

Red alert!

GMO avalanche in Mexico



Maize sprayed with herbicides in Chiapas, Mexico
(Photo: David Lauer)

The agribusiness transnationals are bearing down on Latin America with a force recalling their initial assault under the banner of the “green revolution” in the 1960s, or the first incursion of genetically engineered (GE) organisms (also known as GMOs or genetically modified organisms) in the 1990s. *From one end of the continent to the other, and under different guises, the GMO invasion is threatening the livelihoods and the health of millions of peasants, first peoples, and consumers. Nearly every country in the region is in the sights of the agribusiness transnationals, the most recent example being Paraguay, where a parliamentary coup d'état took as one of its goals that of gaining approval for GE maize – and the de facto government is now preparing to grant that approval. In Argentina, Monsanto wants to build the largest GE maize processing plant in Latin America; the government is set to amend the Seeds Act to adapt it to that company's needs. In the Andean region, there are worrisome attempts to overturn the bans on GMOs in Bolivia and Ecuador using bogus arguments. In Costa Rica, too, the Biosafety Commission intends to approve a GE maize variety.*

It is no accident that in nearly every case it is maize, our maize, that is at stake. Nor is it an accident that Mexico finds itself the focal point for one of the most brutal attacks.



GRAIN is a small international non-profit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. GRAIN produces several reports each year. They are substantial research documents, providing indepth background information and analysis on a give topic.

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GRAIN

Girona 25 pral., 08010 Barcelona, Spain

Tel: +34 93 301 1381, Fax: +34 93 301 1627

Email: grain@grain.org

www.grain.org



Here comes the avalanche.

It is possible that before Felipe Calderón's term in office is out, or as one of the very first acts of incoming president Enrique Peña Nieto, commercial planting of GE maize will be allowed on over 2 million hectares in Mexico, beginning in the states of Sinaloa and Tamaulipas. The ETC Group sounds the alarm in a recent report:

The first applications by transnational corporations Monsanto and Pioneer (a DuPont company) to plant GE maize on a commercial scale in Mexico have now been filed. The transnationals want to plant 1.4 million hectares in Sinaloa and over 1 million hectares in Tamaulipas. This is a larger area than the entire state of Mexico. It is 17 times larger than Mexico City, and larger than the areas of Mexico City, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Colima, and Aguascalientes combined. It is also larger than dozens of countries, among them El Salvador, Kuwait, and Luxembourg.

On over half of this land they intend to use the same type of GE maize (carrying the Mon603 gene) which the Seralini study, published in France in October 2012, linked to cancer in rats.¹

If approved, this irrigated maize will be planted in the coming months and will spread throughout Mexico by the middle of next year. The resulting harvest, traveling via conventional distribution channels, will flood into Mexico City, Tijuana, Monterrey, Guadalajara, and other smaller cities, jeopardising the health of people who eat it in the form of tortillas, *atole* (a traditional maize drink), tamales, or *pozol* (fermented maize dough or the drink made from it), or in disguised form as a sweetener, emulsifier, stabiliser, or excipient used in processed foods.² The Centre for Studies for Change in Rural Mexico (Ceccam), in a pamphlet it has produced

1. Silvia Ribeiro (ETC Group), "Invasión", *La Jornada*, 3 November 2012. See also Gilles-Eric Seralini, et al., "Long term toxicity of a Roundup herbicide and a Roundup-tolerant genetically modified maize", *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, 50(11): 4221–31 (November 2012).

2. For more on this subject, see *Maíz transgénico: Ataque mortal a nuestra salud, a los pueblos, al campo*, a poster produced by the Movimiento Urbano Popular as supporting material for public awareness workshops in November 2012.



Traditional milpa in Edomex, Mexico.
(Photo: Prometeo Lucero)

to further resistance to this act of aggression, emphasises the same point:

Grain conglomerates like Cargill and processors like Maseca, Minsa, and ADM buy maize from farmers. Cargill sells grain maize to urban mills for production of the masa (hominy flour)³ that supplies the tortilla plants. Maseca and Minsa produce maize flour and sell it to the tortilla factories; some of these factories mix the flour with masa, while others (e.g., the ones supplying Wal-Mart) use flour only. Maseca and Minsa also make tortillas and sell maize flour retail. ADM distributes grain maize for the partly state-owned Diconsa chain. All these types of flour and masa will be made from or contaminated with GE maize, since it is impossible to keep it separate from non-GE maize.

