

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Civil Society Groups Condemn USMCA Dispute ruling on Mexico's Corn Restrictions**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — Civil society groups in the U.S., Mexico and Canada criticized a decision today announced by a dispute panel set up under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The panel ruled in favor of the United States, asserting that Mexico's policies to ban the use of genetically modified (GM) white corn for human consumption violated the terms of the trade agreement. The panel called on Mexico change its policies. The decision ignored substantial scientific evidence on health and environmental risks, sidestepped threats to Indigenous Rights, and inappropriately anticipated economic harm to U.S. corn exporters when no harm has occurred.

Since 2019, Mexico has pursued a policy aimed at reducing reliance on imported GM corn and phasing out glyphosate, citing goals of bolstering food sovereignty and transitioning to agroecological practices. The policies include a ban on the use of GM white corn for human consumption but did not restrict imports of GM yellow corn for animal feed or industrial uses. These measures were met with a formal dispute filed by the U.S. (with Canada as a third party) in August 2023 under the USMCA, alleging violations of Sanitary and Phytosanitary standards and discriminatory trade practices against U.S. agricultural exports.

Civil society organizations from Mexico, Canada and the United States will be studying the decision in depth over the coming days. There were numerous submissions from civil society in the case, defending Mexico's right to protect its food system. Those submissions can be viewed at:

<https://www.iatp.org/food-sovereignty-trade-and-mexicos-gmo-corn-policies#usmca-dispute-resources>

#### **Civil society groups issued the following initial responses:**

**Karen Hansen-Kuhn, Director of Trade and International Strategies at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** said, "The USMCA was hailed as a new kind of trade agreement, taking some steps forward on issues like labor rights and investment. This dispute shows how far we still need to go. Mexico has every right to try to transform its food system to better feed its people and enhance rural livelihoods and biodiversity. The U.S. was wrong to challenge that initiative, and the panel is wrong to back them up." [khansenkuhn@iatp.org](mailto:khansenkuhn@iatp.org).

**Sharon Treat, Senior Advisor to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** added, "'Although the Panel appropriately recognized the significance of native corn to Indigenous Peoples' legal rights and culture, it disregarded this significance by ruling that the USMCA Article 32.5 exception does not apply in this dispute. We are very disappointed in the Panel's narrow -- and we believe, incorrect -- reading of a provision touted by USMCA cheerleaders as a significant advancement in trade policy as it affects human rights."

**Farm Action President Angela Huffman** said, "We are disappointed in the panel's ruling today, which shows the U.S. successfully wielded its power on behalf of the world's largest agrochemical corporations to force their industrial technology onto Mexico. Mexico's ban on genetically modified

(GM) corn and glyphosate presented a tremendous premium market opportunity for non-GM corn producers in the U.S. Instead of helping U.S. farmers transition to non-GM corn production, our government has continued to force GM corn onto people who don't want it and propped up agrochemical corporations based in other countries — such as Germany's Bayer and China's Syngenta. This ruling will make winners out of agrochemical corporations and losers out of everyone else."

**Mily Treviño-Sauceda, Executive Director of the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas**, commented that, "The Alianza Nacional de Campesinas strongly condemns the panel's decision in favor of the United States. Mexico's policies to ban the use of genetically modified (GM) corn and glyphosate were enacted to protect biodiversity, cultural heritage and the rights of Indigenous people. This decision will continue to adversely impact the quality and nutritional value of food reaching Mexican households. This is just another step in the direction of consolidating agricultural power to the US agro-industrial complex that we will continue to challenge until we see real change for the benefit of the public and our health."

"At a time when the U.S. president-elect is threatening to levy massive tariffs on Mexican products, a blatant violation of the North American trade agreement, it is outrageous that a trade tribunal ruled in favor of the U.S. complaint against Mexico's limited restrictions on genetically modified corn, which barely affect U.S. exporters." **Timothy A. Wise, U.S. Right to Know**

"Trade agreements should not allow multinational pesticide and biotech companies to imperil the health of people and the environment," said **Kendra Klein, PhD, deputy director of science at Friends of the Earth U.S.** "The science is clear that GMO corn raises serious health concerns and that production of GMO corn depends on intensive use of the toxic weedkiller glyphosate."

"Keeping Mexican maize varieties as well as watersheds and foods in Mexico free of GMOs and glyphosate protects our food system, and therefore our health. Trade agreements should never be prioritized above the health and environment of the countries involved." **Maria Elena Álvarez-Buylla, UNAM, former director, CONAHCYT, Mexico's national science agency**

**The Canadian National Farmers Union** commented that, "We are deeply disappointed in Canada's role in supporting the USA's trade challenge which ruled against Mexico's democratic decision to uphold Indigenous Peoples cultural rights and maintain the agricultural heritage that sustains the biological and cultural integrity of its staple food crop, white corn. By backing the USA's challenge, Canada failed to uphold commitments made as a signatory to the UN Convention on Biodiversity and to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

"Canada doesn't even sell any corn to Mexico but sought to protect the interests of the biotechnology industry. This is a dangerous outcome that tramples national sovereignty and food sovereignty," said **Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, a coalition of 15 organizations.** [coordinator@cban.ca](mailto:coordinator@cban.ca) +1 902 209 4906 [www.cban.ca/trade](http://www.cban.ca/trade)

“Mexico’s heavy tortilla diet faces many safety unknowns from GM corn. Mexico presented considerable scientific evidence on the dangers of eating GM corn and should have the right to make decisions based on their concerns. Canada is not interested in rigorous science since it has recently surrendered government oversight over GM food safety to biotechnology companies themselves,” said **Rick Arnold, of the Trade Justice Group of the Northumberland Chapter of the Council of Canadians.**

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