

Open letter from international civil society organizations on transgenic contamination in the centers of origin and diversity

To the Mexican government and the international community:

On October 9, 2003, peasant farmers and indigenous communities, along with civil society organizations in Mexico, publicly released the initial results of their own testing that found GM contamination of native maize in at least nine Mexican states, even though the planting of transgenic maize is prohibited in Mexico. These results, which are part of ongoing studies, show far more serious and widespread contamination than previously assumed by earlier studies (e. g., the study by Berkeley scientists Chapela and Quist and one by the official Institute of Ecology in Mexico. For background information, see <http://www.etcgroup.org/article.asp?newsid=410> and <http://www.etcgroup.org/article.asp?newsid=409>.)

One alarming fact is that the communities found widespread contamination with Starlink maize (not approved for human consumption in the US and finally taken off the market) and contamination of single plants with up to three different transgenes, which may indicate that contamination has been occurring over several generations. All identified sequences are patented by one of the five multinationals that control the agricultural biotechnology industry.

Mexican indigenous peoples and peasant farmers, the creators and developers of maize, consider this contamination to be one of the greatest attacks on their cultures, economies and livelihoods. Maize is a fundamental part of the diet and culture of every Mexican. We are deeply concerned that despite the risks the contamination poses, two years have passed since its original discovery with no effective action by the Mexican government to stem the contamination. The government is now considering lifting the moratorium on the planting of transgenic maize, and the Mexican Congress is considering the approval of a biosafety bill that has been sharply criticized by Mexican indigenous and farmers' organizations as well as by civil society organizations. The bill could facilitate further contamination.

Contamination is an issue that concerns the entire world, as maize is one of our most important food crops and Mexico is the repository of genetic diversity upon which we all depend. The policy changes being contemplated today could place the Mexican government in the unenviable historical role of having permitted the destruction of a resource that is critical for future global food security, and of having put the most treasured heritage of Mexican indigenous peoples and peasant farmers at risk.

Uncertain is the word that best describes GM technology today. The long-term impacts of GM contamination on crop genetic diversity are not known. However, there is growing evidence that GM crops can pose a threat to the stability of a crop's genome and can have other negative impacts on related biodiversity and the environment. Recombination of transgenic bacteria in plants and animals and the potential to trigger allergies in those who consume GM crops are also grave concerns, as well as the possibility of contamination by crops modified to produce non-food substances, from plastics to pharmaceuticals. The presence of patented traits in farmers' maize is particularly worrying because biotech companies are aggressively prosecuting farmers for patent infringement. Under patent law in the US and many other industrialized countries, it is illegal for farmers to re-use patented seed, or to grow GM seed without a licensing agreement. Farmers in North America are being prosecuted for growing patented seeds on their land, even if they didn't buy the seeds, or benefit from them.

Contamination of farmers' varieties threatens many centers of crop diversity, particularly in the Third World. Although GM contamination has been known to exist for more than two years in Mexico, neither governments nor international institutions have taken action to stop GM contamination and to protect farmers' and indigenous peoples' livelihoods. Traveling transgenes are a global problem, not one confined to maize in Mexico. Among others, GM contamination of traditional varieties of maize in New Zealand, cotton in Greece, canola (rapeseed) in Canada, soy in Italy, and papaya in Hawaii have been reported. The international community and the Mexican government must take action immediately to stop and prevent further contamination of traditional varieties.

It is urgent that a process of decontamination be undertaken by civil society, peasant and indigenous peoples' organizations. We support the demand of Mexican peasant and indigenous peoples' organizations that this process not be left in the hands of the technocrats or government agencies that have allowed, and even promoted, the contamination. The process of decontamination must be farmer-led. Given their intimate knowledge of their land, crops and farming systems, farmers are the only actors capable of leading this process.

We call upon the Mexican Government and the Mexican Congress to:

- Maintain the moratorium against the planting of transgenic maize in Mexico, the center of origin of this critical food crop.
- Stop immediately the importation of transgenic or non-segregated maize — likely the main source of contamination in Mexico.
- Scrap the biosafety bill now being considered by the Mexican Congress, which, despite its name, is not based on the precautionary principle and does not take into account the status of Mexico as a megadiverse country, nor does it take into account the views of indigenous peoples, farmers and environmental organizations in Mexico.
- Stand firm against the extreme pressure being applied by the biotech industry and by scientists closely connected to it.
- Conduct studies on the extent of GM contamination on traditional varieties in Mexico.
- Present an emergency plan to prevent further contamination of farmers' varieties.
- Present the issue of contamination in centers of origin at the first Meeting of the Parties (MOP 1) of the Cartagena Protocol.

