the stations and the trains will be „modern“ and of the highest technical level. At the same time, it is precisely the involvement of the German company DB in Mexico that the project's supporters cite as „proof“ of their „progressivism“ and, consequently, the project's opponents are criminalized as „opponents of progress“.

Photo 25 (below): The vision of the „Mayan Train“: The Mayans as „history“, pushed into the past, is still promoted as a photographic motif for tourists. Behind: the futuristic modernity.





In the Mayan Train project, DB Engineering & Consulting - the international engineering and consulting company of Deutsche Bahn, which offers consulting services, planning and execution of infrastructure projects all over the world - also acts as a „shadow operator“ beyond their cooperation with Conalep. The contract of „shadow operator“ of the Mayan Train was awarded to a consortium of three companies: two Spanish state companies, Renfe Operadora and Ingeniería y Economía del Transporte (Ineco) and the German company DB Engineering and Consulting GmbH.<sup>51</sup>

The term „shadow operator“ does what it implies: when researching the term, one mainly finds reports of large contracts that Deutsche Bahn has in countries with particularly questionable human rights records, such as Qatar, where DB is planning a complete rail network, 52 the United Arab Emirates, China, Brazil or Colombia.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 26: The DB Consulting and Engineering brochure announces its „commitment“ around the world (including Saudi Arabia).

The contract as „shadow operator“ has an initial validity of three years, starting in 2020. The consortium of the three companies will initially receive 13.5 million euros to support the development of the Mayan Train. „[The three groups will] act as shadow operators of the National Tourism Development Fund (FONATUR) -the contracting authority-, as announced by the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda on Friday“, writes the largest Spanish newspaper, El Pais, 54 and continues: „The tasks of this contract include advising on the future operation as well as supervision of the manufacturing, delivery and commissioning of the rolling material and other systems of the project until the start of the commercial testing phase“. Renfe, like DB, also acts as a “shadow operator” in other contexts such as Saudi Arabia. It is not the first time DB, Renfe and Ineco form a consortium.<sup>55</sup>



Fig. 27: „Thumbs up“ for Renfe, Ineco and DB: once again their merger won the contract for a controversial mega-infrastructure project. The photo was published by Ineco under the announcement: „A consortium formed by Renfe, Ineco and the German company DB has been awarded the contract for the Mayan Train project in Mexico“, January 2021.<sup>56</sup>



On May 5, 2021, Eva-Maria Schreiber, a member of German parliament for the Die Linke (The Left), asked a parliamentary question about Deutsche Bahn Engineering & Consulting's involvement in the Mayan Train project.<sup>57</sup> Previously, Deutsche Bahn had not responded to questions of a journalist, who then contacted Eva-Maria Schreiber. The response of the Secretary of State of the Parliament, Enak Ferlemann, confirms their participation: „According to the information provided by Deutsche Bahn AG (DB AG), FONATUR (National Fund for the Promotion of Tourism) of the Ministry of Tourism of Mexico has entrusted DB Engineering & Consulting GmbH with advising on railway operational decisions within the „Mayan Train“ project. [...] The contract was signed on December 1, 2020 and runs until December 2023, with a contractual value of 8.6 million euros [...].“<sup>68</sup>

The fact that MEP Schreiber specifically asks about Deutsche Bahn Engineering & Consulting, as well as other German state institutions or federally owned companies,<sup>59</sup> underlines a crucial point: DB Engineering & Consulting is fully owned by the Federal Republic of Germany. This plays an important role in our evaluation of participation (see: „By the way I: ILO Convention 169“).

Unlike the Spanish companies within the consortium, DB takes the term “shadow” seriously and hardly writes a word about its participation in the Mayan Train on its own website - unlike Renfe and Ineco.<sup>60</sup> A closer look at the company's publications shows that the Mayan Train is just one of the countless participations as a “shadow operator” in Mexico (for example in Monterrey) and throughout Latin America.<sup>61</sup>

The silence on part of Deutsche Bahn may have to do with the fact that the environmental consequences and human rights violations of the project do not quite fit in with the green, environmentally friendly and socially just image that DB likes to display so much in Germany.

The magnitude of the environmental destruction is difficult to illustrate due to its enormous extent. Some examples of certain parts of the planned route can only give an idea of the impact which the destruction of the last intact forests in the south of the country is going to have: „Academics and researchers who have studied the negative impacts of the mega-project warn that the Mayan Train threatens to destroy the Cuxtal Ecological Reserve, which is home to 474 species of plants, 472 types of invertebrates and 17 reptiles of medicinal and cultural value for indigenous groups in Yucatan“, reports Gloria Leticia Díaz, among others.<sup>62</sup> The jaguar, probably the most famous animal in the Chiapas jungle is just one of the countless endangered animal and plant species in the region that are likely to disappear permanently if the project were to become a reality. Currently, only 4,000 jaguars live in all of Mexico,<sup>63</sup> and the habitat of 2,000 of these animals is now directly threatened by the Mayan Train.<sup>64</sup>

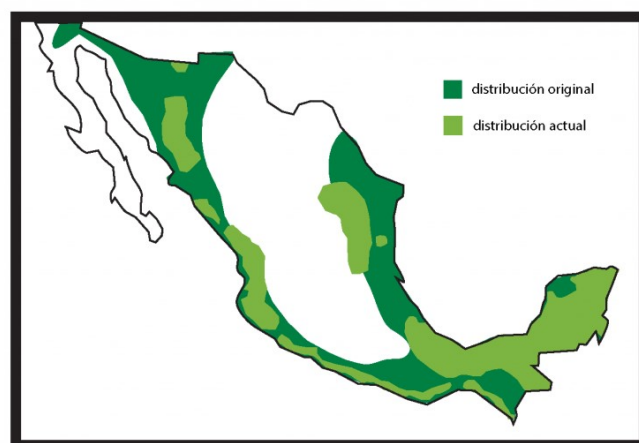
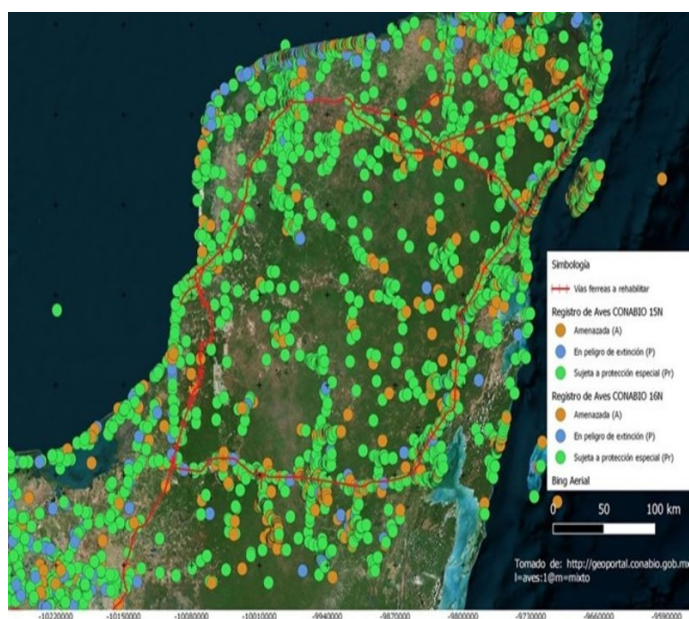


Fig. 28 (left): Distribution of endangered bird species in parts of the proposed Mayan Train route. (right): Original (dark green) and current (light green) habitat of the jaguar in Mexico.

Fig. 29







*Fig. 33: An excavator in the middle of the rainforest working on the Mayan Train line.<sup>67</sup>*



*Fig. 34: In the first phase of construction, more than 11 million trees will be removed. Before these figures were known, the Mexican president had asked permission from „Mother Earth“ in a Mayan ceremony and assured that the biodiversity of the region would not be harmed by the construction project. „They lied.“<sup>68</sup>*

In the 13 years between 2004 and 2017, the Selva Maya, one of the last great tropical forests of the continent (the forest extends through southern Mexico, Belize and Guatemala) has already lost 546,000 hectares (the equivalent of 700,000 soccer fields) . Now this huge deforestation threatens to increase even more drastically due to projects like the Mayan Train or Sembrando Vida [See part 8: „our interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz“], according to WWF.<sup>69</sup>





Fig. 35: Own collage

In the first three phases of construction alone, the works also endanger more than 7,300 monuments and sacred places of indigenous peoples.<sup>70</sup> Another problem is the threat posed by the infrastructure project to underground water resources. As *The Nation* reports, „*The problem here in Calakmul*“, Ernesto Martínez told us, „*is that there is no water*“. In addition to the biosphere, the Calakmul community is home to some 28,000 people belonging to various indigenous groups such as the Mayas, Tzeltales and Choles. They have been calling on their respective governments for more than a decade to find a solution to the drought caused by climate change. „*And now they want to bring 8,000 tourists a day?*“, asked Martínez incredulously, trying not to laugh.<sup>71</sup>

Such statements carry a risk. According to the report by the NGO Front Line Defenders, 24 land and human rights defenders were murdered in Mexico last year. This makes Mexico currently the fourth most dangerous country for environmental and human rights activists. In December, a Mayan activist who criticized the Mayan Train and its consultation process reported receiving a death threat.<sup>72</sup>

The government's rhetoric also fosters a climate of aggression against human rights defenders. Amnesty International states in its report on the situation of human rights in Mexico 2020:

*“Human rights defenders continued to be attacked and harassed. According to civil society organizations, 24 of them were murdered. Human rights defenders working on environmental and human rights issues for indigenous peoples expressed concerns about the large-scale Mayan Train project. The president responded to their objections by accusing them of being „false environmentalists.“ Six UN special rapporteurs, in a joint letter to the government, raised a number of concerns about the Mayan Train project, including indigenous peoples' rights to their land and health, and possible negative impacts on the environment.”<sup>73</sup>*

And while the COVID-19 pandemic was completely out of control in Mexico, comparable to that in Brazil, „*it is striking that, despite the pandemic, the Ministry of Health had a budget of 1,476 million pesos lower than the one approved in the PEF (-1.1%), while, for example, the Ministry of Tourism exceeded 5,207 million pesos to 23,572 million pesos —an increase of 452% explained by the Mayan Train*“, explains Leonardo Núñez González.<sup>74</sup>

## 23. DB as an immobility factor

With all these human rights violations documented, it is not surprising that even the comparatively innocuous argument that the train will facilitate the mobility of the region's inhabitants is to be questioned: „*Most likely, all train journeys will cost more than previous bus tickets between the same places.*“<sup>75</sup>

On the contrary, the DB as a supposed provider of mobility in this case acts rather as a provider of immobility, since the project also has the function of curbing migration to the north and the United States, says Dr. Díaz:

*„It must be borne in mind that this region is one of the largest migration corridors to the United States in the world. So the described function of the border as immigration control is strategically important - but not only for Mexico, but especially for the United States of America [...]. In these mega-infrastructure projects, the respective economic actors buy their twelve, thirty or one hundred hectares, or whatever they can afford. Then they have pure freedom to do what they want with that land. The first thing they do is build walls. It is not so much that the walls protect those who are inside, but rather that the mobility of those outside is restricted. Imagine a railroad protected by walls in a narrow corridor: This is not basically an infrastructure project, it is basically a wall. They call it an infrastructure project, they call it a Mayan train, de facto it is a wall.“ [See full interview, part 8]*

US President Biden's invitation to Mexico can also be understood in this sense: La Opinión quotes the Mexican president: „*I invited him [President Joe Biden] to Mexico because of the subject of development, to address the migratory phenomenon, I spoke to him about the development processes that create new jobs [...] and I told him about the Mayan Train [...]*“.<sup>76</sup> Not long after, the US vice president made it clear on her first trip to Central America that the repressive US „law and order“-immigration policy would not change after Trump: „*Do not come. Do not come. The United States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our borders. [...] If you come to our border, you will be turned back [,]*“ she said in June 2021.<sup>77</sup>

Fig. 36: Former US President Trump „asks“ to sign an agreement on migration from Central America and Mexico, here with the Minister of the Interior of Guatemala (left).



