

Cuetzalan, Puebla, December 13, 2016.

Call for Solidarity With the Maseual People of the Northeastern Sierra de Puebla, Mexico

In the Northeastern Sierra de Puebla, the maseual and totonakú people have been struggling for over ten years against mining and hydro-electric companies. Since November 19, in Cuetzalan, we, the maseual people, answering the call from our organization ALTEPE TAJPIANIJ (« the guardians of the territory »), we keep on watch so that the people's decision will be respected and that no electric sub-station shall be built. We set up a camp, with plastic sheets and canvas, where, from November on, dozens of men and women live and keep a watch, so that no building takes place.

We camp to protest against the decision made by the Federal Electric Commission (FCE) to build a high-voltage line which is to cross most of our municipality, including densely populated areas. This Cuetzalan Branch of the Teziutlán-Tajín High Voltage Line should end up at this sub-station where the transformers would be installed.

During an Altepe Tajpianij meeting, in past September, we learned the serious dangers for health associated with the electromagnetic fields these high-voltage lines emit : among people who live within one hundred meters from the lines, there is a significantly higher rate of leucemia, for children under four years of age, and a much higher incidence of Alzheimer disease, for the elderly. Th Cuetzalan has an Integral Territorial Plan, elaborated by a citizens' committee. This plan, which was democratically adopted in 2010 by the Cuetzalan township authorities and then approved by the Puebla State Government, forbids

mining and hydroelectric projects within the township boundaries. The present-day mayor had committed himself not to allow the construction of the high-voltage line, but, last September, he changed his mind and gave the permit.

During an *Altepe tajpiani* which followed this meeting, on October 25, we demanded that the mayor respect the plan, and his word, and nullify the permit. On the opposite, he called a meeting, to which he invited all village heads so that they would approve the building of the line. The president of the committee who keep watch over the respect of the plan explained to the people gathered why the project should not be carried on. And the heads of the indigenous villages refused to support it, without « consulting those who elected us ».

Taking no account the people's will, the INGETEAM company which is responsible for building the sub-station went on at a quicker pace. On November 19, we were more than one thousand people gathered in the township center. We all listened to the report on the project, made by the committee who keep a close eye on new projects so that they respect the Plan. Then we, the maseual people, decided to stop the building of the sub-station, in a popular and definitive way. Immediately afterwards, all those who participated to the assembly went to the plot where the sub-station is supposed to be built, we took control of it, and we organized the shifts for the watch. It has continued since then. The volunteers bring their lunch with them, and some families bring them some food. We also built a little bamboo hut where we organize talks and discussions. To this day, local authorities have not dared to stop our action, because they know it is supported by a large number of citizens in this township where we the maseual are the majority.

On Saturday, December 10, International Day of Mother Earth, we decided to show the essence of our struggle for life, through the strongest symbolic action for us, maseual : we planted corn, spring corn we call *tonalmil* « corn of the sun ». Together with those who take shifts in the watch, from now on the guardian spirits of the corn will watch over our crop until its harvest in August ; they will also protect the land which we consecrated through planting. While we were sowing, we remembered that, two centuries ago, our maseual ancestors did exactly the same thing to defend our communal lands which a big landowner wanted to grab. They planted a large cornfield in Xocoyolo. The struggle was hard, as in many other occasions, but we were able to keep our land.

WE MAKE A CALL TO ALL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WHO ARE, LIKE US, FIGHTING FOR THE DEFENSE OF THEIR LANDS AGAINST LARGE-SCALE MINING, HYDRO-ELECTRIC AND OIL PROJECTS, TO SEND US THEIR SUPPORT.

In the name of the maseual people

ALTEPE TAJPIANIJ « THE GUARDIANS OF THE LAND »

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