We call upon the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and the Cartagena Protocol to:

- Publicly acknowledge that GM maize contamination has taken place in Mesoamerica and that other centers of origin are threatened by the release of GM crops.
- Immediately adopt these issues in your agendas (FAO Conference and CGRFA Meeting, COP 7 of CBD, MOP1 of Cartagena Protocol), and take actions to ensure the application of the precautionary principle to prevent further GM contamination of traditional varieties everywhere in the world.
- Acknowledge that GM contamination poses a potentially serious threat to biological diversity, particularly in crop centers of origin and/or diversity
- Call for an immediate moratorium on the release of genetically modified seed or grain, either for food, feed or processing, in those countries or regions that form part of the crop centers of origin and/or diversity for the species.
- Declare that patent infringement claims against farmers who are victims of DNA contamination will not be permitted, and that companies should be held legally liable for the contamination.
- FAO and CGIAR must adopt a comprehensive strategy and procedures to ensure that gene bank accessions are protected from contamination. The integrity of farmers' varieties must be maintained, with zero tolerance for DNA contamination. The vitally important exchange of genetic resources between gene banks and farmers must not be imperiled by concerns about contamination.
- The FAO-CGIAR Trust Agreement must be reviewed to ensure that the integrity of germplasm held in Trust is protected and that there are no intellectual property claims pertaining to any of the germplasm or its components.

Acción Ecológica, Ecuador
 Acción por la Biodiversidad, Argentina
 ActionAid Agriculture and Food Security Advisor,
 Tanzania
 Adrian Dominican Sisters,USA
 Africa Faith & Justice Network,USA
 African Centre for Biosafety, South Africa
 Agrolink, Belgium
 AJAGI, Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos
 Indígenas, México
 ALTER VIDA, Paraguay
 Amigos de la Tierra Latinoamérica y El Caribe
 Amigos de la Tierra, España
 ANAMURI Asociación de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas,
 Chile
 ANPED, Northern Alliance for Sustainability, Netherlands
 AnthraHyd, India
 Applewood Farm, Canada
 Arise for Social Justice, USA
 Asesoría Jurídica Popular, México
 Asia Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty, Philipines
 Asociación Civil Don Jaime de Nevares, Argentina
 Asociación de Consumidores Ecologicos de Flandes,
 Bélgica
 Asociación de Ecología Social Costarricense, Costa Rica
 Asociación de Lucha por el Medio Ambiente y la Salud,
 Argentina
 Asociación de Mediación Social Igualdad de
 Oportunidades, BATERA, Euskal Herria
 Asociación Ecológica del Oriente (ASEO), Bolivia
 Asociación Juvenil Movimiento Ecológico Nueva
 Generación, Ecuador
 Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras,
 ANEC México
 Asociación Nacional de Enfermeras Hispanas, Puerto
 Rico
 Asociación Quechua Ayamara para Comunidades
 Sustentables "ANDES", Peru
 Asociación Vida Sana, España
 Association of Organic Farmers Thessaly, Greece
 ATALC-Amigos de la Tierra de América Latina y el
 Caribe, Uruguay
 ATAUN, Gipuzkoa, Euskal Herria
 ATTAC, France
 ATTAC, Working Group on 'Globalisation and
 Agriculture, Germany
 Attac-Agrarnetz, Germany
 Australian Greens, Australia
 Basler Appell gegen Gentechnologie, Switzerland
 Bend-Condega Friendship Project, USA
 Berne Declaration, Switzerland
 Bina Sarana Bakti Foundation, Organic
 Development Center, Indonesia
 BIOCOOP, France
 Bioland e.V., Germany
 Bios Iguana, México
 Bloque de Organizaciones Sociales, México
 Brotherhood of IRRRI Support Services Group-KMP,
 Philipines
 Buendnis fuer Eine Welt /OeE (Alliance for One World),
 Austria
 Bur Oak Greens of Grant County, USA
 C.I.F.A.E.S. - Municipio ecológico Amayuelas de Abajo,
 España
 Californians for GE Free Agriculture, USA
 Cambridge GM Concern, USA
 CAMPO, A.C, México
 Cáritas Santa Ana, El Salvador
 CASIFOP, Centro de Análisis Social, Información y
 Formación Popular, México
 Catholic Bishops' Conference, Philipines
 CECCAM, Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el
 Campo Mexicano, México
 Célula Itinerante, México
 CEMyF, México
 CENAMI, Centro Nacional de Misiones Indígenas, México
 CENCOS - Centro Nacional de Comunicacion Social,
 México
 CENSAT Agua Viva, Amigos de la Tierra, Colombia
 Center for Food Safety, USA
 Center for the Study of the Americas, USA
 Centro CSO, USA
 Centro de Agroecología San Francisco, México
 Centro de Estudios Rurales Interdisciplinarios, CERI,
 Paraguay
 Centro de Estudios Rurales y de Agricultura
 Internacional, CERAI, España
 Centro de Estudios y Asesoría en Salud, Ecuador
 Centro de Innovación en Tecnología Alternativa A.C.,
 México
 Centro de Investigación y Asesoría Sindical, A.C. ,CILAS,
 México
 Centro Ecologico, Brasil
 Centro para la Defensa del Consumidor, CDC, El
 Salvador
 CESTA, El Salvador
 CET Sur, Chile
 CIAM, A.C. de San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas,
 México
 CIOEC Bolivia: Coordinadora de Integración de las
 Organizaciones Económicas Campesinas de Bolivia
 CIPO Ricardo Flores Magón, Oaxaca, México
 Circolo Culturale palazzo Cattaneo - Roma, Italia
 COECOeiba-Amigos de la Tierra Costa Rica
 Columban Mission Society, International
 Comision Pastoral T-Regional Goiás, Brasil
 Community Technology Development Trust, Zimbabwe
 Community Technology Development Trust, Zimbabwe
 Companeros Norsur, Hamilton, ON, Canada
 Comunidad Catolica Siervos Misioneras Santisima
 Trinidad
 Comunidad de San Miguel Maninaltepec, México
 CONAIE, Confederación de Nacionalidades indígenas del
 Ecuador , Ecuador

Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras, España
 Congregation of Sisters of the Good Shepherd, USA
 CONMIE, Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas, ECUADOR
 Consejo de Organizaciones de Médicos y Parteras Indígenas Tradicionales, México
 Consejo Unihidalguense, México
 Consiglio dei Diritti Genetici, Italy
 Consultoria en Educación Ambiental, México
 CONTEC, Consultoria Tecnica Comunitaria A.C. México
 Contramano, Argentina
 Cooperativa "Mujeres Campesinas en Acción", México
 Coordenação da Rede Brasileira de Ecosocialismo, Brasil
 Coordinadora Apoyo Mutuo, México
 CORPOS, Corporación Colombiana de Proyectos Sociales, Colombia
 Cosecha Sana, México
 COSYDDHAC, Comision de Solidaridad y defensa de los derechos humanos A.C, México
 CT Peace Coalition/New Haven CT, USA
 Desarrollo Alternativo, AC. México
 Desarrollo Comunitario de Los Tuxtlas, México
 DIO Inspection & Certification of Organic Products, Athens Greece
 Diverse Women for Diversity
 Doctors for Global Health, USA
 Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena, Zaire
 Dutch Platform on Genetechnology, Nehterlands
 Earth Action Network, USA
 Ecological Society of the Philippines
 Ecological Society, Philippines
 Ecologistas en Accion - España
 ECOSENS, Rumania
 Edmonds Institute, USA
 Educacion-Cesder, México
 ENVIROCARE, Tanzania
 Environmental Task Force of Congregational Unitarian Church, USA
 ESK Coordinadora Sindical de Izquierdas, Euskal Herria
 ETC Group, Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration
 ETK (ELTE Nature Conservation Club), Hungary
 Fair Made, USA
 Family Farm Defenders, USA
 Farmers of Nayakrishi Andolon, Bangladesh
 FIAN-Austria
 Fife Against GMOs, United Kingdom
 Food and Farming Forum
 Food First, Institute for Food and Development Policy, USA
 Food Policy Center Vision 21 (Japan)
 Foro Ecologista de Paraná, Argentina
 FORO para el Desarrollo Sustentable A.C., México
 Friends of the Earth International
 Friends of the Earth, Ukraine
 Full Circle Farm
 Fundación AGRECOL Andes, Bolivia
 Fundación Educativa en Salud, Comunidad integradora del saber andino, Ecuador
 Fundación traperos de Emaús de Navarra, España
 Future Earth, Tierra del Futuro, Sweden
 GE Free Northland, New Zealand
 Gene Campaign, India
 Gen-ethisches Netzwerk e.V./Gene-ethical Network, Germany
 Genetic Food Alert, USA
 German League for Nature (DNR), Germany
 GEYSER, France
 GL Organic Farming, Luxembourg
 Global Trade Watch, Australia
 Go Wild Consumer Education Campaign, USA
 Goldeneaglevideo, USA
 GRAIN, Genetic Resources Action International
 Green Action, Croacia
 Green Network of Vojvodina, Serbia and Montenegro
 GreenCity Wholefoods,Glasgow,UK
 Greenpeace México
 GRET (Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques), France
 Grupo de Ecologia, Ñangapire, Paysandu, Uruguay
 Grupo de Estudios Ambientales, GEA, México
 Grupo de los Cien Internacional, A.C., México
 Grupo de Reflexión Rural, Argentina
 Grupo de Tecnología Alternativa S.C, México
 Grupo Interdisciplinario de Tecnología Rural Apropiada (GIRA A.C.), México
 Grupo Ngabe Defensor de la Naturaleza, Costa Rica
 GrupoEco, Uruguay
 Guatemala Working Group, Ontario Public Interest Group, Canada
 Gubiña XXI, A.C., México
 Guerreros Verdes A. C, Guerrero, México
 Guises Montaña Experimental, Nicaragua
 Harvest for the Hungry Garden
 Hemen Eta Munduan, Iniciativa Popular Euskal Herria
 HepCURE, USA
 IAAS, Belgium
 IFIRK - Research on genetic engineering, The Netherlands
 IFOAM EU Regional Group, Germany
 Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Network
 INESC, Brasil
 Institut pour la Relocalisation de l'Economie, (IRE), France
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), USA
 Institute of Environmental and Health Research Inc, Australia
 Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo, Ecuador
 Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud, España
 Interhemispheric Resource Center-Americas Program, USA
 International Forum on Globalization
 International Society for Ecology and Culture, USA

