Dear Friends and Colleagues:

On Sunday the Oaxacan Zocalo (main square) appeared tranquil without the PFP (Federal Preventive Police). A year ago, on a Sunday afternoon there before Christmas, one would have experienced large crowds of people, locals and tourists alike, music and a general atmosphere of holiday merriment. But this past Sunday, it was quieter than usual.

Different colored paint patches now cover the graffiti that once was the signature of the political struggle of this Mexican state. Like an abstract painting, all around the downtown area, the fresh coats of paint are the reminders that this city is the battleground of a popular movement to overthrow the repressive Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO).

On the surface, the intervention of the federal government seems to have stopped the bleeding that since June 14, 2006, has left an estimated 14 dead, thousands injured and hundreds arrested. Any outsider, who has not lived the last year in Oaxaca and is unfamiliar with the popular uprising, could now think that nothing has happened or is happening here.

The hundreds of arrests a few weeks ago—after a violent confrontation between the PFP and the radical groups affiliated with APPO (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), including one of its leaders, Flavio Sosa—may have left the “movement” paralyzed or decapitated.

After such tremendous repression, people might, understandably, no longer be willing to risk arrest or imprisonment in an out-of-state high-security facility where people may linger indefinitely without being seen or heard.

Is the “movement” dead, or simply regrouping? At this moment, that is the biggest question. If I had to guess, my answer would be the latter. With the governor still in power, there could be a New Year’s response to the conflict. It is very clear that violence will not help the cause. A peaceful popular movement can have a significant effect locally and worldwide support.

But there is also the chance that this is the beginning of an armed urban guerrilla movement never seen before in Oaxaca but with precedence in Chiapas.

Whatever the direction the people of Oaxaca choose to take, these recent quiet moments are to be enjoyed while we wait for the answer to the big question. Today, at the Plazuela del Carmen Alto a few blocks from the Zocalo, amid the present calm, the collective “Women Without Fear” presented an artistic cultural event organized by the famous Mexican actress, Ofelia Medina. Here are some of the pictures of that event.

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