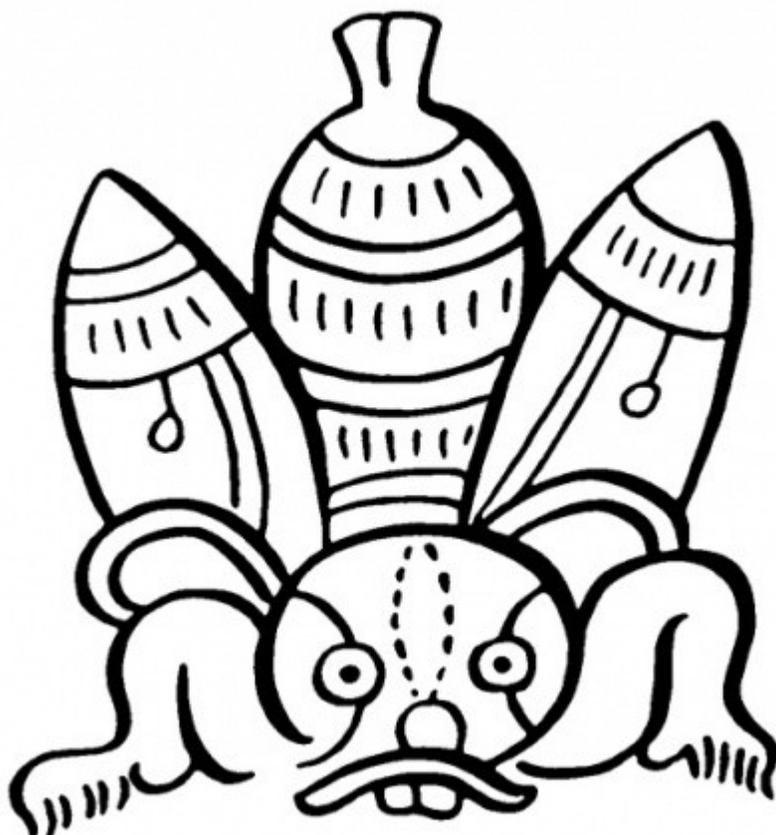


2013: The year of resistance to GM maize

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Bees from 1.500 hives of a community in Hopelchen, Campeche, have died the 6th of February 2013 due to a fumigation of soy crops from Monsanto in a nearby area. This has had a direct impact on more than 50 rural families that after a bad maize harvest due to a drought, were hoping to recover with the sales of organic honey which is now impossible since the honey is contaminated with pesticides and genetically modified (GM) pollen. Álvaro Mena, a Mayan peasant and beekeeper who takes part in the Network in Defense of Maize has estimated that the losses amount to 10 million pesos, a year's income for these families. Impacts have been also observed in four other communities. There is more intensive fumigation with GM crops, and since these crops are resistant to pesticides and planted in monoculture, enormous quantities of chemicals are applied. This is not a coincidence: it is the toxic avalanche that comes with transgenic farming and the threat of authorizing millions of hectares of GM maize.

It was with this serious testimony that Mena started his participation in a debate about the GM maize on February 7th, in a full auditorium at the Science Faculty, summoned by several networks, among them #YoSoy132 Ambiental, Vía Campesina, Movimiento Urbano Popular, and Red en Defensa del Maíz.

The authorities of the Ministry of Agriculture (Sagarpa), the Ministry of Environment (Semarnat), and the "Intersecretarial Commission of Biosecurity and Genetically Modified Organisms" (Cibiogem) were

called to participate in the debate, but did not want to attend, not even to hear the social organizations and scientists invited. Officials of the ministry of agriculture claimed they had no opinion on the issue (although there are thousands of hectares of experimental and pilot plantations of GM maize contaminating the fields); Cibiogem excused themselves saying that they had a full schedule so couldn't make it to the public debate, and Semarnats' answer, sent via e-mail on the day of the debate, stated that they would not attend because they rely on a "group of experts", (scientists from public institutions UNAM, Cinvestav, Colpos, UAAAN and Conacyt), to determine a "public policy on the issue of GM maize".

It seems that they await the "correct" opinions, in favour of GM crops. They claim that "more scientific grounds are needed." If it were for scientific recommendations, from day one of their mandate, the authorities have received solid documents and several researchers from these same organizations., Many others (3.000 scientists and experts, several with national and international prizes) are calling for the cancellation of all the trials and the eventual commercialization of GM maize for the risks it involves. Those experts also have demanded the establishment of "an immediate revision of all the environmental and social aspects involved in the massive planting of GM maize in Mexico, a decision that requests rigorous scientific criteria, wide public participation [...] and the consideration of the best technological options, already present, to tackle the food production in our country".

Dr. Antonio Turrent, president of the "Union of Scientists Committed with Society" (www.uccs.mx), has shown that the GM maize is not necessary to increase the maize production in Mexico, and that the country possesses the soil, water, seeds, resource diversity, and public technologies to cover all its present and future needs, without putting its economical independence, diversity, health, or environment in danger, as the GMOs do whenever they are planted. Dr. Turrent has recently published a detailed study exposing these options.

Peter Rosset, biologist and researcher, presented a list of published articles in renowned scientific magazines, particularly a compilation of studies carried out in 2009 by Artemis Dona and Ioannis S. Arvanitoyannis, which indicate that GM crops are associated with toxic, hepatic, pancreatic, renal and reproductive effects, hematological and immunological alterations, as well as carcinogenic effects. It mentions (as well) a study carried out by Dr. Seralini in France (2012) where the same GM maize that Monsanto intends to plant on 700.000 hectares in Mexico, has produced cancer in rats. Regarding this, Rosset indicated that considering Mexico is the biggest consumer of maize in the world and the risks observed in several studies from the last years, we should not expose the population to GMOs. He also indicated that the children would be the most affected in their health and all the consumers that cannot decide for a GMO-free maize meal, which urges for the immediate application of the precautionary principle, banning the GMOs in favour of future generations.

Urban, rural and student organizations have stated their critical views against GMOs, and have shown that the GMO avalanche concerns all fights and that they will not allow that the government imposes it against the interest of the majority of the population, in favour of a few multinationals. It was agreed to promote new debates, forums and activities, besides strengthening ties between organizations to avoid GMO in crops and food. As well to promote a bigger participation in the hearing *Maize and Food Sovereignty* of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal who will host a pre-hearing with scientific testimonials about GMO, its failures and the corruption in the biosecurity system in the country. As Álvaro Mena mentioned, we see more and more support to "2013, the Year of resistance to GM maize and in defense of the native maize, the life and autonomy of the maize people".

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