

In Defense of Mexican Corn

A presentation by four Zapatista representatives from the highlands of Chiapas made to the National Forum *In Defense of Mexican Corn* held in Mexico City January, 2002

Brothers and sisters, you who have come from different places and who are of different political affiliations. We want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate along with you in this national forum in defense of corn. There are four of us here, and we are from the highlands of Chiapas.

We are people who are made of corn and earth, we are Tsotsil indigenous.

Today they call us Tsotsiles, because our true name was transformed on the tip of the invaders' tongue. We have been indigenous ever since our mother earth gave birth to us, and we shall continue to be so until that same mother earth engulfs us. We came to represent an Autonomous Tsotsil School, located in Oventik, Aguascalientes II, in the municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres in Los Altos region of Chiapas.

It is a school that was born out of our indigenous and non-indigenous struggle, in which we sowed our struggle for an alternative education which emancipates humanity, because a people who do not know their history, their culture, are a dead people. It is a school that has no place for making distinctions about people, that is, men or women, large or small, white or dark, old man or old woman, we value everyone, and we are all valuable.

The school belongs to you, to you who are here today, to Mexico, to the world, to those who speak badly about it today, to those who have looked down upon it. We are fighting for a different education, where we are seeking the common good, where each activist's perspective will not have to be isolated. We are fighting to know what we were yesterday, what we are today and what we shall be tomorrow.

We are fighting to know history, to rescue our culture. Because we are quite aware that a people who know their history shall never be condemned to repeat it, and they shall never be defeated.

We have found out that the agro-chemical companies have patented our natural corn so that we will then have to buy trans-genetic corn. We know the serious consequences of this type of corn they are creating, which affects our culture. For us, the indigenous, corn is sacred. If these agro-chemical companies are trying to get rid of our corn, it is like wanting to get rid of part of our culture which we inherited from our Mayan ancestors. We know that corn is our primary and daily food, it is the base of our culture. We know that our first fathers and mothers, Tepeu and Gukumatz, created us from corn, and that is why we call ourselves men and women of corn.

That is why our grandfathers and grandmothers did not plant corn in just any way. When they planted their fields they prayed three days before Mok in our Mayan calendar, because the day Mok begins is when our indigenous grandparents surrendered their brabajos, their hearts, asking protection from our god creator so that their work would be successful. During the days of prayer they ate only three tortillas the size of a coin at three in the afternoon, and they took pozol (hominy) and dough so that the plants would not anger the earth, because our

grandparents believed that the land, the trees, were beings who had souls.

We are worried that our corn will be done away with completely. That is why we want to create a seed bank in our school in order to conserve our corn, and then encourage every community to establish seed banks. A project defending our natural corn is being carried out in our school.

The name of this project is "mother seed of our chiapaneco land, in resistance".

That is why we are participating in this national forum against trans-genetic corn, so that together, and with all the people of Mexico, we will be able to save that part of our culture which they want to steal from us.

Second Presentation

First of all, a very good afternoon to everyone who is here. I am an indigenous campesino from the state of Chiapas, which is one of the richest states in the Mexican Republic because of its variety of natural wealth.

It is also one of the states with the highest degree of marginalization, of educational backwardness and of poverty, with more than 2,000,000 inhabitants.

We are here [in Mexico City], but this is not the first time, because we Mayas have come here since the Anahuak empire. We have returned once again because we know that they will not listen to us from Chiapas. Today we are bringing the voices of our peoples in resistance.

That voice of the peoples of 500 years of resistance. That voice of those who are erased from memory.

We, the survivors of death without bullets, are here in this national forum against trans-genetic seeds and in defense of native corn, which is so important.

I want to call on the gentlemen of power, primarily on the Chamber of Senators, the Chamber of Deputies and the Executive Branch. Specifically, I do not believe in just words, although it is good if they are talking to us about constitutional rights against trans-genetics. I want them to understand quite clearly: for us, the indigenous, corn is very sacred in our vision of the cosmos, and it is part of our culture. But now the entire world knows that Mexican indigenous rights and culture have not been ratified in the Congress of the Union. What they ratified is the freedom of national and transnational businesses, primarily the US, benefiting the Plan Puebla Panama, which is taking a first step by introducing trans-genetic seeds, so that they can then carry out monoculture. This Plan Puebla Panama is only for the benefit of the 1,000,000 middle class inhabitants, and not for the 64 million lower class people in our country.

And, in order to prevent all this, we need the resistance of Mexicans, like we are giving birth to in Chiapas, and the unity of, or links between, non-governmental organizations, and the understanding that no one is liberated by themselves and then no one can liberate anyone.

[Translated by irlandesa]

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