

## **Manifesto**

### **Defend our maize, care for life**

Here, in this part of the world, maize was born. Our grandparents created it. With it, they created themselves, and forged one of the greatest civilizations in history. The oldest residence of maize is in our lands. From this place in the universe maize went forth to the rest of the world.

We are people of maize. The seed is our brother, foundation of our culture, reality of our present. It is in the center of our daily life. It appears without fail in our diet and in a quarter of the products that we buy in the stores. It is the heart of rural life and a constant ingredient in urban life.

We are people of maize. And we are running against the current, in a continual fight against the dominant winds. The wisdom of campesinos and indigenous peoples about maize has continually been belittled, suppressed, and forgotten. This has brought about the extinction of innumerable native varieties of maize, which were the fruits of the patient experimentation of our ancestors. These losses have led many campesinos into a disgraceful dependency on hybrids.

Over and over again, with different policies, they have tried to get us to abandon our cultivation of maize. Instead of producing it on our own land with our own hands, they want us to import it from the United States, where they cultivate it for pigs and for industry, not for humans.

The blind official policy does not take into account that, for us, maize is more than a cereal. It summarizes our past, defines our present and is the foundation of our future. We eat it, but it is not only food. It is a cause for celebration, for exchange, for coexistence, for mutual help. It is our life. Maize is in the center of our culture, in that which has a sacred character. We don't want it to be otherwise.

To defend our maize requires us to be as we have been, not like the great companies want us to be. To defend our maize means to save our land, the sun, the water, the wind. Do not damage that which surrounds you.

When genetically modified maizes appeared, it seemed to us very sensible that Mexico prohibited their planting in 1998. As responsible scientists signaled at that time, we have to be prudent. The government, however, introduced them with a slight of hand, by way of their imports. And so there appeared among us, in our own Sierra de Juárez, the first contamination by transgenic maizes. Soon it was proven that other states were also at risk.

The world's center of origin of maize is now in danger. We could lose the prodigious genetic richness that gave rise to the patient dialogue between humans and plants, maintained here for millennia.

The great liars of the market or the state appear at times among us, disguised as investigators of new technologies or specialists in crop improvement. They

say that our seeds don't work or that our way of cultivation is inadequate. They want us to buy their seeds and learn their ways of killing maize and the earth.

Now has arrived the hour of saying "Enough!" "We will not take it any more!" We will not permit the damage to deepen and the risks to increase.

We do not reject experimentation. We have practiced it for many thousands of years. We are interested in change, but not change that brings ways of cultivation that destroy instead of conserve. We reject commercial activity, obsessed with profit. It destroys the earth, debilitates the social and cultural fabric of our pueblos and distorts the relation between people. We fight to conserve the maizes that during thousands of years have adapted to live in our climates, altitudes, and soils and that share the spirit of our communities.

### **In Oaxaca there will be no transgenics**

We have listened with patience to the scientists who defend them. But already we tire of them. The most serious risks from the use of transgenics are long term. Sufficient time has not passed. There exists, therefore, not a single long-term study. All that they say now about effects is pure speculation.

Besides, they don't want to respect the precautionary principle, they manipulate information and use false and foolish arguments. The worst, for us, is that they do not care at all about the immense cultural damage that their experiments could cause. We will not listen any longer.

### **We will continue with the legal fight**

We will continue to combine our effort with that of others, inside and outside of Mexico, to employ all the legal resources within our reach. We demand that the Mexican government:

- Prohibit the growing and importation of transgenic maize.
- Create a new legal framework for biosafety that protects human and animal health from all transgenic contamination and supports biological and cultural diversity. For now, we will fight against the draft bill that the Senate sent to the Cámara de Diputados, which we consider unacceptable.
- Stop all importation of maize.
- Make it obligatory to inform and consult with our communities on whatever public or private program of "technological help" that they try to apply.
- Take action, in concert with affected communities, to avoid the spread of transgenic contamination.

We have seen with sadness the irresponsible behavior of the authorities. We have proof that they have violated the Constitution, national laws, international treaties and agreements. They don't see or hear the clamor of civil society and independent scientists. They are doing the dirty work of corporations and countries interested in selling transgenics, without worrying about popular and

national interest. We cannot wait any longer. The threat grows. The contamination increases.

### **We will move onto direct action**

The dignity of Indian peoples is contagious. In Oaxaca they won a new legal decree and exercise, although with tensions and difficulties, their splendid autonomy of deed and right. By their hand, with their example, we will exercise our autonomy and the only legitimate sovereignty, that of the people, to defend what we are, to defend our maize.

We will strengthen the sowing of our criollo maizes of all colors. We will do this in the milpa that we always cultivate, with beans, squash, quelites, and other plants.

We will continue selecting our varieties and will create our own seed bank that we will share with other communities. We will make our own medicines for the milpa, reinforced by traditional practices, while carrying out campaigns against the use of agrochemicals.

### **In our territories there will be no transgenics**

In each community, in each neighborhood, in each village, we will fight for what is needed, in a peaceful and democratic way.

We call for a legitimate rebelliousness, not for a revolt. We call for an assertion of the constituent strength that we represent, the only legitimate source of political power, against the irresponsibility of the established powers.

**We invite one and all, in Oaxaca, to protect our maize, our way of life and our culture.**

**We invite the solidarity and assistance of as many as are able, in other parts of Mexico and the world, in a fight similar to our own, so we may extend each time the territories free of transgenics.**

*Manifesto signed in the forum **In defense of our maize**, celebrated in the city of Oaxaca, 10 March 2004.*