



“2014-2024 Decade for the Defense of the Native Corn of the Indigenous Peoples and Campesinos of Mexico”

STATEMENT OF THE COLLECTIVE FOR THE DEFENSE OF INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES OF OAXACA

COMMITTEE ON NATIVE CORN

“Under the development model contemplated by the signing of NAFTA, priority was given to international commerce to create an economic growth that never happened.”

“From 1994 to 2010 alone, more than six million people were forced out of rural Mexico to the U.S. in search of work.”

¡NO to NAFTA, NO to theTPP!

The Effects of NAFTA in Rural Mexico

The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 was perceived by some as the most important political decision that the Mexican state had made regarding rural Mexico in the last two decades. In actual fact, it meant a relinquishing of national food sovereignty. Mexico had been self-sufficient in the production of corn, beans, rice, meats, and vegetables. The crisis in the Mexican countryside grew as importations from the U.S. shot up during the first seven years of NAFTA. Mexico was converted into an importer of basic foods, principally grains and cereals. The most devastating case was corn imports, which rose from 17 million tons between 1987-1993 to 30 million tons between 1994-1999. Since NAFTA came into effect, U.S. corn exports to Mexico have tripled, contributing to a Mexico dependent on imports of wheat, corn, sorghum, rice, milk, and meats. Mexico now imports 80% of its meat consumption, creating an absolute dependence on imported meat.

In the first decade of NAFTA, the direct effects of the treaty included the loss of internal markets for national farm and livestock production, the loss of farm jobs, and declining working conditions for those employed in agro-export businesses. The most serious effect was the dismantling of the Mexican subsistence farm economy. **All of these changes initiated an exodus from rural Mexico, with over 6 million rural peoples migrating to the United States between 1994 and 2010.**

Possible implications of a new trade agreement, the Trans-pacific Partnership or TPP:

Now a new trade agreement, the Trans-pacific Partnership, or TPP, is at the door. The TPP is an even more aggressive attack on Mexican agriculture and would mean a “gradual” elimination of all tariffs and trade barriers that protect Mexican agricultural and livestock production, while remaining government agricultural subsidies would favor large agro-business production and leave small farmers with no protections. As mentioned above, NAFTA was responsible for a massive migration of rural Mexicans to the U.S. The approval of this new extreme commercial opening can be expected to create a new migration crisis in the U.S.

In addition, the TPP would increase the length of patents on plants to up to 25 years, and patent owners would have the power to prohibit the production of generic products. The TPP agreement seeks to obligate governments to enforce agreements such as the 1991 International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV-91), and other mechanisms that facilitate the theft of native plant varieties and which try to prohibit the essential millennial practice of farmers exchanging seeds.

The TPP is calculated to improve market conditions for large corporations and foreshadows a voracious and savage attack by the extractive industries. The TPP would give predominance to investments in mining and petroleum and emphasizes the rights of these investments and these businesses as a priority over all other interests. In addition, recent Mexican energy reforms now represent a new threat to the communal lands of indigenous peoples, since they give land use priority to energy production in all Mexican territory. This means that lands formerly protected by the Mexican constitution can now be expropriated in the name of energy corporations and also puts pressure on indigenous communities to agree to development projects that threaten to contaminate their water and reduce agricultural production.

The TPP strengthens the hand of corporations in the arbitration of investor-state differences. A system already skewed in favor of corporations could now be used against not only national governments, but also state and municipal entities, further compromising national autonomies. A current example of how this might affect Mexican farmers is the effort to permanently prohibit the planting of GMO corn in this the center of origin of this grain. If we were to be successful in prohibiting GMO corn even at the municipal level, we could be “sued” for obstruction of investors’ profits on a national or international level. The important ancestral custom of interchanging seeds in indigenous communities could also be challenged as an “unfair” barrier to investor profits, and new Mexican legislation, such as the Federal Law on Production and Certification of Seeds, and the Law on Plant Varieties already seek to criminalize this thousands-of-years-old custom of seed interchange.

The position of countries such as the United States, when confronted by these new corporate powers to “sue” all levels of government at corporate-dominated tribunals, would be similar to that of other countries. The U.S. would be obliged to accept external powers that would affect internal and even local decisions on agriculture, health, labor, and the environment, seriously compromising its national autonomy.

We cannot help but conclude that there is clear evidence of the disastrous effects that implementation of international treaties such as NAFTA have had. The trade agreements now being considered take no account of the current and needed advances in matters of individual and collective human rights. In Mexico the further destruction of local economies would lead to changes in communal life and in control of communal lands, with devastating cultural and social impacts.

The indigenous communities of Oaxaca represent an important economic and social alternative for the world of today. Our economies are based on an agricultural production of low-cost inputs founded in a rich variety of native seeds and ancestral technologies, such as the system of the *Milpa*. Our common territories, managed by elected communal land committees, serve as a practical common “wealth”, while our traditional systems of mutual aid and community work, or *tequios*, harmonize community and family life. Our respect for our Mother Earth demands an economy that recognizes the land as the fundamental basis of all economy and of the future of generations to come. We live according to alternative economic values that can serve as examples for other societies of today’s world. Let us globalize these values and not international treaties that favor transnational corporations and destroy the planet. No to the TTP!

In Mexico we indigenous peoples aspire to be free, to build strong local economies and to respect our Mother Earth.

¡NO to NAFTA, NO to TPP!