Photo 37: AMLO and the new president of the United States, Biden, hold a joint videoconference on the migratory situation on the southern border.

## 241. . By the way I: ILO Convention 169

After more than 30 years, the German government has ratified ILO Convention 169 (International Labor Organization, an agency of the United Nations), which aims to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and communities.<sup>78</sup>

In the Mayan Train megaproject, the views and rights of indigenous communities affected by the megaproject were systematically ignored and violated. Deutsche Bahn's commitment is thus in contradiction with the policy of the German Government. Deutsche Bahn AG is a German federal company. This means that it is 100% owned by the Federal Republic of Germany. If a state-owned company is involved in a project which violates the rights of indigenous peoples, the agreement's ratification becomes a sham. [For more information on ILO Convention 169, the German ratification of the Convention and the possible consequences for the Mayan Train project, see part 7].

It is also striking that the Spanish Ministry of Transport at least openly mentions the participation of Spanish companies in the project,<sup>79</sup> while the search for „Tren Maya“ or „Maya Zug“ in the German Ministry yields no results.

## 242 By the way II: And in Germany?

Even in Germany, the Deutsche Bahn only lives up to its „green image“ at first glance: While many people rightly demand that the infrastructure of the automobile and road be replaced by that of the railroad, it is necessary to bear in mind where Deutsche Bahn gets the electricity it needs for its supposedly green trains: A quarter of all German railroad electricity is supplied by the Datteln IV coal-fired plant.<sup>80</sup>

Datteln IV came into operation despite a political decision to exit the use of coal power - without court approval<sup>81</sup> - and apparently „[the] power station [...] was only built to such a size because Deutsche Bahn committed itself to a long-term contract to buy this enormous amount of electricity.“<sup>82</sup> In fact, DB is likely to continue to draw electricity from the Uniper plant into the 2030s and beyond. If DB trains - now decorated with a green stripe instead of red - officially consume green electricity, at least to some extent, this is regulated by certificates, which are just another layer of a DB greenwashing: „The Certificates work like this: The railroad consumes fossil fueled electricity but acquires the right to claim it on its balance sheet as green electricity. Therefore, the electrical balance of another consumer deteriorates. Green electricity therefore only shifts in the balance, but the regenerative share of electricity consumption in Germany does not increase as a result.“<sup>83</sup> Here, neocolonial abysses of ‚green capitalism‘ open: Germany propagates climate protection and CO2 neutrality and thus repeatedly puts its bets on the railroad. But the railways get much of their electricity from climate-damaging coal, which is no longer mined in „sustainable“ Germany, but in the global South:

*„The operation of Datteln IV is irresponsible not only because it further exacerbates the climate crisis: The coal that is burned there has blood on it. As in Germany no more (hard) coal has been mined since 2018, due to the enormous environmental consequences and high compensation costs, it is imported, mainly from Russia and Colombia. In this way, the German industry outsources the consequences to other regions of the world. Blood charcoal is part of a colonial continuity and makes the imperial way of life visible in the Global North. In Colombia, open pit mines destroy huge areas and the local population is forcibly displaced. In the Caesar region, it is known that there are paramilitary units deployed around the open pit mines. Hundreds of people have been displaced, many even killed. Environmental and human rights activists are also under attack in the Russian Kusbass.“<sup>84</sup>*

Local populations and activists from countries like Colombia pay with their lives for the lie of German climate protection. So this is what the so-called Strong Rail-strategy is supposed to be. The expansion of the rail network is also on everyone's lips in the current election year of 2021. And while it is true that highway projects have no future in the midst of the climate catastrophe and that short-haul flights must be ended: In the system of unbridled capitalism, also the railroad mainly means destruction.

DeCOALonize Europe has summarized detailed information on blood charcoal in the book „Burning Seasons“, click here for the PDF:

<https://decoalonize-europe.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Still-Burning.pdf>







Fig. 38: The Cerrejón coal mine in Colombia. Mining takes place in an area of 69,000 hectares..<sup>85</sup>



Fig. 39: „Germany’s fastest climate protector“. DB consumes green electricity only on paper and acquires the corresponding certificates.



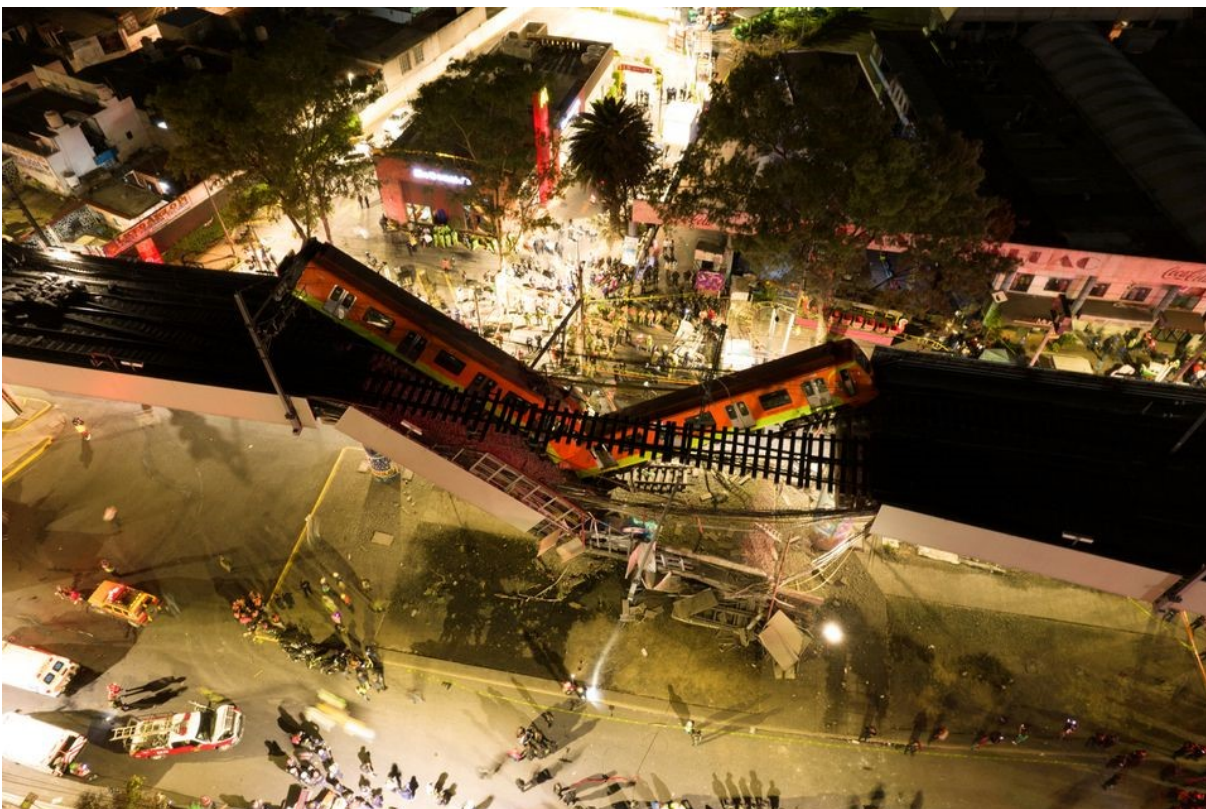
## Part 3: SIEMENS Mobility – “It would be a privilege to be part of the Mayan Train Project”



*Bild 40: „Tenemos mucho interés de ser parte del Tren Maya.“ - “We are greatly interested in being part of the Mayan Train”<sup>86</sup>— The SIEMENS Regional Manager for Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean, Juan Ignacio Díaz.*

### 3.1. The interest of SIEMENS in the Mayan Train Project

Already in 2018, SIEMENS offered to participate in the Mayan Train Project, with services ranging from the power generation and transmission, to electrification, signal technology and automation, and to the trains themselves.<sup>87</sup> An initial contract award has already been received by the French company of Alstom, to which belongs the Berlin-based firm of Bombardier Transportation<sup>88</sup> (Since taking over Bombardier, Alstom is thus also domiciled in Germany, and already before this the group had large works in Germany, including the group’s largest works in Salzgitter).<sup>89</sup> Jointly with a US and a Mexican company, Alstom will be in charge of the section between Cancún and Izamal. Furthermore, the French giant only recently obtained an order to manufacture the initial 42 trains for the Mayan Train.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, both firms were co-responsible for the evidently defective construction of the Metro Line 12 in Mexico City, onto which a bridge collapsed on 3rd May 2021, an incident in which 26 people died and 79 were injured.<sup>91</sup>



*Fig. 41 : The collapsed Line 12 in Mexico City. More than 20 people died.*

## 3.2 SIEMENS in Mexico

The interest taken by SIEMENS encouraged the Government as early as 2018 to emphasize the supposedly progressive nature of the project. Also in the neighbouring country of Guatemala, newspapers described the possible participation of German companies as a step forward into modernity. “[The] Mayan Train could be the first ‘intelligent train’ in Latin America – thanks to the interest of a German company”, so ran the title of the largest Guatemalan newspaper, Prensa Libre, in December 2018: “The German consortium is interested in participating in this project, which could mean the realization of one of the most modern and technologically advanced trains in Latin America.”<sup>92</sup>

The enthusiasm shown here by the Mexican Government is hardly surprising since the CEO of SIEMENS for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, Juan Ignacio Diaz, announced great things to come: “A large part of the rail network in Europe is manufactured by SIEMENS. We can participate in the entire chain [of the Mayan Train], from the power generation and transmission, the electrification of the tracks and the signalling, to the “physical” trains themselves, and to the automation and the digitalization”, said the CEO.<sup>93</sup>

Regarding SIEMENS, the desire to become part of the project seems to be enormous: Even if until now, unlike in the case of DB Engineering & Consulting, nothing has clearly been heard about an agreement to participate, SIEMENS emphasizes its interest and asserts that two million dollars per year have already been invested in “researching” new, large-scale infrastructure projects.<sup>94</sup>

Notwithstanding all criticism and problems relating to the project, the Regional Division of SIEMENS Mexico has announced: “para la empresa sería un “privilegio” participar en la construcción [del Mayan Train]” – “It would be a “privilege” for the company to take part in the construction of the Mayan Train.”<sup>95</sup>

Since the initial announcements of interest in 2018, nothing was heard in the years following, until 2020, about the planned SIEMENS participation in the megaproject – neither a rejection nor a consent by the Government to the company could be clearly identified.