To make matters worse, the Mexican government has continually opposed the labeling of genetically modified products. The upshot is that all of us will soon be eating genetically modified maize without knowing it.⁴

3. In Mexico, *masa* is the traditional way of processing maize. A small amount of slaked lime is added to the maize during cooking in a process known as nixtamalisation. This ensures maximum dietary availability of the nutrients in the grain.

4. Ceccam, "Alerta roja transgénica", supporting material for neighborhood awareness-raising workshops, October 2012.



Squash and other plants grown alongside traditional milpa.
(Photo: Prometeo Lucero)

Why a red alert?

Peasant and indigenous communities, residents of working-class barrios in all the major cities, and civil society organisations have declared a situation of dire emergency, a red alert, due to what they consider “a deliberate, well-rehearsed plan to contaminate our food supply.”⁵ With such a big area set to be planted to GE crops, we are clearly facing an avalanche of genetically modified maize that is bearing down on the whole country, whether it is the farmers who grow the maize or the many city dwellers who will have to eat it.

Another reason for calling a red alert has to do with the unavoidable environmental consequences. We are looking at a significant erosion of the immense diversity of native maize, and this right in its centre of origin (which in actual fact extends far beyond Mesoamerica). Government agencies have argued for the existence of “centres of origin and diversification of maize” in Mexico but this is a subterfuge: what they are saying is that there are also areas that are not “centres of origin”, which will serve as the initial point of entry, so that GMOs can ultimately colonise the entire country. Of course, Mexican communities and civil society organisations, backed by researchers and experts

5. Testimonials collected at training and awareness-raising workshops by the Movimiento Urbano Popular, October-November 2012.

from around the world, have publicly denounced this charade:

*Contamination is an issue that concerns the whole world, since maize is one of our most important food crops and Mexico is a reservoir of the maize genetic diversity on which we all depend. If the Mexican government goes ahead with the policy changes now under consideration, it will be taking on the tragic historical role of having allowed the destruction of a resource critical to the global future of food security. Furthermore, it will have imperiled the most precious legacy that the peasants and indigenous people of Mexico have received from their ancestors.*⁶

This letter was published in 2003, shortly after hundreds of communities and organisations took matters into their own hands and presented public proof that GE contamination of native maize varieties had already occurred in several Mexican states.

6. “Carta a la opinión pública nacional e internacional firmada por 302 organizaciones de la sociedad civil de todo el mundo”, November 2003, in *El maíz no es una cosa, es un centro de origen*, Colectivo por la Autonomía GRAIN, Centro de Análisis Social, Información y Formación Popular (Casifop), Editorial Itaca-CS-Fund, México, 2012, pp. 93-94.

Between March and May 2009, more than 762 organisations from 56 countries, plus literally thousands of alarmed individuals, signed an open letter to the people of Mexico, the Mexican government, the FAO, the Biodiversity Convention, and the UN Sustainable Development Commission rejecting the Mexican government's decision to terminate the moratorium on GE maize that had been in effect since late 1998-early 1999 and its clear intent to pave the way for the commercial planting that now threatens to be approved.

The signatories of this letter, along with the Red en Defensa del Maíz, a Mexican confederation of thousands of communities in 22 states of the Republic, stated:

Mexico is the centre of origin and diversity of maize. There are more than 59 recognised landraces and thousands of varieties, all of which will be unfailingly contaminated.

It is the indigenous peoples and peasants who have created and maintained this genetic storehouse of maize, one of the world's most important crops, on which human and animal diets depend.

