

Posted December 17, 2007 by Dr. Steve Suppan

*(IATP's Steve Suppan is reporting from Mexico City, where he met with Mexican farmers protesting the final implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement)*

December 13, 2007

Mexico City

Angel de la Independencia

The National Campaign for Food Sovereignty and Revitalization of Rural Mexico invited IATP to present a solidarity letter at a press conference on behalf of more than 70 U.S., Canadian and international civil society and farmer organizations and 15 individuals who signed the letter. The site of the press conference is the Angel de la Independencia, a plaza constructed in 1910 to celebrate Mexico's 100th anniversary of independence. In other words, not your typical press conference.

About 30 members of the Campaign began a fast on December 10 to call attention both to widespread food insecurity - more than 40 percent of rural Mexicans or about 52 million are malnourished - and to the Campaign's proposals for a new agricultural and trade policy under a food sovereignty framework. We visited more than a dozen of those fasting who were camped out on a cool and cloudless night under the watchful eye of the Angel, a statute whose grandeur is poorly reflected in the snapshot here.



Among the Campaign's proposals is the renegotiation of the agricultural chapter of the North American Free Trade Agreement to exclude corn and beans from trade liberalization. Corn and beans are crucial to Mexican food security. On December 11, they attempted to deliver a letter demanding the renegotiation of NAFTA to the U.S. Embassy but were turned back by municipal police. The event was featured in the national press.

On the morning of December 13, well known Mexican artists, movie stars and intellectuals came to the Angel to announce their support for the National Campaign and the hunger strikers. Again the press covered the event. I visited the hunger strikers in the afternoon, bringing gifts of tee-shirts and bandanas from our Rural Youth Summit held in October in Ames, Iowa. I signed the Campaign's petition to the government to renegotiate NAFTA and wrote a brief testimonio in the visitor's book.

During the afternoon, university students and participants in protest against the privatization of Mexico's state owned oil company visited the fasters. We talked about the U.S. Farm Bill, NAFTA and the U.S. led project to replace Mexico's more than 80 varieties of corn developed over centuries by indigenous groups all over Mexico with transgenic corn whose patents are owned by U.S. companies, above all Monsanto.

As the sun set, cold began to creep into our bones and we shook hands all around and said good night as some of those fasting crawled into sleeping bags and slept or read under the Angel's light. We left, a little guiltily, in search of something for supper.