IRDF [Integrated Rural Development Foundation],
 Philippines
 ITDG (Intermediate Technology Development Group),
 United Kingdom
 Jubilee Farm, Springfield, Illinois, USA
 KAHEA: The Hawaiian- Environmental Alliance, Hawai'i
 Krisoker Saar (Farmers' Voice), Bangladesh
 LA Catholic Worker, USA
 Latin American Solidarity Conference, USA
 Leeuwenberg, Brasil
 Local Agenda, Environmental Group, United Kindom
 Lok Sanjh Foundation, Pakistan
 LOKOJ research and activist organization, Bangladesh
 Malta Organic Agriculture Movement, Malta
 MASIPAG, Phillipines
 Mesa Nacional Campesina de Costa Rica
 Moosewood Restaurant, Ithaca, NY, USA
 MST-Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra,
 Brasil
 Mujeres Abriendo Brecha, A.C., Veracruz, México
 Munloch GM Vigil, Scotland
 National Consortium of Forest and Nature Conservation,
 Indonesia
 National Development Foundation, Sri Lanka
 National Development Foundation, Upali
 Magedaragamage, Sri Lanka
 National Family Farm Coalition, USA
 National Unity of Associations Organic Farmers, Greece
 New Hampshire Citizens for Health Freedom
 Nicaragua Network, USA
 Norwegian Farmers and Smalholders Union, Norway
 O deser, Agricultores Familiares, Brasil
 Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity Province of Our
 Lady Guadalupe, USA
 ONG Ecologista Ka'á Bera- Montecarlo Misiones,
 Argentina
 Oregon PSR Campaign For Safe Food, USA
 Organic Agriculture Association, Albania
 Organic Agriculture Promotion Network Chiba, Japan
 Organic Consumers Association (OCA)
 Organization of Development Policy Organizations in
 Carinthia, Austria
 Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific, Malaysia
 Pesticide Action Network North America Regional
 Center (PANNA)
 Pesticide Action Network, New Zealand
 Plataforma Antitransgenicos de BOLIVIA
 Plataforma Rural - España
 Plataforma Rural Alianzas por un mundo rural vivo,
 España
 Policy Communication Department, PROSHIKA,
 Bangladesh
 PortiaSun International, USA
 Poryecto San Isidro Educacion Permanente S.C.
 (PROSANISI), México
 Proceso de Comunidades Negras de Colombia
 Programa Comunitario Autogestión Odontológica
 (PROCAO)
 Promedios de Comunicación Comunitaria, México
 Proy.Área Indígena, Mugarik Gabe, Euskadi
 Proyecto Jardin, USA
 Public Citizen, USA
 Radio Sabotaje, México
 Rainman Landcare Foundation, South Africa
 Red Accion sobre Plaguicidas-AL Uruguay
 Red Ciudadana frente a los Transgénicos, El Salvador
 Red Ciudadana va los Transgenicos, Unidad Ecológica
 Salvadoreña, El Salvador
 Red de Acción en Plaguicidas y sus Alternativas de
 América Latina (RAP-AL)
 Red de Accion sobre Plaguicidas y Alternativas, México
 Red de Agricultura Organica de Misiones, Argentina
 Red de Información y Acción por el Derecho Humano a
 Alimentarse -FIAN, México
 Red de Organizaciones Socioambientales de Entre Ríos,