Now it is clear: The interest continues to be there, also in 2021 – and in spite of initial contract awards to the French company, Alstom. In March 2021, several Mexican economic journals, among them El Economista, published online articles which reported on changes to the tendering procedure made by the competent tourism authority, FONATUR. Thereupon, several international company groups which evidently definitely want to secure further contract awards for sections of the project (Alstom is at first only taking on one of several planned construction sections), requested the authority to extend the deadline for submission of the necessary documentation in the tendering process, since it would be impossible to comply with the period of three months.<sup>96</sup>

Likewise, SIEMENS: “In view of the various adaptations made to the basic requirements and the continual incorporation of documents during the past four months (the tendering commenced on 24th November of last year) a number of firms applied for an extension to the deadline of up to 90 days, so that they could submit [their] tenders. The principal is hereby requested to postpone the date for the submission of quotations to the 30th July.” Such a request was also made by SIEMENS Mobility, reports El Economista.<sup>97</sup>

The participation of SIEMENS is not made immediately more likely by the above request but, all the same, the great interest shown by the group in taking part in the project is becoming more and more evident.



Fig. 42: The SIEMENS logo also appears repeatedly in reports by Mexican news portals in connection with the Mayan Train.



# Part 4: TÜV Rheinland – Certificates of misery

## 4.1. The interest of TÜV Rheinland in the Mayan Train

Just like SIEMENS, the German company TÜV Rheinland also expressed its interest as early as 2018 in the Mayan Train Project<sup>98</sup> and had offered to participate already before more concrete plans or studies became available, for example on the environmental problems. The TÜV Rheinland (*“Technical Inspection Service Rhineland”*) even itself emphasizes this paradoxical decision. Thus, in December 2018, several Mexican and Central American daily newspapers quoted the Business Development Manager of TÜV Rheinland Rail Mexico, Sandra Alamo: *“[Alamo] emphasized that the Mayan Train is a project for which the studies are presently at a very early stage as regards enabling it to participate, ‘though of course we will be there as soon as the quotations become available’.”*

Nevertheless, when it became known that deficiencies existed during the questionable consultations with the indigenous communities or during the environmental impact assessments (cf. Part 1: Train of Destruction) this did not cause TÜV Rheinland to retract its offer to participate in the project – quite the contrary.

It thus appears yet more astonishing that the TÜV in Mexico itself admits that it can carry out its own environmental impact assessments, and wishes to do so, e.g. on behalf of the UN.<sup>99</sup> The fact that this same company would now like to participate in an infrastructure project for which neither the environmental impact assessments nor the consultations with the indigenous population have been implemented to a sufficient extent – something that the UN itself emphasizes (cf. Part 1: Train of destruction) is extremely worrying, since the question arises as to what standard is applied by the TÜV to studies regarding environmental impacts undertaken elsewhere on behalf of the UN. On the company’s own website, TÜV Rheinland talks about its “responsibility for people and the environment”<sup>100</sup> – yet it would seem that this maxim is not taken quite literally in the case of the Mayan Train.

The quick offer made by the German company also seems less surprising on taking a look at its previous participations in large-scale projects in Mexico: Over the past few years, TÜV Rheinland has been tasked, for example, with the evaluation of major projects such as the Modutram Autotren in Zapopan (Jalisco) or the Independent Safety Assessment (ISA) for the Intercity Train from Mexico City to Toluca (Federal State of Mexico).<sup>101</sup>

And now also the Mayan Train.

The tasks for which TÜV Rheinland has made itself available in the Mayan Train Project seem to be similarly extensive to those performed by DB or SIEMENS. The Business Development Manager of TÜV Rheinland Rail Mexico, Sandra Alamo: *“[said] [in 2018], that they [the TÜV] could participate in everything, ranging from the preliminary concept of the project, the pre-feasibility, the feasibility itself, the development of materials and everything that might be necessary, to the inspection and execution of the work.”*<sup>102</sup> For the company, it would also be important here to monitor the time expenditure for the entire process. Here the company makes reference to the “Official Guidelines” of the German TÜV Rheinland in Mexico: These state that it would be necessary to supervise the entire project. *“This is because the work involved is very expensive, and it would be very sad if we were to be entrusted with the certification only at the end. Simply in order to be able to say that it can’t function in this way. Therefore, we will supervise it from the initial concept onwards.”* Alamo further explained: *“We are an independent company and must therefore retain the certification part, we cannot work together with other companies, and we must be on the side of the customer, in this case the Government.”*

These above-mentioned “guidelines” resulted in the offer to the Mexican Government: *“In our guidelines it was pointed out that we, as a socially responsible company, are obliged to participate in tenders for any kind of mass transport, above all for passengers.”*<sup>103</sup>

As regards the report about environmental destruction and risks, the impending water shortages or the threats made against human rights activists\*, who speak out against the project, TÜV Rheinland nevertheless appears to consistently overlook the stipulated “social responsibility” and, in 2021, is still vociferously expressing its wish to cooperate on the Mayan Train project.

This wish seems to be so great that a lawsuit arose between the German company and the responsible tourism authority, FONATUR:

On 26th January of this year, the FONATUR tourism authority excluded TÜV Rheinland from the ISA certification contract award and, instead, awarded the contract to a competitor consortium, composed of SGS de Mexico and the

Spanish Ardanuy Engineering.<sup>104</sup> TÜV Rheinland thereupon protested most vehemently against this decision, with the company emphasizing its “pioneering role” in Mexico and officially contesting FONATUR’s decision. On 11th February 2021 the agency granted the complaint and, since then, the German TÜV Rheinland continues to be able to participate. Just as in the case of SIEMENS, the final decision is pending and here, irrespective of the outcome, the official contesting of decisions made in favour of other companies clearly underlines the evident interest of both German companies. Furthermore, TÜV Rheinland even condescended to describe the temporary exclusion from the award procedure as “an infringement of the guarantee and of the human right to legality“, whereas actual human rights violations resulting from disregard for the right of co-determination of the indigenous and local population or the threatening and murdering of activists who have spoken out against the project evoked no comments whatsoever on the part of the TÜV, let alone causing it to reconsider its participation in the procedure.

## 42 TÜV worldwide: Brazil and Bangladesh

To present this farce in the context of human rights – and leaving the environmental disasters to one side for once – it is worth taking a look beyond Mexico: The “Technical Inspection Service” in fact not only scrutinizes technical processes or material risks, as is often assumed, but is also responsible internationally for the checking, for example, of working conditions in factories worldwide. For this, the German TÜV companies are organized mainly into three large holdings, including TÜV Süd (Technical Inspection Service South) as well as TÜV Rheinland. The individual TÜV companies operate independently of one another throughout the whole world. Thus, on its website, TÜV Rheinland states that it has been active on all continents since 2006, and that it makes the greater part of its profits outside of Germany and also that in Brazil, for example, it ranks among the largest technical service providers, with almost 2,000 employees.<sup>105</sup> Its sister company, TÜV Süd, was responsible for the inspection of the dam belonging to an iron ore mine in the region of the small Brazilian town of Brumadinho. The dam had been certified by TÜV Süd but was still unsafe. When it collapsed on 25th January 2019, a gigantic, poisonous avalanche of mud buried people, animals and houses beneath it. At least 259 people perished, and the unique section of rainforest, including a branch of the Amazon with a hitherto high diversity of species, will continue to be contaminated for decades, or even centuries, to come.<sup>106</sup>



*Figs 43, 44: Only one year before the catastrophe, TÜV Süd had certified the dam as “safe”.*





Fig. 45: (Collage) Only one year before the catastrophe, TÜV Süd had certified the dam as “safe”.

In the case of the dam in the State of Minas Gerais, two employees of the responsible subsidiary of TÜV Süd have since been arrested, yet in less well-known cases the inadequate measures of the TÜV do not carry any consequences:

In April 2013, in a textile factory in Bangladesh, close to the capital, Dhaka, more than 1,100 people died when one of the factory buildings collapsed. There was great outrage, and textile manufacturers the world over declared that drastic improvements would be made to the inhuman working conditions.<sup>107</sup> Since well before the spectacular accident, one possibility of ensuring the observance of appropriate working conditions is to provide a relevant certificate, such as those issued by the TÜV: The job of the TÜV Süd inspectors is to monitor the working conditions. These TÜV inspectors, however, do not take their responsibilities very conscientiously, and nor have they done so in the past, as is evidenced by some impressive investigative research by the German TV magazine “Monitor”:

*“Social Auditings were actually supposed to improve the employment situation in clothing factories. However, they often just embellish the miserable conditions. This is shown by a test report by TÜV Süd from the year 2010. The factory, in which 600 people work chiefly for the German and European markets, ultimately received good marks: for observing the statutory working hours, freedom of assembly, protection against discrimination, and for the working conditions. However, what the seamstresses experience each working day in this factory is completely different. They report that they work 14 hours or more each day, that they are insulted, sworn at and even hit. On being confronted with the statements made by the seamstresses\*, TÜV Süd writes that the “test reports from the years 2009 and 2010 would not allow any conclusions to be drawn regarding the current situation in the year 2013”. [...] One of the seamstresses\* has already been working since 2010 in the factory. She says that nothing has changed during these three years. Good marks for wretched working conditions – how can these come about? A TÜV inspector in Bangladesh enlightens us: “70 percent of the inspections are in most cases announced in advance. For a further 15 percent, the company at least receives advance notice of the time period in which the check will take place.” The inspector admits that abusive working conditions exist in textile factories. However, to establish this when checks are announced in advance is virtually impossible. “They have already all been alarmed by the time we arrive.” The inspection companies are familiar with the problem of announced checks. But that is how the clothes manufacturers want it. “We are obliged to honour the decisions of the customers”, according to TÜV Süd. If they wanted to remain credible, the TÜV could also reject such requests.”<sup>108</sup>*

But rejecting orders on the basis of questionable compliance with environmental and human rights does not seem to be part of the association’s guidelines, unlike finding skillful excuses why disasters of TÜV-certified projects would always be up to other parties involved:





Fig. 46 (collage) Textile factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh. A collapsed factory building, catastrophic working conditions, child labour, and factory fires. At the same time, the TÜV is expanding its activities in Bangladesh, and the collage also shows the opening of a new head office of TÜV Süd in Dhaka.

