

Mexican president apologizes to Indigenous for Spanish conquest

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Workers build a replica of the Aztec Templo Mayor, with an image of the pre-Columbian God Quetzalcoatl adorning the surrounding buildings, at Mexico City's main square the Zocalo, August 9, 2021 [File: Eduardo Verdugo/AP Photo]

Mexico City, August 13 (RHC)-- Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has asked the country's Indigenous Mexica Peoples for forgiveness for the abuses inflicted on them during the bloody 1521 Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire.

Lopez Obrador on Friday spoke in front of a large replica temple built to commemorate 500 years since the fall of the ancient Aztec capital Tenochtitlan to Hernan Cortes, the leader of the invading Spanish forces and the armies of his Indigenous allies.

Cortes and his allies defeated the Aztec leaders and the Mexica people who lived in Tenochtitlan, which later became Mexico City. They then looted and razed the city, ushering in three centuries of Spanish domination.

"Today we remember the fall of the great Tenochtitlan and we apologize to the victims of the catastrophe caused by the Spanish military occupation of Mesoamerica and the territory of the current Mexican Republic," Lopez Obrador said.

Lopez Obrador has said the Spanish monarchy and Roman Catholic Church should formally apologise for the atrocities committed during the conquest. The leftist president on Friday repeated previous criticisms that colonialists narrated history at their convenience. "The conquest and colonisation are signs of backwardness, not of civilisation, less of justice," he said.

Lopez Obrador has repeatedly blamed colonial-era abuses when setting out the origins of inequality and corruption in Mexico. Surveys show many Mexicans consider themselves to be of mestizo heritage, a mixture of European and indigenous roots.

Areas with high concentrations of Indigenous people tend to be more impoverished, and thus closer to the electoral base of Lopez Obrador, who has pledged to put Mexico's poor first.

As the anniversary approached, Lopez Obrador stepped up criticism of Spain and other European countries, including Austria, whose former ruling family, the Habsburgs, also sat at the head of a French-imposed Mexican Empire in the 1860s.

Last year, he pressured a Vienna museum to lend Mexico a bejewelled feather headdress, considered one of the most important pre-Hispanic artefacts. The headdress is said to have been worn by Aztec emperor Moctezuma before he was toppled by Cortes. Despite a visit by Lopez Obrador's wife Beatriz Gutierrez to the Austrian capital, the Mexican request was rebuffed.

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