 Argentina
 Red Maya de Productores Orgánicos, México
 Red Nacional de Promotoras y Asesoras Rurales, México
 Red Solidaria por los Derechos Humanos, Uruguay
 REDAST - Red Alerta sobre Transgénicos, Argentina
 RedBosque América Latina
 REDES Amigos de la Tierra, Uruguay
 Reed Nacional de Acción Ecologista, RENACE, Argentina
 Revista La guillotina, México
 S.S.S "Unión de Familias Campesinas de Zapotitlán de
 Vadillo", México
 S.S.S "Unión de grupos de mujeres de Copala", México
 Safe Food Coalition, South Africa
 Schweizerische Arbeitsgruppe Gentechnologie SAG, CH
 Scientists for Global Responsibility, United Kingdom
 SCODE, Kenya
 SEARICE, Phillipines
 Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz, A.C. (Sedepac), México
 Servicios Educativos y de Investigación Social, A.C.,
 México
 Small Potatoes Gleaning Project, USA
 Social Justice Committee of Montréal, Canada
 Sociedad Ecológica Regional, Rio Negro, Argentina
 Sociedad Ecologista Hidalguense A. C, México
 Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica, España
 South Australian Genetic Food Information Network
 (SAGFIN)
 SSJ, Philadelphia, USA
 Stop GM Seeds contamination Network, Japan
 Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Sweden
 SWISSAID, Switzerland
 Tequio Jurídico, A. C., México
 The Corner House United Kingdom
 The Greens Movement - FoE, Georgia
 The New World Ariculture and Ecology Group (NWAEG),
 USA
 The ZHABA Collective, Hungary
 The-Edge, a project of Earth Island Institute
 Thomas Justin Arthur Carl Fackler, USA
 Tierra Viva, Chile
 Tocnihuane, IAP, Centro Guadalupe, Iztapalapa, México

UBINIG, Bangladesh
UNES, Alfredo Carias, El Salvador
UNIDA , Argentina
Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo (UCIZONI), México
Unión de la Clase Trabajadora-Agrupación política Nacional (UCLAT-APN)
Unión Internacional Trabajadores de la Alimentación, UITA Regional AL
Unión Regional de Productores de Pueblos Indígenas, México
UNORCA, Unión de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas, México
UNOSJO, Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez Oaxaca, México
VEN, Association for the Conservation of Agro-Biodiversity, Germany
Veterinarios Sin Fronteras, España

Voces de la Tierra, México
Voluntarios para el Mejoramiento del Ambiente, COVOMA, USA
Washington Biotechnology Action Council, USA
WERVEL vzw, Belgium
WHY, World Hunger Year, USA
Wisconsin Fair Trade Campaign, USA
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, Vancouver, Canada
Working Group Genetic Engineering of Bund Naturschutz, Germany
World Fisheries Day, USA
WTO Watch Qld , Australia
www.planorganic.com, Ireland
XminY Solidarityfunds, The Netherlands
Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft (Foundation on Future Farming), Germany
49th Parallel Biotechnology Consort, USA