In the case of the previously mentioned collapse of Metro Line 12 in Mexico City (cf. Part 3: SIEMENS) TÜV Rheinland had supervised the repair work and confirmed that the operation of the line was safe. *“When questioned by the “STANDARD”, TÜV Rheinland declared that it actually had been incorporated into the renovation work, though only in respect of the tracks and the rolling stock, and not for questions regarding the condition of the bridge infrastructure.”*<sup>109</sup> Examinations showed, however, that the rails and the rolling stock were not compatible. The rails displayed extraordinary signs of wear and tear, which in turn caused damage to the trains: Six out of 30 complete trains were out of operation at that point in time. The fact that the collapse of the line and the death of dozens of people has meanwhile been proven to have been caused precisely by these rails, which had been checked by the TÜV (upon its own admission!), and by the rolling stock that had likewise been checked by the TÜV, does not seem to concern the Technical Inspectorate one little bit.

What does really concern the TÜV is the possibility that participation in the next Mexican mega-infrastructure project, the Mayan Train, might be cancelled and the promise of high profits lost. Here, TÜV Rheinland is currently employing legal proceedings in its struggle to ensure that it will still be able to act as “supervisor” and issue a certificate for the Train of Destruction. Such a certificate guarantees that railway system is safe in all its aspects and that all risks during the development of the project are anticipated and avoided. On considering the international activities of the TÜV hitherto, it would only be consistent for the train, an infringer of human rights and a destroyer of the environment, to be embellished with a seal of approval from the German inspectorate. Even in the event of cancellation, the interest of the TÜV up to now in its impact above all in Mexico is not something to be disregarded: Declarations of interest by German companies are always useful for defaming dissenting voices against such large-scale projects by labelling them as “opponents of progress” and for emphasizing the “modernity” of the Mayan Train.



## Part 5: “The Train of Hope” – Resistance



Fig. 47: “No pasarán” – “They shall not pass!”

### 5.1. Various forms of resistance against the Mayan Train

Both the indigenous and rural population and the Zapatistas who live on the territory that would be affected by the “Tren Maya” (Mayan Train), or that is already being affected by the project, are utilizing various forms of resistance against this and other large-scale projects. These forms of resistance include:

- Legal proceedings:

Among these legal proceedings, several appeals have been made to the National Human Rights Commission. For example, in 2020, members of the Ch’ol Maya people filed an injunction and a federal judge ordered a halt to the construction of the Mayan Train in the municipalities of Palenque, Salto de Agua and Ocosingo, Chiapas. The basis for the verdict was that to continue the work during the Covid-19 pandemic would endanger the population. Thereupon, the government reacted simply by stating that the work would not be stopped. In February 2021, the Fourth District Court, with seat in Yucatán, granted three suspensions against the Mayan Train, and the precautionary measures are the result of three legal actions brought against the approval of the environmental impact assessment for the project. These court verdicts ordered *“the provisional suspension of the activities in question, with the result that the construction of the Mayan Train in the Federal State of Yucatán (Sections 3 and 4) would not be continued until the granting of the final suspension of the activities in question”*, was the comment of the representatives of those organizations which had filed the injunctions, among them the Assembly of Defenders of the Múuch’ Xünbal Maya Territory and of the Chuun t’aan Maya community.<sup>110</sup>



- Petitions:

Thousands of signatures were collected for petitions, by means of which local residents expressed their rejection of the infrastructure project and demanded free and transparent referendums. At the beginning of 2019 human rights activists and the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas collected more than 6,000 signatures against the megaprojects and the Mayan Train. They presented these to the International Labour Organization and to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. More than 270,000 signatures had already been collected online on the “Salva la Selva” (Rainforest Rescue) website.<sup>111</sup>

- Street actions:

The resistance is also carried onto the streets, into the public space. Thus, for example, in June 2020 activists who disagreed with the construction of the Mayan Train demonstrated by means of a march that began at the Remate de Montejo, Mérida, Yucatán, where they demanded that the Federal Government cancel the project.<sup>112</sup> ***“If we are in favour of life, then we are necessarily against megaprojects that negatively influence life. In every meeting in the communities and on the Peninsula the position is one of rejection of the train. But they (the government, the large companies) are trying to turn the resistance into something invisible”***, says Ángel Sulub, a member of the U kúuchil k ch’íbalon community.<sup>113</sup>

## 52 Resistance against the motorway project

The local population is also resisting the motorway project that is being implemented along with the Mayan Train and is trying to prevent the construction of the motorway, for example by forest occupations. An exchange has already taken place between the resisting community in Bachajón and the activists in the Dannenröder Forest in Germany (“Danni”):<sup>114</sup> *“At the end of March we implemented an exchange between activists from the Dannenröder Forest and the activists in Bachajón, Chiapas, Mexico, involving the Klima- und Umwelt-AG (Climate and Environment Working Group) of the #NetzderRebellion (#Rebellion Network) and the Human Rights Centre Frayba Derechos Humanos. Like us, they too are fighting against the construction of a motorway and are suffering increasing repression because of this. From the Klimacamp (Climate Camp) in Danni, we are opposing the construction of the San Cristóbal-Palenque motorway, opposing the planned base of the Guardia Nacional (National Guard) in Chilón and opposing the arbitrary persecution of the activists by the state!”*



Fig. 48: “Danni and Bachajón, we stand side by side - for life and against the repression!”





Fig. 49: Banner: "The megaprojects are deadly! Down with the neoliberal projects! No to the Mayan Train!"



Fig. 50: Residents of Maxcanú obstruct the machines that have been brought to clear away the forest and their village for the Mayan Train.<sup>115</sup>



Samir, you haven't left, you are still here with us and we will continue to defend life, to fight against megaprojects, PIM, the Transismic Corridor, the Mayan Train, mines and hydroelectric dams... the government's only argument is money. But we, WE... prefer life.



Fig. 51: A demonstration in remembrance of Samir Flores. The journalist and environmental activist, defender of indigenous rights and land protection was a member of FDPTA (Peoples' Front for the Protection of Land and Water) and of the CIG, an organization affiliated to the Zapatistas. In February 2019 he was murdered by two bullets to the head in his house in Amilcingo, an indigenous village in Morelos, Mexico. Samir had devoted his life to the resistance against "modernization" projects run by the state and private enterprise that disregarded the rights of indigenous peoples.



Fig. 52: "No to the Mayan Train."  
Art and Resistance.



# Part 6: The German armaments industry and the Mayan Train

When describing the involvement of German companies in the Tren Maya (Mayan Train) project, it is important not to forget those participants who, at first sight, do not have anything to do with the infrastructure. The Mexican armed forces, who have the task of managing the entire infrastructure project and are going to obtain the profits [cf. Part 1] are a regular customer of European and, above all, German armaments companies. It is a worrying trend that the military is becoming an ever more important actor in megaprojects under AMLO's government:

*"In May of this year, AMLO signed an agreement that confirmed the active role of the army in police work up until the end of his term of office. Contrary to AMLO's promise to end the war on drugs, the army remains active in enforcing prohibition. On any one day in Mexico, an estimated 150,000 members of the armed forces are in operation throughout the whole country [...]. Under AMLO, the armed forces have assumed a paramount role in the country. Today, soldiers are building Mexico City's new airport, are laying tracks for a section of the Mayan Train, are setting up thousands of new banks, and are helping with social programmes and with the distribution of vaccines. The Marines, an elite unit with connections to the USA, now control the Mexican ports and the National Guard, together with the army, has responsibility for the surveillance of non-Mexican migrants as they make their way to the United States."*<sup>116</sup>

A major portion of the weapons (small firearms such as the USP, submachine guns such as the MP5, sniper rifles such as the MSG-90 or machine guns such as the MG3) are procured by the armed forces from the German manufacturers Heckler und Koch or SIG Sauer GmbH & Co. KG. During a brutal attack in the night of 26th September 2014 on the University of Ayotzinapa in the southern Federal State of Guerrero, involving a joint operation between police, military and criminal groups, six students were murdered and around forty injured, some of them seriously. A further 43 students are still "disappeared" as of today and have presumably also been murdered. The weapons used in this operation were G36 assault rifles that had been sold illegally to Mexico by Heckler und Koch. In a historic verdict, the corporation was ordered to pay a fine.

According to a study by the German charity "Brot für die Welt" ("Bread for the World"), ***"[t]he case clearly exposes the fact that Mexican security forces collaborate at all levels with organized crime and are responsible for thousands of human rights violations"***.<sup>117</sup>



Fig. 53: "We are missing 43!" – "They were alive when they took them from us, we want them back alive." – "No more disappearances!" "No more deaths!". The families held a 43-hour hunger strike on the Zócalo, the enormous main square in the heart of Mexico City.

Following the verdict against Heckler und Koch, the German Federal Government furthermore undertook, in the Coalition Agreement signed in the spring of 2018, to basically stop the export of small arms to so-called third countries (i.e. those which, like Mexico, belong neither to the EU nor to NATO).<sup>118</sup>

However, a quick look at the report submitted by the government itself on its export policy for conventional armaments during the first six months of 2020 (Military Equipment Export Report) indicates the following: In the first half alone of 2020 eleven armaments consignments to a value of more than 100,000 euros were approved for export to Mexico.<sup>119</sup>

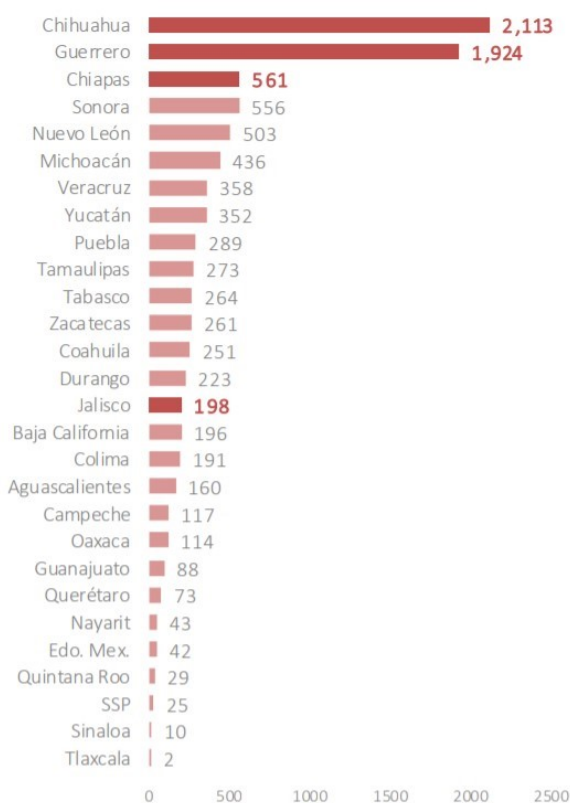
Once they have arrived in Mexico, a major proportion of the weapons originating from Germany are transported directly to the southern Federal States, in which the Mayan Train is to be built. Besides Guerrero, where the massacre of the students took place, Chiapas occupies third place among the Mexican Federal States with the largest number of German G-36 rifles in the possession of the Mexican Army.<sup>120</sup>