Maize is the basic staple of the Mexican people. Nowhere else in the world is it eaten in such great quantities on a daily basis. Scientific studies have turned up cases of allergies and other human and animal health impacts at much lower rates of GE maize ingestion.⁷

At various workshops and meetings held in 2011, the communities reaffirmed that they would not permit the government to establish putative "centres of origin" that would leave other areas of Mexico open to a GE invasion. By that point, the Minister of the Environment, Juan Elvira, had already stated: "We think that at least 2 million hectares are suitable for biotech maize, where there will be no impact on our native maize varieties and their ancestors, the teosintes; where the science shows that these varieties will be completely safe." Within a day he had retracted this confident statement.⁸ Given the imminent planting of 2.4 million hectares of GE crops in Sinaloa and Tamaulipas alone, Minister Elvira's words ring even more hollow now, and the communities were quick to respond to him at that time:

7. "Contra el fin de la moratoria", open letter sponsored by Red en Defensa del Maíz, signed by organizations and academics, researchers and persons from around the world, March-May 2009; see *El maíz no es una cosa*, 179-82.

8. Greenpeace, 17 November 2011, online at www.greenpeace.org

The whole country of Mexico is the centre of origin of maize. In fact, we consider the whole of Mesoamerica and adjacent areas, ranging from the southern United States to northern South America, to be the centre of origin of this plant. And what is more, maize has never existed in isolation: it has always been closely associated with people. There is a larger community composed of human communities and communities of plants – maize together with the other crops, plants, and animals with which it has coexisted for millennia. The government will only classify an area as a centre of origin if it harbours archaeological traces of maize, but this is an insufficient and biased criterion. If the experts don't find anything, they say "it isn't there", as if maize were not omnipresent in the historical memory and the present-day diet of every region of Mexico.⁹

Indeed, an examination of this complex interaction of communities appears to confirm a close relationship between the biological and the social aspects of maize. According to maize historian Paul Weatherwax (as quoted by Arturo Warman, a researcher and later a public official, in his now legendary book on the expansion of maize around the world), "When contact was made between the New World and the Old, maize was being grown from 45 degrees north latitude, at the current site of Montreal, Canada, to 40 degrees south latitude, some thousand kilometers south of Santiago de Chile."¹⁰

Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, expressly recommended a return to the moratorium on field trials and on the commercial cultivation of GE maize in the report of his 2011 mission to Mexico.¹¹

Recently, the Unión de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad (UCCS), in conjunction with similar unions in other countries, called on the world scientific community to defend maize in its centre of origin. The invitation reads:

9. See "Los pueblos indígenas de México defendemos todo México como cuna del maíz", declaration of the Seed Festival of the Centro Ecológico la Primavera de Organizaciones Campesinas in conjunction with the Organización de Agricultores Biológicos, Tlacolula, Oaxaca, 27 November 2011, *Ojarasca* (monthly supplement to *La Jornada*), no. 176, 10 December 2011.

10. Arturo Warman, *Maize and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, c2003).

11. UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, A/HRC/19/59/Add. 2.*

Mexico is the centre of origin and diversification of maize and its wild relatives, with more than 59 landraces (native varieties) of maize distributed throughout the country.

These native varieties of maize represent a reservoir of genetic diversity that is critical to current and future crop improvement efforts designed to assist with climate change adaptation processes around the world. More than that, however, they are the way of life of millions of peasants in Mexico.

The available scientific evidence demonstrates that once transgenic maize is planted in any part of Mexico, it will be impossible to prevent the flow of transgenes into native varieties. This will not only compromise the viability of Mexican native maize but also affect the way of life of millions of people, including peasants, larger-scale farmers, and consumers.

In light of the foregoing, and given the prospect that the outgoing government intends to leave a legacy of forcing transgenic maize on our country, using a deregulation process that flies in the face of all the scientific evidence of risk, and in light of the many petitions submitted by domestic and international civil society, we call on you to sign on to this Declaration and Call to Action, which will be used by the *Unión de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad* as a tool to lobby domestic and international bodies.¹²

In short, this is a worldwide red alert because the world's agriculture and biodiversity are in danger. If this awe-inspiring plant, one of the four most important staples in the human diet, is allowed to be irreversibly contaminated with transgenes in its centre of origin, the result will be disaster for humanity's survival strategies. We are facing nothing less than a frontal attack on the people of the world – and, more particularly, on the food security and sovereignty of urban and rural populations. Never before has there been such a large-scale attack on



Traditional milpa grown on the hillside.
(Drawing: Rini Templeton)

the genetic makeup of a crop within its centre of origin, or on the lives of a population ingesting 115 kg of this crop per capita (as documented by Ana de Ita of Ceccam).¹³

What happened to the precautionary principle?

