Mayan cosmology believes history develops in a succession of cycles every twenty years. In 1974, two important events took place. First, the commemoration of the birth of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, first bishop of Chiapas, five centuries ago. He was expelled from Chiapas by a crowd of outraged Spaniards. His only sin was to consider Indians were human beings.

The other event was the First Indigenous National Congress. Someone was asked to organize it and he put one condition: to invite only Indigenous authorities democratically elected by their communities. Revealing were the words of a Tzeltal who said: We Indigenous peoples have no human rights, where is the freedom Fray Bartolomé left to us? Unfortunately he is dead and we do not expect another to come.

The man who made this congress possible is here with us. During decades, Bishop Samuel Ruiz walked beside Indians and became the new Fray Bartolomé. Father or “Tatic” Samuel, as Mayan Indians call him, visited remote communities and listened to the poorest among the poor and comforted their pain, but never allowed pain or fear paralyse him. Tatic Samuel did not convert Indians, he was rather converted into aboriginality. Through the Church he preached a new Indian theology where Indians are humans and have rights.

The first time I went to Chiapas, I saw descendants of Spaniards insult Indians because they dared walk on the sidewalks. I heard them saying Indians were dirty, poor, stupid; being myself an Indian woman I felt insulted too. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, I learned there was one place where Indigenous merchants felt secure: that was the cathedral’s atrium because Tatic Samuel was there. I am not a believer but I thanked God Tatic Samuel was there.
The Mayan cycle of twenty years opened again in 1994, when the Zapatista uprising started. For all who knew Bishop Ruiz's dedication to Indian causes, it was not a surprise that the Zapatistas chose him as chief mediator for peace negotiations. Since then, Tatic Samuel has been blessed, threatened, ambushed, revered, criticized and called “red bishop”. His sin has been, as Fray Bartolomé's, to believe Indians are human and have rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen it is my great pleasure to present to you Bishop, Tatic Samuel Ruiz García!