*Fig. 54: An extract from the Military Equipment Export Report of the German Federal Government. The exports to Mexico and Colombia have been highlighted subsequently by the editors.*

*Fig. 55: right: The distribution of German G36 assault rifles in the various Mexican Federal States.*

Land	Anzahl der Genehmigungen	Gesamtwert in Euro
Ceuta	1	600
Chile	16	10.175.034
China*	6	5.872.843 <sup>12</sup>
China (Hongkong)	1	330
Côte d'Ivoire	1	8.430
Ecuador	2	111.977
Georgien	3	53.623
Haiti	1	188.189
Indien	187	24.737.053
Indonesien	37	47.785.490
Irak*	2	1.982.720
Israel	91	533.044.265
Jordanien	5	1.187.062
Kamerun	2	377.810
Kasachstan	16	707.102
Katar	52	260.274.378
Kenia	1	355.593
Kirgisistan	10	540.840
Kolumbien	7	3.623.583
Kongo, Dem. Republik*	1	5.902
Korea, Republik	217	103.508.655
Kosovo	1	302
Kuwait	40	9.341.744
Libanon*	2	330.667
Malaysia	21	472.726
Mali	3	505.471
Marokko	9	10.478.999
Mauritius	8	133.446
Mexiko	11	138.644
Mongolei	8	132.043
Namibia	7	71.573
Nepal	1	71.988
Niger	1	85.532
Nigeria	3	1.473.294

*Fusiles G36 por entidad federativa según solicitud del 15 de marzo de 2011*





In the Federal State of Chiapas, in which the Zapatistas administer their autonomous regions, the Army, which will now be managing the Mayan Train, has been conducting a “low intensity” war against the self-administered indigenous communities for several years. Constant military presence, attacks by paramilitaries and harassment by armed soldiers are intended to cause intimidation and insecurity. It is doubly farcical that a project implemented with the assistance of DB Engineering & Consulting serves to promote militarization by an army that demonstrably infringes human rights with the aid of German weapons.

The German armaments concern Sig Sauer has also been involved in such business dealings with Mexico. In 2020 the German TV and radio channel SWR published research according to which this concern, and in particular its US subsidiary SIG Sauer USA Incorporated, received export licences for weapons from the US State Department, even though it would have been necessary to obtain licences from the German Federal Government. The consignments had a value of more than 200 million euros. The Federal Government refused to approve some of the consignments, but Sig Sauer supplied them nevertheless.<sup>121</sup>

#### By the way: Colombia

Armaments worth millions of euros have been supplied by Germany also to Colombia, where demonstrators are currently being murdered by police, military and groups of armed mercenaries using German weapons<sup>122</sup> (see the above figure taken from the Military Equipment Export Report, yellow highlighting). Just like in Mexico, exports of armaments into the country continue to be authorized, in spite of the proven collaboration between the army and organized crime and in spite of historic verdicts arising from illegal weapons deliveries by German companies.

This month, the verdict against Sig Sauer was issued, resulting in a fine of several millions for the illegal supply of 38,000 pistols.<sup>123</sup>

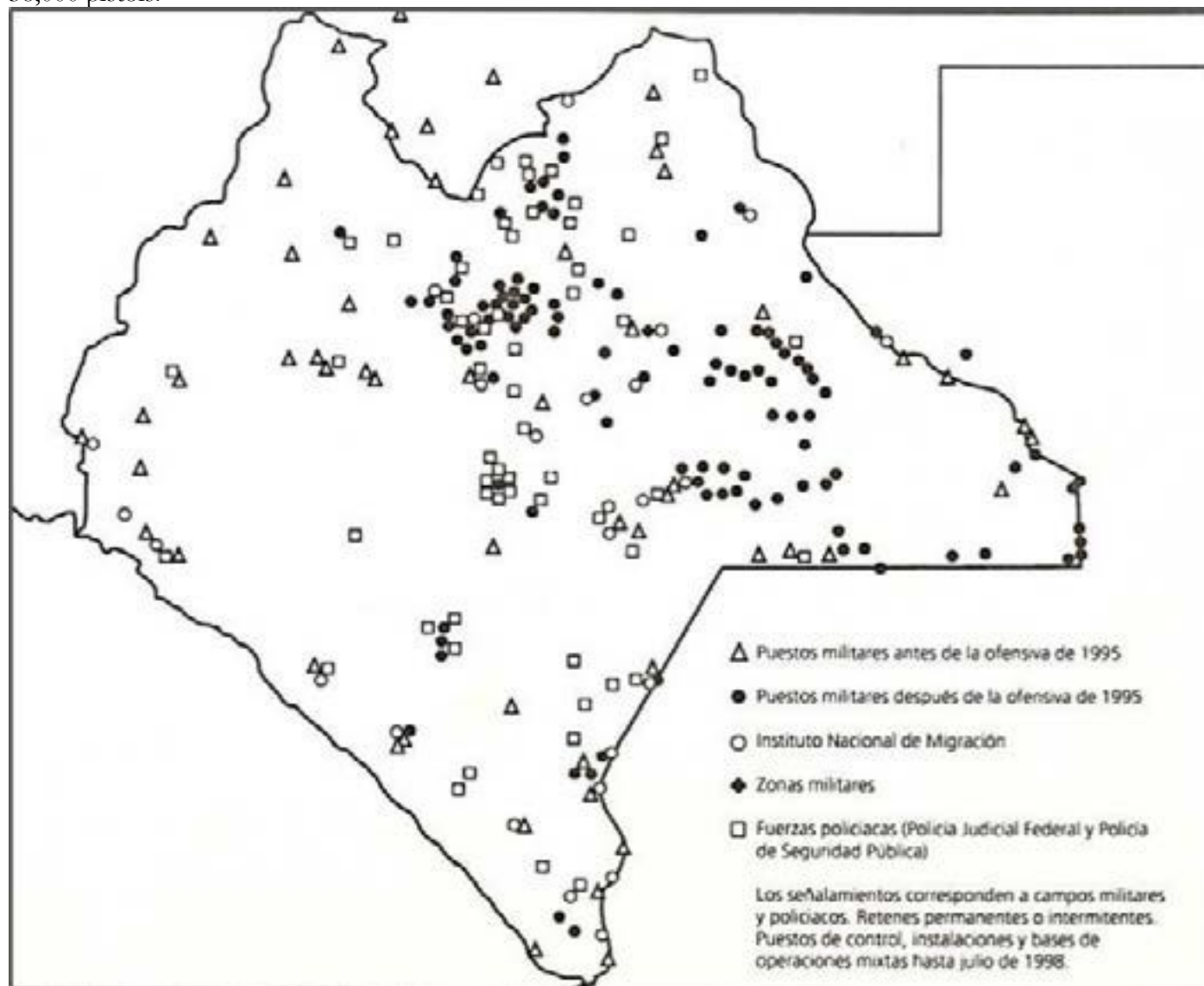


Fig. 56: The map shows military bases and zones in the Federal State of Chiapas, including in the immediate vicinity of the Zapatistas' areas. The triangles indicate the military bases prior to 1995, the black dots indicate those after 1995.

# Part 7: The ILO 169 Convention

The following is quoted from the factsheet of the ILO 169 Coordination Group, a coalition of civil society organizations, networks and experts who are requesting the ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention 169 by Germany.<sup>124</sup>

The complete factsheet is available under:

<https://www.ilo169.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ILO-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



“Between 350 and 440 million people worldwide belong to around 6,000 indigenous peoples. This represents four to five percent of the world’s population. Those who make up today’s indigenous peoples are in most cases the descendants of the first inhabitants of a region. They possess their own languages, religions, political and social institutions as well as specific culturally defined patterns of their way of life.

Everywhere in the world, indigenous peoples experience the consequences of the historical colonization and invasion of their territories and suffer discrimination due to their differing cultures, identities, and ways of life. They belong to those ethnic groups who are heavily disadvantaged politically, economically and socially and are also highly vulnerable. The assertion of their internationally recognized human rights is one of the greatest challenges of our time. **The Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the UN is the sole international legal system for the protection of indigenous rights.**

Indigenous peoples play a key role in the protection of biodiversity and of the world’s climate. In recent years, this role has been instrumental in making their problems and anxieties become a topic of high political relevance. In countries like Brazil, their territories currently represent the best possible protection against the destruction of the rainforests, as is clearly proven by a study made by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations<sup>125</sup>. The safeguarding of the land titles of indigenous peoples, and the directly related preservation of the rainforests, thus makes an active contribution to the protection of the global climate.

[The corresponding report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN are available in it’s entirety under: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2953en>]

The ILO Convention 169 of 1989 recognizes the distinct characteristics and ways of life of an indigenous people. The 44 articles in total are intended to enable indigenous peoples to develop in a way that takes into account their own particular priorities as indigenous peoples. At the heart of ILO Convention 169 are the consultation and participation procedures in Articles 6 and 7 to ensure participation and voice of indigenous peoples in projects that affect them. The rights established for indigenous peoples are not privileges or special rights; instead, they are universally applicable human rights adapted to the particular cultural and social situation of these peoples.“

On 15th April 2021– after several decades – the supposed breakthrough was achieved: *“The Federal German Parliament adopted [on 15.04.2021] the Law of Ratification of the Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, thereby fulfilling an agreement made by the governmental coalition. Here, the ILO 169 Coordination Group recognizes a decisive step towards strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples. The Convention guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain their cultural identity, to participate in government decisions and to have access to land and resources.”*

The participation of state-owned enterprises in the Mayan Train appears to contradict this: In the Mayan Train megaproject, as described in this investigation, the opinions and rights of the indigenous communities have been, and continue to be, systematically ignored and violated.

The involvement of Deutsche Bahn, as a state-owned company, thus runs contradictory to the policy of the German Government. If a company owned by the Federal Republic of Germany is involved in a project that is proven to be infringing indigenous rights, then the ratification of the convention becomes a farce, even if the convention is not retroactive.



However, if the infringements continue to occur after the convention has come into force – usually about one year following its adoption by the Federal German Parliament – then, in the estimation of the FDCL (Chile-Latin America Research and Documentation Centre), the German State as full owner of Deutsche Bahn is guilty of infringement of the convention. The contract of DB Consulting and Engineering initially runs until 2023. Should the already ratified ILO 169 Convention come into force by then, then the Federal Republic of Germany will be violating the convention right from the outset, a convention that it has already taken several decades to ratify.