The red alert, then, has been generated by a general understanding on the part of Mexican community and civil society organisations that the planting of GE maize is “an attack on the basic subsistence and health of the Mexican population” that is “tantamount to genocide.”¹⁴ Many scientific experiments have pointed to the potentially serious risks associated with eating this maize; there are concerns about mutations, tumours, cancer, immune suppression, and other harmful effects yet to be identified. There is an eminently sensible idea known as the “precautionary principle”, according to which scientific applications of such doubtful safety should be held back from widespread implementation until their safety can be proven. Nowadays, the companies and governments pushing GE crops seem to be doing the opposite

12. Invitation to sign the declaration of the UCCS. www.unionccs.org; links to read and sign the document: <http://www.uccs.mx/doc/g/planting-gmo-maize> (English), http://www.uccs.mx/doc/g/planting-gmo-maize_es (Spanish).

13. Ana de Ita, “Fe de ratas”, *La Jornada*, 16 October 2012.

14. Testimonials collected at training and awareness-raising workshops and held by the *Movimiento Urbano Popular*.

– they are in a mad, irresponsible rush to roll them out around the world, with a criminal disregard for the consequences. In their minds, the exact opposite of the precautionary principle should apply: You are members of society and you have legitimate concerns about these crops? Then it is up to you to prove them harmful beyond a shadow of a doubt. Otherwise, we will steamroller them over you.

The problem of food

Ceccam is among the organisations that have been spearheading resistance to the transnationals' plot to inundate fields and cities with GE maize. Should the plot succeed, it will mean a total takeover of the farming sector in Sinaloa and Tamaulipas by governments and corporations – for the benefit of the corporations, lest there be any doubt. Ana de Ita writes:

Last September, Monsanto applied for the first two permits for commercial planting of 700,000 ha of GE maize in Sinaloa; within weeks, Pioneer Hi-Bred International had applied for three permits for 320,000 ha in Tamaulipas.

Usually in Sinaloa, 300,000 ha of irrigated maize are planted, but Monsanto applied for 700,000 for this fall-winter cycle. Next December, Monsanto intends to plant GE maize on all the irrigated areas in Sinaloa.

In Tamaulipas, Pioneer intends to double the area planted to maize.

Sinaloa and Tamaulipas farmers growing maize for market use hybrid seeds which they purchase year after year from transnationals like Monsanto, Pioneer, and Dow – the same companies producing and promoting GE seeds. If these companies decide to withdraw the hybrids and only sell GE, farmers will have no choice but to grow it. And if a farmer manages to grow non-GE, her crops will be contaminated by her neighbours', and at any rate her harvest will be mixed with GE crops during transportation and in the silos, elevators, and warehouses. As happened in the United States, it will be impossible to segregate GE from conventional maize, and the whole harvest will wind up contaminated.

Since Sinaloa maize makes its way into every village in the country, the threat extends to rural areas, where local landraces and varieties will be contaminated by outcrossing transgenes.¹⁵

15. Ibid.



Milpa tradicional en Malinaltepec, Guerrero, México
(Photo: Prometeo Lucero)

It is ironic that Sinaloa, for years a Mexican grain-growing powerhouse, was cut out of the supply chain this year, its production replaced by imports from the United States and South Africa in the hands of Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, and other transnationals, all with the approval of the Mexican government. The result was that Mexican commercial maize growers were driven to desperate economic straits and the food security of the Mexican people was compromised. This could have been avoided if the government had offered price supports for producers to compete with South Africa's price to the grain cartels. However, "the Ministry of Agriculture, which confuses food security and farm policy with business opportunities, argues that it doesn't have the money to help producers establish some sort of pledge scheme to bolster market prices, guarantee the sale of the national harvest, and build a technical reserve; on the contrary, it claims, supporting domestic farmers would lead to losses. It forgets that one function of the state is to regulate staples markets and support domestic production."¹⁶

And this is only one of several contradictions. Concurrent with this favoritism shown the grain cartels to the detriment of domestic production, and this intent to blanket Mexico with GMOs, a joint report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (ECLAC), the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) states that every year, more and more of the country's arable land is being taken out of maize production. Of the countries of the region, only Guatemala exceeds

