



International Indian Treaty Council
Consejo Internacional de Tratados Indios

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MEXICO ISSUES A DECREE TO PHASE OUT GLYPHOSATE AND GENETICALLY MODIFIED CORN



Yaqui Students from School General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, in Torim Pueblo, Rio Yaqui, Sonora, Mexico, wrote a letter on April 30, 2016, urging Mexico to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to prohibit the import and use of banned pesticides in Yaqui territory, stating "We do not want those airplanes spraying over our school, our homes. We have brothers, sisters, and friends who are sick."

Tucson, Arizona: On December 31, 2020, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador issued a Decree announcing that Mexico will phase out the "use, acquisition, distribution, promotion, and import of the chemical called GLYPHOSATE and the agrochemicals used in our country containing this substance as their active ingredient." The Presidential Decree went into effect on January 1st, 2021, and establishes a transition period until January 2024 for private companies to replace Glyphosate with sustainable, culturally appropriate alternatives to "safeguard human health, the country's biocultural diversity, and the environment".

Glyphosate is produced by the multinational corporation Monsanto. Monsanto was formerly based in the United States and was purchased by the German Company Bayer Crop Science in 2018. Glyphosate is the primary component of Monsanto's infamous weed killer "Roundup" and is known to cause cancer.

According to the Decree, "Public and government institutions as of the entry into force of this Decree, shall refrain from acquiring, using, distributing, promoting and importing glyphosate or agrochemicals that contain it as an active ingredient, within the framework of public programs or any other activity of the government."

The Decree also establishes that “the [Mexican] authorities, within the scope of their competence, in accordance with the applicable regulations, will revoke and refrain from granting permits for the release into the environment of genetically modified corn seeds” to protect food security and food sovereignty, native corn, traditional cornfields (“milpas”) and the country’s biocultural wealth.

Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) called this a victory for the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico and the many organizations and UN Human Rights experts from around the world that have joined the campaign to eliminate the use and international traffic of toxic and banned agrochemicals. She affirmed that “this is most specifically a response to the long-standing challenge on Mexico to halt the import and use of toxic agrochemicals in the territory of the Yaqui People of Sonora.”

In 2001 the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) organized a meeting between the UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes Ms. Fatma-Zohra Ouhachi-Vesely’s and representatives of Indigenous Peoples impacted by toxic pesticides from the US, Alaska, Mexico, and Guatemala. During her visit, she addressed the United States’ practice of exporting pesticides that are banned for use in its own country due to their known deadly health impacts, which is permitted under US and international law. She stated that “Just because something is not illegal, it may still be immoral. Allowing the export of products recognized to be harmful is immoral.”

Since that time the IITC has consistently presented the export of banned and highly toxic pesticides from “developed” countries as a human rights violation and an example of environmental racism. IITC, in coordination with its affiliate Jittoa Bat Natika Weria and the Yaqui Traditional Authorities in Rio Yaqui Sonora, Mexico, collected over 90 testimonies from impacted Yaqui community members. These have included over 40 deaths, severe birth defects, cancers such as leukemia, and other deadly illnesses caused using highly toxic pesticides, including aerial spraying, and burning of contaminated crops by agri-business companies. These have been presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), and UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights and Toxics, Health, Food, Environment and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2015, for the Committee on the Rights of Child’s country review of Mexico, IITC sponsored a delegation from Rio Yaqui Sonora, Mexico, to present cases of deceased and dying children from the use of toxic pesticides in the Yaqui homelands. As a result, the CRC called upon Mexico to halt the import of pesticides that have been banned by the exporting country and to work with the Yaqui and other impacted communities to address the health impacts. The CRC also recognized for the first time that “Environmental Health” is a right protected under the Convention.

Francisco “Paco” Javier Villegas Paredes is the coordinator of Jittoa Bat Natika Weria (“ancestral medicine”) in Vicam, Rio Yaqui, Sonora, Mexico. He was a member of the delegation that traveled to Geneva Switzerland to present the devastating impacts of pesticides and other agrochemicals on the health of the Yaqui mothers and young children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Francisco welcomed the Presidential Decree as an important first step to removing these hazardous chemicals from the Yaqui homeland. “Toxic chemicals like glyphosate imported from the US and other developed countries to Mexico, have been sprayed on our lands and communities for many years. Many of our Yaqui people have died and many children have suffered deadly illnesses and permanent disabilities as a result. We believe that the import and use of toxic pesticides and other agrochemicals should be prohibited for the health and well-being of the Yaqui and other Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, for all Peoples and our Mother Earth.”

For more information contact Roberto Borrero via email at communications@treatycouncil.org or log on to IITC’s web page: www.iitc.org

For the complete text of the Mexico Presidential Decree log on to: https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5609365&fecha=31/12/2020