Fig. 57 (upper); Fig. 58 (lower)

*The peaceful indigenous resistance of Santa María Cababón (Resistencia Pacífica Cababón, Guatemala) organized its own public referendum on the question: “Are you in agreement with the continued operation of the hydroelectric power station on the rivers Oxec and Cababón in Santa María Cababón?” since the government did not hold one. More than 26,000 people voted against the project, 12 were in favour, and five abstained.*



## Part 8: Interview with Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz of Campeche University



Fig. 59

### *Personal details:*

Dr Sergio Prieto Díaz is a lecturer at the Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR) in Campeche, Mexico, where he is involved in the project „Forced Migrations on Mexico’s Southern Border“. He has undergone a transdisciplinary education and attended, among others, the Universidad Autónoma and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain), the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico). He completed research stays at CIESAS in San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) and at the Department of Human Geography of the University of Granada (Spain). His personal research project is called „Southern Border of Mexico-Central America: Megaprojects, Migrations and (in) Mobilities“. Additionally, he is the founder of the Espacio de Estudios Migratorios in Argentina and currently belongs to the thematic networks STAND (South Training Action Network of Decoloniality), COMPA (Colectivo Migraciones para las Américas) and MIGRARE (Migraciones y Movilidades). He is also a member of the organising committees of the World Social Forum on Migrations and the Permanent Tribunal of the Conscience of Peoples in Movement. At ECOSUR, he is also a member of the scientific evaluation committee of various thematic publications on migration in the Americas. Among his main areas of interest „Undocumented Migration“, „Forced Migration“, „Megaprojects“, „Socio-cultural Influences on Mobility“, „Indigenous Peoples“, and „Territory and Resistance“, he has already produced several essays and works on the consequences of the Tren “Maya”.

We talked to Sergio via video call after his return from a trip through the southeast of Mexico, through which the infrastructure project will pass.

### **Editorial Research AG:**

Good morning Dr Prieto Díaz, thank you very much for this opportunity of exchange, and for your time! At the start, we would like to address the global dimension of the Tren Maya: In what international context must the project be understood? What role do geopolitical interests play?

### **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Nice to meet you! The question has to do with the analytical and contextual complexity of the project itself, the region where the project is being implemented, and the political and strategic context of both the project and the area in which it is located. It is necessary to understand the region’s role as a border area. So we have three basic elements, they are not the only ones, but we can conclude that it is about the construction of a territory with the basic characteristics of border spaces and the ensuing relationship to the process of human mobility, or better: human immobility.

To answer the question more precisely:



I assess the project in the context of the following aspects: the importance of the region as a border region and the increase in mega-projects in this region, of which the Tren Maya is only one example - although particularly paradoxical, it is not the only one. It is necessary to analyse this infrastructure project in its relation to other projects, to uncover their influence on processes of immobility. This term [processes of immobility] does not only refer to people who move - voluntarily or forced - but also to people who do not move - voluntarily or forced.

One could say that there is a historical relationship between the multiplication of megaprojects and the process of territorial reordering. The idea of megaprojects is to reconfigure territories according to the conditions of the global economic model. They attempt to occupy territories and subject them to irrational production processes, that are historically and, of course, right now, dominant.

These mega-projects are accompanied by at least two processes of population redistribution. On the one hand, the displacement of those who live in these areas and, on the other hand, the attraction of a different population group that does not live in these areas, but comes to work or invest, or in this case, comes to represent a certain model of „development“.

From this relationship, the current international context of the project, or to use the terms global and local, has precisely to do with Mexico's southern border. This border is a historically contested space - that is, the fact that it inhabits large amounts of natural resources, such as water, has made it a coveted territory in the economic system, especially in the international context of a strong crisis of neoliberalism.

Today, the territories at stake are not so much viewed on a national level, but rather in a strategic-geopolitical context in which the USA, but also Europe, are relevant factors. In this context, the historical, cultural, and economic connections are also important, especially regarding Spain as a colonialist country and former metropolis of the Latin American countries and, on the other hand, also regarding China as the current protagonist in the world economy.

This region in the south of Mexico functions as a kind of global laboratory, as far as the ability to realise these large-scale projects against the will of the local population is concerned. The projects are also used as tools of territorial control. It is not only about the extraction of resources, but more generally about the administration of territories as regions of mobility and thus the way in which these projects of territorial reorganisation influence the traditional functions of the borders.

The only traditional function of the border that still exists in the globalised present is the control of the transit of people. Let's say that the only loophole in the sovereignty of states lies in many of their borders - because capital and products move practically freely, but people are, so to speak, the only resource whose entry, exit or non-entry states can still control.

We must take into account that this region is one of the largest migration corridors in the world to the US. The described function of the border as a mean of controlling migration is therefore strategically important - but not only for Mexico, but above all for the United States of America.

This is a dynamic that is also evident in Europe.



*Fig. 60:  
A trek of  
migrants from  
Central  
America in  
souther Mexico*

## **Editorial Research AG:**

You are describing the strategic intention of the USA to move the border further south in the case of this region, aren't you? The US wants to control the mobility of people not only at its southern border with Mexico, but already between Mexico and Guatemala. Under Trump, many treaties with the Central American countries of the „northern triangle“, such as Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, in order to control the flow of caravans of migrants already exist. The past caravans have already been stopped at the borders of Guatemala and Honduras by extreme use of police force. In this context, another question: are there any changes in sight, especially regarding the start of Biden's presidency? Or will the same repressive „migration policy“ continue?

## **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

I would say that the changes in this sense concern the form rather than the substance. But even beyond the economic changes or the changes we can see in the presidency right now, there are dynamic variables of form, but not substance, in the border policies of US governments: the first is the idea of „racial migration“: „brown migration“ is presented as a threat to the American way of life. This is something that has changed its name throughout history - but this racist variable and the portrayal of migrants as a threat is something that has always been maintained.

At the same time, migration is being used as a fundamental resource, which seems kind of paradoxical at first, no? While being used a commodity in labour markets with poor working conditions and the worst wages etc., migrants are at the same time mostly seen as a danger. In retrospect, this goes back to the times of „classical“ slavery, in which the enslaved were seen as racially less valuable and dangerous.

In the end - and this is no different in Europe - there remains a structural need for migration. It is not true that they want to stop migration, it is not true that they want to improve the living conditions in the migrants' country of origin. The countries of origin and transit and the countries of destination - the Global South and the Global North - benefit from migration in different ways and through different mechanisms, and each country seeks to take advantage of these migratory movements.

In this sense, what we see in the southern border region is the process of how this idea of the border becomes a kind of multiple border: borders no longer serve as controls for the sovereignty of states but are rather associated with what is called public-private actions between government and business. This is basically a division of territories taking place: today's southern border is a space in which any group, company or person who has the economic capacity and political contacts can propose its own „development“. This is exactly what has happened and is happening very much in the processes of globalisation and gentrification, especially in Merida and Cancún, but through these projects like the Tren Maya, it will begin to happen in other regions of Mexico: Valladolid, Palenque... These are all complex and conflict-ridden places, but they are also very sought after by big capital.

So: in these mega-infrastructure projects, the respective economic actors buy their twelve, thirty or one hundred hectares, or whatever they can afford. They then have the pure freedom to do whatever they want with this land. The first thing they do is build walls. They build walls around these territories. It's not so much that the walls protect those who are inside, but to limit the mobility of those outside.

Imagine a railway protected by walls in a narrow corridor: This is basically not an infrastructure project, it's basically a wall. They call it an infrastructure project, they call it the „Maya train“, de facto it is a wall. All the projects that exist in the region are presented as sustainable, green, social - but there is the underlying paradigm of the „development model“ lying at the basis. This model is something that is repeated historically, not only in this region: It includes the asymmetrical relationship between powerful and dependent countries, it includes exploitation by the metropolis. It is a very broad context in which to understand what is happening in this region, not only with the Tren Maya, but also with other projects: They are related to the migration processes.

## **Redaktion Recherche AG:**

How do you assess the role of Germany - German companies, German capital - as global actors in the processes you just described?

## **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

The role of the big global players, the USA and China, and, because of the colonial connections, also the role of Spain, are always very much considered and emphasised in this context. But because of the historical connection to Spain and the great power of China and the USA, many other global players and their influence on the described megaprojects often remain invisible, including the role of Germany.

One should keep in mind that countries like Germany are very important - I am thinking for example of the „renewable energies“, the oil market and certainly also the financial sector - but nevertheless we can say that the relevance of the German investments, which can be a dangerous strategic factor, is less represented. The attention paid to Germany's role in Mexico is less and the knowledge we have about Germany's influence is also less.





*Fig. 61: „Mexico has become the US government’s gatekeeper,“ says Brot für die Welt Mexico officer. “Migrants are prevented from travelling north by the military. Serious human rights violations are the result.”<sup>426</sup>*



*Fig. 62: US Vice President Kamala Harris during her visit to Central America and Mexico in 2021: In Guatemala, she addressed „migrants“ and threatened, „Do not come!”*

We must remember that managing Mexico's southern border today also means managing the global market!

In the past, the Mexican government, in a nationalist discourse, used the concept of a national „development“. Curiously enough, today, with a government that considers itself rather left-wing, the door to foreign investment is being opened more than in other times - and the Tren Maya is a way to open up this region for foreign investment, much of it from Europe.

#### **Editorial Research AG:**

Are you saying the Tren Maya also opens up opportunities for other global industries and for global capital? Will the next phase of mega-projects like the Tren Maya make the expropriation and exploitation of the region by foreign actors possible?

#### **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Sure! One of the problems has always been to see the „Maya Train“ simply as a train - that is, to see only the railway line and the stations that will be built in the countryside and will be used for transport.

In the long run, the Tren Maya project goes far beyond that:

Firstly, as already mentioned, there is the process of privatisation, and we know that it is not the locals who will benefit from this privatisation, but the big players from outside:

Within the ambiguity of the project - there is no concrete data that can assure how many people will move, how much a ticket will cost, how often the train will run, exactly where the train will run, where the stations will be - all this is not certain - in this lack of clarity there is something beyond this lack of information, which is known because it is already happening: You can observe a process of land value speculation, starting from the moment the government said there was going to be a Tren Maya project.

Without any concrete information about the project, without any works, without anything, the value of the land, on and past which the train will hypothetically pass or where it will have an impact, has immediately doubled or tripled.

What begins at this moment is a process of population substitution.

[...]

The state will intervene in these lands, to include them in the Tren Maya project, and it will do so through investment funds [FIBRAS]: Basically, this means including the lands that are linked to the project in a kind of financial market, more precisely: all the lands affected by the Tren Maya project will be an object of speculation on the stock market, and the value of the lands will depend on the stock market curve of this project.

Imagine the following situation: A person uses two hectares of land and on one of them the railway is being built. How much the land is worth depends on the stock market price. This is a very recent example of financial speculation. And it is clear who will be the winners in this speculative competition: the big international players, not the small investors or the locals.

In a not too hypothetical horizon, the people could lose the use of the land, the de facto ownership of the land and, at the same time, lose the only economic income that allows them to use the land. But: this is all legal. Completely legal. And these are the aspects that go far beyond the actual „train“.