16. Ana de Ita, "La seguridad alimentaria como negocio", *La Jornada*, 28 April 2012.



Mexico's rate of declining maize production – 5% in five years.¹⁷

Ultimately, to allow Monsanto, Pioneer, and Dow to “sow death” in the Mexican countryside with such a massive GE incursion, whether directly or by contract growing – and/or by “disappearing” everything except GE varieties, making the latter “the only game in town” – is to promote a brutal land grab, a supplanting of domestic non-GE production. It is to give ADM and Cargill speculative and monopolistic control over food distribution and marketing to the cities.

In case it is not obvious, it is not the farmers who have applied to introduce GE into Mexico: “the transnational purveyors of genetically modified crops are becoming the overt owners of Mexican agriculture. It is they who decide what is planted, when, where, at what price, with what risks, and for whom.”¹⁸

In response, peasant organisations, indigenous forums, and civil society networks have all begun to take a stand, staging *plantones* (long-term pickets and/or encampments) and producing press releases, declarations, and posters. In demanding that the government reject Monsanto's application, Olegario Carrillo

17. See Susana González, “México, segundo país en AL que más redujo área para cultivar maíz”, *La Jornada*, 11 November 2012.

18. Silvia Ribeiro, “Invasión.”

Meza, president of the Union of Autonomous Peasant Organisations (UNORCA), an affiliate of Via Campesina-North America, argued: “There is no technological, economic, or ethical reason for the approval of commercial planting of GE maize on no less than one million hectares in the states of Sinaloa and Tamaulipas. There is certainly no benefit to

the population or the majority of farmers; quite the contrary.” He added: “During the term of the outgoing president, the federal government, through the intermediary of the ministries of agriculture and environment, granted 162 permits for field trials of GE maize, for a total to date of 177 such permits.” He emphasised that the federal government is “obligated to restore the moratorium on all types of GE maize in the country.” Should the government approve the pending applications, “it would be a frontal attack on the right to food, since it would limit the opportunity for the population to acquire healthy, sufficient, high-quality food. Monsanto's and Pioneer's plans represent a threat to human health, biodiversity, culture, and national sovereignty.”¹⁹

An avalanche? Really?

Yes, really. It should be recalled that in the eleven years since 2001, the government not only did nothing to stop the contamination but downplayed the risk and, by its action or inaction, allowed contamination to happen. But communities in the central and southern parts of the country were able to keep GMOs out, and that is a credit to the painstaking efforts of communities to apply

19. Jair López Vega, “Campesinos demandan negar permisos para siembra de maíz transgénico”, *El Financiero*, 6 November 2012.

their own *de facto* ban on the entry of these organisms into their territories. The ban came into being as a matter of course and without the need for grand pronouncements. It remains in force to this day, due to the unshakable will and determination of the many citizens keeping watch over our rural areas. Their efforts have prevented GE contamination from spreading throughout Mexico, as has occurred in other countries. All this work by the Red en Defensa del Maíz (as mentioned, more than one thousand communities in 22 states of the country) definitely helped keep GMOs out of Mexico. But the country's peasants know full well that an incursion on this scale will irrevocably lead to the mass-scale GE contamination of crops throughout the country, and hence the entire Mexican food supply. So, "avalanche" is the right word to describe what the transnationals intend for us.

As stated on a poster now circulating in support of the resistance rising up in working-class neighborhoods around Mexico:

For more than eleven years, since GE maize contamination was discovered, hundreds of peasant communities and organisations, many of them indigenous, have been fighting the entry of GE maize into Mexico. They have been raising awareness, refining their seed exchange strategies, watching their crops closely, enacting community GMO-free zones, and rejecting seeds supplied through government programs. They understand that the fight is not just over one meal, or one plant, or one farm: it is a fight for land and, in essence, for material and political freedom.²⁰

20. See *Maíz transgénico: Ataque mortal*.



Mural in an outlying, semi-rural area of Magdalena Contreras, a district of Mexico City. (Photo: Prometeo Lucero)

During these years the Mexican government gradually brought in laws, regulations, and policies that were clearly designed to promote the entry of GMOs into the country. The government inundated indigenous and peasant communities with imported maize (with a high percentage of look-alike GE maize mixed in) through the 23,000 rural outlets of the quasi-state company Diconsa, causing localised contamination that did not succeed in spreading. Among those who have studied the process, there is clarity that this contamination was and is a conscious strategy on the part of politicians, government officials, and state-owned enterprises.²¹

Following this, elements in government began to spread the idea that Mexicans must learn to "coexist" with genetically modified organisms, and that no harm would come to anyone because of it. This led to the plenary of the Mexican Congress (representatives and senators voting together) enacting the Biosafety and Genetically Modified Organisms Act (LBOGM) and various related legislation, such as the Federal Seed Production, Certification, and Commerce Act, the regulations to both laws, and a whole set of policies designed essentially as a way of obstructing justice for the Mexican people.

Third, the government bet on public confusion as a way of supporting its aims. Contributing to this was

21. See *El maíz no es una cosa*.

Storage of imported maize,
Chiapas, Mexico.
(Photo: Jerónimo Palomares)



the gutting of the Special Protection Regime for Maize with the enactment of the LBOGM. The result was legal uncertainty around the question of whether there are such things as “centres of origin of maize” within Mexico and other areas that do not constitute such centres, or whether the entire country is a “centre of origin”, as a great many organisations, communities, collectives, researchers, and people of good will in general have been insisting.

That the whole Mesoamerican region, including all of Mexico, is a centre of origin of maize for the world, constitutes a pillar of the *de facto* moratorium operating from 1997 to 2009. This position is one that the Red en Defensa del Maíz continues to vigorously defend.

A number of agribusiness elements took advantage of the confusion to put in clandestine field trials in northern Mexico. The government, instead of enforcing the law then in force, declared an end to the moratorium on 6 March 2009. A new era began in which the relevant agencies, no longer bothered by moratoria and such hindrances, began issuing permits for fields trials in northern Mexico. In parallel, the government began making preparations to monitor communities for “uncertified” or “pirate” seeds – an alarming sign of how the biodiversity used by peasants and indigenous peoples is being criminalised with the pretext of protecting it.

At that point the discourse changed, with the government adopting a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, it arranged for the states to pass laws supposedly defending “native” maize from contamination through registration, certification, and monitoring of seeds,

producers, and the agricultural process; on the other, it delimited allegedly unique “centres of origin” in Mexico, thereby opening up the rest of the country for mass-scale industrial agriculture and GMOs.

Both strategies are designed to give state policy the appearance of clean hands. The government protests that its goal is to protect the country’s genetic heritage, the multicultural reality of the first peoples, and the diversity of maize, when in reality it is planning to clamp down on anything in agriculture that eludes the legal and constitutional framework put in place by a Mexican government in league with the transnationals.

For eleven years now, the communities who plant maize in complex systems like the *milpa* have been stressing that in order to defend maize, you have to plant it; that to keep seeds out of corporate hands, you have to continue to steward and exchange them; that the most elemental autonomy consists in growing one’s own food, and that this is the starting point for a comprehensive defense of land and culture.

The transnationals, for their part, want nothing more and nothing less than to crush independent food production. To achieve that they will have to destroy people’s ties to their means of subsistence, and that means eradicating the very idea that community, land, and people’s sovereignty are worth defending. Land and water grabbing is the essential first step towards changing the use of land, spreading monoculture, and rolling out authoritarian programs to support mechanised, agROTOXIN-intensive agriculture. The result will be to drive the rural population into the cities, vacating the countryside so that

the transnationals can extract minerals and biodiversity at will, prey on the forests, or speculate on international carbon exchanges.

Seeking to take control of the entire food chain from farm to fork, they have decided to force GMOs on the population. The worst thing is that this not only puts the future of agriculture in jeopardy – it threatens everyone’s survival. It is a sadistic attack on the great majority of city dwellers who do not produce their own food but are totally dependent on others to provide it. The transnationals are willing to run the risk of making the entire urban population of Mexico sick just so that they can wield total control over production, processing, and distribution.