To answer the question: the Tren Maya represents a profound shift in many paradigms on the land question and [S. 48 Ende]

also in the collective experience within the villages - because there are those who are in favour of the project and those who are against - and this division is a tactic. The beneficiaries of the project do not need to convince everyone, only a few are enough, then the division and the ensuing conflict are already working for them.

These kinds of transformations are historically provable, they lead to the spread of the „modern“ Eurocentric model to other territories with other worldviews and other structures....

We go to the colony, we put in money and build a church, and we are already winning....

#### **Editorial Research AG:**

In your essay „Tren Maya: ¿cuarta transformación o continuismo estructural?“ [Fourth transformation or structural continuity] you write: „The construction of the Tren Maya seems to be a done deal. What the indigenous peoples decide, will not matter. Is this also the Fourth Transformation?“

There was no prior debate about the project and its impact. What do you think of the retrospective consultations the Mexican government has held in the meantime?



In your essay „Tren Maya: ¿cuarta transformación o continuismo estructural?“ [Fourth transformation or structural continuity] you write: „The construction of the Tren Maya seems to be a done deal. What the indigenous peoples decide, will not matter. Is this also the Fourth Transformation?“

There was no prior debate about the project and its impact. What do you think of the retrospective consultations the Mexican government has held in the meantime?

#### Dr Sergio Prieto Díaz:

Well, consultations have been held. But these are not the consultations that are required under international law and the conventions that Mexico has ratified. There are clear guidelines from the ILO Convention 169 [See Part 6: The ILO 169 Convention] and there are also clear guidelines from other international and national institutions.

What has been done and is still being done here in Mexico is an „ad hoc“ consultation. Such an „ad hoc“ consultation is - in theory – supposed to follow the described ‚regulated‘ international mechanism [of the envisaged consultation], but to do so in practice in a way that in the end will not lead to a „NO“ to the Tren Maya.

Of course there was consultation, but there was not the consultation that should have been done. And yet the government can now calmly say, „Yes, consultations were held“, right? We know how they did in this in this ‚discourse‘ with the data: „70% of the ejidatarios were consulted“, they claim. Well, but 70% of the Ejidatarios (see below) do not include all the people who are affected. They do not include people who have limited [land] rights.

„The mayors were consulted“. - Well, but who elected them? They are not the traditional authorities. And even then, there are times when there are conflicts between the traditional authorities.

#### *Editor's comment:*

*In Mexico, an ejido refers to a form of land ownership characterised by communal ownership with individual use. The communal ejido is usually distributed in small parcels to community residents to cultivate the communal land and should remain undivided while it is neither sold nor inherited, but rather supposed to remain in collective ownership. In the Mexican Constitution of 1857, it was replaced by large private landholdings. In 1915, the Mexican Revolution called for its reintroduction, and in 1934 this demand was officially realised. In 1960, 24% of Mexico's cultivated land were ejidos. With the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), against which e. g. the Zapatistas revolted, the right of peasants to be distributed an ejido was removed from the constitution (Article 27), justified with the alleged „low productivity“ of these lands*

According to the official discourse, the government has complied with what it had to comply with - the consultations. But that is a very subjective view, isn't it? From whose point of view and how is ILO Convention 169 understood here? With a more holistic perspective, including the necessary historical justice? What has been done is rather just a practice how the retrospective legitimisation of a decision that has already been made can work. The Tren Maya decision was already made before the consultation. All that was needed was to find a way for the pueblos originarios [literally: original peoples] to not obstruct what was to be done anyway.



Fig. 63: „Consultation process Tren Maya“ - Rogelio Jiménez Pons, Director General of FONATUR and the Mexican President AMLO. During the consultations, over 90 percent voted in favor of building the train, but not even three percent of eligible voters cast their ballots or had the opportunity to do so.<sup>128</sup>

## **Editorial Research AG:**

I understand. And in this context, it becomes important again to look at the participation of German companies because Germany has also - after three decades - ratified the ILO-Convention 169. And DB Consulting and Engineering, which currently has an ongoing contract to participate in the Tren Maya project, is a state-owned company. In this context, the agreement also becomes a farce from the German side.

In light of that very agreement, we also find it interesting if you consider the importance of Spain with its colonial history (and present) in such megaprojects, but at the same time report that countries like Germany are often less closely scrutinized for this very reason. After all, Spanish companies are also beneficiaries of the contract for which DB Consulting and Engineering was awarded: This was done as part of a merger with two Spanish companies that are also state-owned, Renfe and Ineco. In contrast to what we are seeing here in Germany with DB's involvement, in Spain, where the agreement was ratified more than a decade ago, there is a lot of information about the involvement of Renfe and Ineco in the project, even by themselves and the responsible ministry of transport. DB will receive more than 60% of the sum agreed between the state of Mexico, or better: FONATUR, and the three companies, but hardly a word is said about the participation in Germany, it only got public after a parliamentary inquiry.

So we ask ourselves: Is Germany's silence perhaps related to the ratification of Convention 169, which was concluded only recently and under pressure from civil society and organizations?

## **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Yes - it could certainly have a lot to do with that. Or rather, here we also have to look at the relationship of the various states to their companies. How closely, or not, are the political interests coupled with the economic interests? I would like to see that by exerting pressure - in this case on the German government - Germany is made to force its companies to comply with international legislation. Especially when their actions have an impact on third countries, right?

I think that in this sense there should be a social action; that leads to a governmental response, to a serious control of companies in countries like Germany and the entire global North - although the relationships are of course manifold and the problems are complex, as it shows again and again, especially in the case of Spain: The amount of Spanish companies involved in megaprojects in Mexico is enormous, and sufficient control of the companies and their activities in Mexico has never been established. At the same time, the Tren Maya region is also a central place of Spanish capital; for example, the Riviera Maya is full of Spanish hotels.

Let us imagine that proper consultations and deliberations are now taking place there - let us imagine that the legitimacy of all these megaprojects, not only the Tren Maya, is once again - or let's say for the first time - questioned.

In the case of Germany, it might be even more possible to monitor compliance with laws and agreements and to try to enforce the international regulations, perhaps because of an awareness in the civilian population ... but I don't know - let's not forget, for example, in the case of Spain, that there are large groups of the population who will not recognize the connection of Spain with the 'conquest' and colonization and also the continuous current inequality. Perhaps it is important to raise even more awareness.

Finally, I think it is certainly possible through the institutions of the European Union to put pressure on certain national governments to comply with the promised regulations.

And that's where your research project becomes important and interesting, right? And this is also where the timing - during the Gira Zapatista - becomes more and more important. I'm talking about bringing the movements in Germany, Spain and other countries, not only, but also in this particular case, together. You have to put pressure on the foreign companies, on the banks that finance these companies...

It's incredibly important to connect with other resistances.

## **Editorial Research AG:**

Right! Tomorrow we will present the first results of our research to other activists from Germany, especially what we found out about German companies and their participation in the „infrastructure project“.

And speaking of legal issues: What is your opinion on the recent court decision to stop the Tren Maya construction in certain sections. Has anything changed since the verdict?<sup>130</sup>

## **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Well, if I remember correctly, there are now 12 or 15 preliminary injunctions that have already obtained a halt of the work. But these are not final judgements. Nevertheless, the verdicts are enormously important for one thing: They show that the entire process leading up to the construction work has been inadequate: because these many lawsuits are being filed by local people who are resisting the project. So what about the consultations that have been carried out? I thought the overwhelming majority was in favor of the project and the construction works....



The truth is: the overwhelming majority does not seem to agree.

We must also understand this project as a permanent conflict! The Tren Maya project is a conflict about territory, but also a conflict about legitimacy, about people's rights - it is a multiple conflict - and in this multiple conflict the fact of the judicial stop of the construction has led to a new argumentation by the construction companies, contracted by FONATUR: Now they say, „But nothing new is being built.“ I have already mentioned it: The idea of this train is not new. There are already several historic rail projects in the region that just haven't crystallized yet. They may have crystallized at some point, but they haven't been completed or are not functional anymore... On these ruins, the new project is being built and imagined. The official discourse is thus: „There is no reason to stop what we are doing, because what we are doing is not new. (...) We will more or less just change the tracks that are already there, we will complete what has already been done.“

So from here on it's a matter of interpretation, isn't it?

For some, with the statement „It's nothing new after all“ everything is said and everything is okay. But: if you look at what really happens, it quickly becomes clear that it's not just a matter of replacing rails, it's a matter of felling millions of trees, of land being accumulated, including land beyond the actual track - or, to put it in a nutshell: there are negative consequences of implementing the „old“ project that are new.

### **Redaktion Recherche AG:**

To talk about one of these negative consequences in more detail: The management of the project is being taken over by the military, without any intermediary governmental authorities.

We would like to ask you whether this indicates a - well, dangerous - independence of the armed forces?

Dr. Sergio Prieto Diaz:

Yes, of course. We have to keep in mind that, as I said, we are in a border area, or rather a geostrategic border area: geostrategically important because of the migration issue, because of the drug transport issue, because of the question of natural resources - it is a rich region. Impoverished, but rich.

And the completely usual consequence of such borders is the militarization of the region, isn't it?

This is not a place that is free of militarization. And it is a historical militarization: a little outside the Tren Maya, in Chiapas, is the Lacandon Rainforest, where a military conflict has occurred for the last twenty years and continues to occur. So it is a traditional zone of militarization.

Now this militarization continues in the Tren Maya project, precisely because of its capacity to adapt. That is to say: The way the project solves 'problems'.

[...]

The train consists of two sections, so to speak:

One that is attractive and touristy, and finally can be profitable. Basically, it is the one that goes from Campeche to Merida, Valladolid, Cancún, and part of the Riviera Maya - there, the distances are short, with many attractions and a lot of tourist movement.

Then there is another part which is in short: Ugly, long, slow and not very profitable. This is exactly the section that runs past the border with Guatemala and Belize. And this is exactly the part where there have been no or very bad offers from foreign companies to build or operate the line. No surprise, really. But since there were no bids, it was said, „We want to build a train here so badly, but there is no one to build it, so it's better if the army does it“. Problem solved.

[Whereas the other sections are also to be largely managed by the military, I'm talking in this current example of the military being additionally responsible for construction].

Problem solved in questions of construction, but also: problem solved in this dynamic of militarization of the border. What they end up doing is finding a way to justify that militarization.

This has been done in different ways: there is another aspect in this sense, for example, the program Sembrando Vida [literally: „Sowing Life“]. I will briefly touch on this to show a somewhat broader overview of the context of the Tren Maya:

The Sembrando Vida program is officially a public policy measure. This is different from the Tren Maya, which is an investment project. The Sembrando Vida program is intended to reforest trees and pay some basic income to the people who own the reforested Land. The official discourse then says, „People don't have to migrate, there is no reason to leave.“ It's even broader than that: Sembrando Vida is being proposed by the Mexican government for El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala as well.

In fact, the initiative comes from the United States, in Central America and especially in Mexico. Officially, one million hectares of land are to be reforested. It would be the largest reforestation plan in the world.