The proposed approval of commercial GE crops, with distribution of the harvest to the cities, is the culmination of this process. Its purpose: to impose a *fait accompli* on society, making all further public debate on the matter pointless. We have only one option: to turn back the avalanche.²²

Turning back the avalanche

The Mexican people are not taking this attack lying down. Resistance is forming, made up of hundreds of organisations derived from the ranks of academia, rural communities, peasant associations, indigenous peoples, lawyers, urban neighbourhoods, students, and many other sectors. In fact, the resistance is now turning into generalised public anger. The people are demanding that the government abide by its own legal framework. They are networking, pooling information, creating forums in which to carry out consensus actions in the short, medium, and long term – workshops, meetings, conferences, legal proceedings, ethical systematisation exercises before people’s tribunals, demonstrations, leafletting, strikes, encampments, and more. It is an underestimated resistance, coming from so close to the grassroots that it barely appears on the maps of blinkered, corporation-friendly politicians. No matter: it will not allow such a grave threat to life itself to go unchallenged.

It is a peaceable but determined resistance movement, working for the subsistence of the Mexican people and indeed for the good of the whole continent. It stands in defence of seeds, knowledge, human health, the soil, and the environment; it stands for our survival and food

22. See the narrative of eleven years of campaigning in *El maíz no es una cosa*.

sovereignty. It stands against genocide, against the desecration and the devastation of maize – called *tlayolli*, *yok-ixim* or *kiximtik*, *niza*, *i-ku*, and by other names in a multitude of indigenous languages, each carrying the connotation of a critically important plant which must be stewarded and improved through the ages in order for a people to survive.

This resistance is taking root and finding expression: in the barrios, communities, and schools, in the grocery stores and eateries, the tortilla factories and mills, the cultural centres and the remotest villages. It has also found expression in a brief filed with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT), which will hear testimony in Mexico from October 2011 until 2014. A solidarity-oriented body with a venerable history (a successor to the Russell Tribunal), the PPT is helping to build consensus among the different sources of resistance to a whole range of corporate attacks on our society. The brief, calling for a ban on GMOs and for measures to protect food sovereignty and security, has already garnered support from thousands of communities and hundreds of organisations. It takes a comprehensive approach to the issues relating to defence of land, agriculture, independent food production, native seeds, and the urgent problem of urban food security.²³

It is not long before this resistance taking place in Mexico will join forces with the fights already underway in Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile. For all these movements are striving for the same goals: to keep out GMOs, to abolish seed certification laws, and to resist the imposition of agricultural models that give pride of place to the large corporations and the world industrial agrifood system while attempting to eliminate peasant agriculture in both its traditional and contemporary forms. In a word, all these movements are fighting for life itself. Food sovereignty is the most forthright step being taken by the people to elude dependency on those corporations that want to decide what we will eat and at what price. The movement also clearly articulates the ties binding city and country, as the Red en Defensa del Maíz en México explains:

23. See “Violencia contra el maíz, la soberanía alimentaria y los derechos y la autonomía de los pueblos”, brief filed with the Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos, Mexico chapter, 2012, online at www.tppmexico.org.

See also “Las razones del maíz” online at www.grain.org.



**Alto Balsas, Guerrero, Mexico.
(Drawing: Abraham Mauricio Salazar)**

The defence of maize in Mexico is predicated on respect for the self-determination and autonomy of indigenous and peasant communities and peoples.

We once again reject any field trials or commercial planting of genetically engineered organisms as well as any distribution, storage, marketing, or commercialisation of such organisms in any part of Mexico (or elsewhere in the world).

Food sovereignty will always be a matter of respect for the collective right to possess, save, and freely exchange native seeds without the imposition of any mechanism of state, federal, or corporate control (e.g., certification, inventories, seed banks, variety catalogues, patents, controlled designations, or plant breeders' rights).

Food sovereignty requires conditions allowing for the free and autonomous production of food at the local, regional, and national levels. It requires respect for our land, now threatened by mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas exploration, highway construction, "environmental services", "biosphere reserves", ground water privatisation, and other such projects, and likewise threatened by unchecked industrialisation and urbanisation and by an official environmental policy of "conservation without people."²⁴

24. *Comunicado de la Red en Defensa del Maíz*, 17 March 2011, online at www.reddefensadelmaiz.net