But how exactly is such a huge area to be reforested? To reforest, they have to plant hundreds of thousands of trees. They need tree nurseries, don't they? So what happens? The people in the affected communities themselves, of course, are not allowed to have tree nurseries. That task is given to the military.

Why?

Well, all you have to do is look at the map and see where the „nurseries“ - the military - are located on the map: The military nurseries are mainly found in the middle of the Lacandon Jungle, around all the caracoles.<sup>131</sup>

Editor's comment:

The „caracoles“ are the autonomous administrative centers of the Zapatistas, against whom war has been waged in the region for decades - currently a „low intensity“ armed conflict.

The „nurseries“ are strategically located in this conflict zone, but: with a green mandate.

Sorry for the digression, but it's all part of that logic:

There is a de facto power, which is the military. And this power is very important in this country, is very important in Mexico. And this de facto power has to be satisfied. „How do we achieve that?“ „How do we keep the military happy?“. By giving them prerogatives that allow them to maintain their power: By giving them public works, by giving them control of territories, and, of course, by treaties in that sense, treaties that surpass the purely military ones. We see here a debate, not between the state and the market economy, but in this case between the state, the market economy and the military.

#### **Editorial Research AG:**

How shocking that they are now also painting militarization green and giving it an „environmental protection“ image....

#### **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

And that makes this Sembrando Vida program extremely interesting! People don't talk as much about this project as they do about the Tren Maya.... But it is located practically in the entire southern region of the country, but also in the vast areas of the center of the country. Because of its function in the context of migration, it is also a geostrategic military project, but the discourse is planting trees, even more cynically, „sowing life.“

#### **Editorial Research AG:**

Highlighting your emphasis that the „Maya Train“ is much more than a train, we want to conclude by talking about the resistance against the project. What resistance strategies are possible, how are local communities on the ground resisting against the project? And what role do the Zapatistas play in this?

Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:

From the first moment, the Zapatista support networks and media have been present in the resistance to the project beyond the Lacandona [rainforest] and Chiapas. The Zapatista committees have been present in the efforts to articulate the resistance here on the ground.

We have to think of the emphasis that the project carries in its very name, the „Mayan Train.“ This is not an innocent name. The name markets a concept and an identity that is still very much alive.

This is about historical processes of resistance in the Yucatán Peninsula that give the resistance today a premonition of what they can achieve. It wasn't that long ago that there was a caste war in which the Mayan peoples rose up in resistance to exploitation on the fincas and haciendas, and against the train that was already planned and that first brought them to these fincas - I mean: the historical train tracks in the region mark the traces of the resistances of the Maya. The earlier trains only stayed as incomplete as they did because the Mayans said: this far and no further. What is generating more and more resistance in general and also on the ground is the long time that the project has already been thought and talked about, and the long period of time over which the implementation will take place. Because right now it becomes more and more apparent what serious effects the project will have. In the beginning, more people were in favor of it, because what should be so bad about a train But the more time passes, the more negative effects are recognized.





*Fig. 64: Only in connection with other megaprojects - this map shows the existing and planned train projects - the significance of the Tren Maya as a „migration barrier“ becomes apparent.*



*Fig. 65: Mexican President AMLO and Nayib Bukele, the president of El Salvador, at an event on the expansion of the „Sembrando Vida“ program. Once again, the event was attended by high-ranking Mexican military officials.*

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It is not a new project. The dream of colonizing and neoliberalizing this region is old and will continue to exist in the future. In the end, this Tren Maya project may or may not become a reality, in which case it will have a successor that we must also watch out for - because as I said, these projects are the dreams of imperialism. The mega-projects currently being planned are very far-reaching. These projects that are being built here in the region today can be linked to historical projects.

They are new attempts, but they are based on old and yet dynamic logics. And the train is just a good dynamizer; a good attention factor on how to look at these regions, not only in Mexico, but in many places in the world: these attempts have stopped in the discourses of green development and clean energy. And all these are also elements of a new wave that triggers migration processes.

Obviously, if we continue with this logic, there won't be any places left in the world that we can exploit. And we will then certainly experience more and more restrictions and limitations on mobility, if we do not prove to be functional within this system....

## **Editorial Research AG:**

There is a need for resistance in Europe as well. We have already talked about the ILO 169 agreement. And international resistance is important, not only between Mexico and Germany. The resistance, for example, between Spain and Germany also needs to unite in this case, just as the Spanish and German groups united to win the commission to participate in the Tren Maya. And in relation to our research and this text, to which you have contributed a lot: That it does not remain a theory, that actions follow!

### **Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Sure - and in that sense, let's deepen our communication and connect with other organizations in the resistance. And basically, we see exactly the same problems in other countries in Latin America and everywhere: in Colombia, Brazil... And as you just said: we need a way to give a practice to the discourse - because even if there is a discourse against neoliberalism, if there is a discourse about human rights and history, those are first of all dialectical struggles, aren't they? Or better: a lot of things are already quite practical, of course: the fact that you can take the laws that have been ratified and are on paper into your hands. They are there, they exist, but now they have to be enforced! And that's complicated because: Companies and governments are in favor of projects like the Tren Maya, especially here. But with international pressure, it is possible that at least the already ratified Conventions are adhered to.



## Editorial Research AG:

Dr. Díaz, thank you very much for the interview! What would you like to say personally in conclusion?

**Dr. Sergio Prieto Díaz:**

Sure, and in that sense: Let's stay in contact and exchange!

And now that you ask: I was thinking about what you said to me at the very beginning: Let's talk about the „train of Death“, „sobre el tren de la muerte.“

I thought about this name in the last hour of our conversation, but it doesn't convince me. I think that the logic of capitalism, the logic of neoliberalism, of the new, „green“ neoliberalism that this train embodies, is not death. That means, yes, death is the final result of all this exploitation that is taking place and I understand your point. But all these megaprojects are not projects that aim to kill, per se, but to profit from a state of death in life.

What matters is not the killing. What matters is that people live – in fact on the edge of survival. It is about exploiting as much as possible, but: without killing. Of course, that brings death in the end. [...]

Underneath all this rhetoric of sustainable energy, „green“ capitalism, i.e. „development“ – we do already know what constitutes the „surname“ [apellido] of this „development“: inequality, exclusion, eviction, poverty - and of course: in the end, death.

„Sustainable“ development, in fact, is about how to do just that „sustainably“: it is about maintaining the conditions of inequality and exploitation, making them „sustainable.“ That is the logic. The logic is not that the Project ends lives. - It is simply about commercializing life. Life can be turned into a resource.

Life as a resource. No longer as a right, no longer as a biological property, but simply as a resource - and I understand that this dynamic ultimately leads to death, that's undeniable. [...]

What are we talking about when we talk about „development“? These projects like the Tren Maya - and the Tren Maya is certainly one of the first to take up this new discourse, this new dialectic of not being focused on a classical idea of development- of development as industrialization, development as extraction of natural and human resources. They demonstrate this idea of tourist development, of sustainable or green development - but: only dialectically, because in practice it remains the same, it remains an exploitation of people and nature.

This can be seen concretely in the example of the mentioned walls that have occupied us today. This Sembrando Vida project, which is presented as reforestation, the „Maya train“, which is presented as a tourist train - this is the real wall, also from Trump [or now from Biden].

Today, these mega-projects are the walls.

One last sentence: we can give the project thousands of names, they will all be closer to the truth than the name „Maya Train.“

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## LEARNING TO DREAM WE WILL LEARN TO FIGHT

Daydreaming walking asleep, with the wind singing in our ears, with the tide our spirit is dancing, our spirit illuminated the pathless path raising our voice with guitars, caracoles and drums, demanding respect, raising our voices for our rights, **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION** accompanying our grandmothers and grandfathers in this fight, fight for mother earth for the defense of the territory where we were born, where we live, where we demand respect for life, respect for our food, our corn, fight for our boys and girls for this present, where we say:

**ENOUGH** with so many concepts of nationalism because here we are all sons and daughters of the earth, no one is a foreigner and here we are willing to defend ourselves together, in community, as ants do in defense of life. Don't stop, keep going. No matter where you are from, this is our fight at the entrance and exit, the fight belongs to everyone. The State and the authorities have the obligation to protect and defend the rights of the inhabitants of their nation. These are guaranteed by the Constitution. The basic law of each republic must guarantee the instruments and mechanisms of control, which must be developed through specific legislation to make the exercise of these rights effective.

It is absolutely necessary to reaffirm respect for human rights, it is a call to all human rights attorneys to fulfill their true function, effectively protecting the aforementioned rights.

**NATURE AND INTEGRATION** Connecting again with the great family that we are, thus moving away from that divisive thought of patriarchy or nationalism, the concepts of reality, modernity, transformation or evolution. We promptly recognize our position, our mission, and purpose of being here on planet earth and it is to **PROTECT LIFE**. Recognizing the laws of **MOTHER NATURE** for a better **TOMORROW** for our sons and daughters, for respect of our Dignity, integrity, we know that there are laws, agreements, treaties, provisions and recommendations for the defense and dissemination, promotion and enforcement of our fundamental rights . Respect for our way of life, way of thinking and our practices of a geopolitical spiritual worldview and peaceful co-existence, that is why we are Invincible, like our ancestors before your invisible eyes, for your tangible senses, for your interests of supposed unintelligible industrial technological development.

**THE POWER OF A TRUE HUMAN HUG WILL SET US FREE, IN THE TRUE UNION OF OUR WORDS IS THE FORCE THAT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD GOOD HEALTH TO FIGHT, FREEDOM TO ORGANIZE, FIGHT TO THE END!**

Artwork y text: **APORTE MOVIMIENTO RAIZ**

Reevolcion Artisitica Integral de la Zona by xaman~kid, guatemala 2021



Latin America is one of the most dangerous regions for human rights activists. A strategy to protect one self, is to make their struggles for justice visible to the global community. This also works, because especially European companies and governments have to pay attention to their image.

A strategy in solidarity by European activists must therefore consist in watching closely and opposing, when our governments and companies are partly responsible for human rights violations and environmental destruction.

**Knowledge makes us responsible.**

*„Human rights defenders, who advocate for environmental aspects and human rights of indigenous population groups expressed concerns regarding the megaproject Tren Maya. The president responded to their objections by accusing them of being ‘false environmentalists’. Six UN special rapporteurs, in a joint letter to the government, raised a number of concerns about the Tren Maya, including indigenous peoples’ rights to their land and health, and possible environmental impacts.“*

**Amnesty International**

*„The indigenous consultation process on the mayan train did not meet all international human rights standards.“*

**UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mexico**

*„Moreover, voting [the consultation process] is often conducted in the context of threats, criminalization and harassment, which undermines its free character.“*

**UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

*“No more permits for extractivist companies that contaminate the environment and biodiversity and affect the health of the mayan community.”*

**Viridiana Lázaro Lembrino, Greenpeace**