

*"Our lives, our land are not for sale" **

With these words, people from the farmers community of Atenco made it clear to the Mexican government they would resist the multi-billion dollar plan to build a new international airport in Mexico City. They knew the Mexican government's plan would lead not only to displacement from the land, kept so far thanks to a relentless social struggle, but it would also annihilate their livelihoods.

As a result of rallies, campaigns and demonstrations that gained national and international support for the *Peoples Front in Defense of the Land* (Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra - *FPDT*), the airport, announced to be built in October 2001, was subsequently cancelled in June 2002. This event represents a historical conquest of neo-liberalism by the social movements.

Nonetheless, last September, after 12 years of continuous harassment against Atenco and the *FPDT*, the Mexican Government launched a project to build a new, bigger and more ambitious airport. Designed by Norman+Partners, FREE and Netherlands Airport Consultants, the US\$9.1 billion project will initially consist of three runways that will eventually be expanded into six.

Once again the *FPDT*, while preparing to prevent Mexican and international capital from taking their land, is telling the government and its new associates: "Our lives and our land are not for sale".

The conflict first started in 2001, when President Vicente Fox announced the construction of a new international airport for Mexico city, which consisted of a US\$2.8 billion project to be developed in the rural community of San Salvador Atenco, affecting also Texcoco and Chimalhuacán. Rather than asking for compensation, farmers from these communities formed the *FPDT* to warn about the government's lack of previous consultation with the farmers.

They also warned about the negative consequences this project would have on the environment of the valley of central Mexico, as it would be built on the remnants of what was Texcoco Lake. An airport would put an end to the livelihood of the farmers, and also to any further possibility of ecological recovery in the valley. Furthermore, Mexico City would lose the chance to find new and much needed water supplies.

Between October 2001 and August 2002 the *FPDT* blocked main roads and highways to stop the project. They also organized rallies at the State Governor's Office and in Mexico City. But the local and federal authorities responded with police brutality, resulting in the death of one farmer and several political prisoners.

Protests and demonstrations increased in number, as well as the expressions of solidarity from other campaigns and movements. The machete that farmers use to clean the crops became a symbol of national resistance against neo-liberalism. Despite being criminalized by the mass media, the *FPDT* achieved the cancellation of the project. They became a celebrated example of popular resistance. Other collectives and struggles sought to learn from their experience and reverse similar projects across the country.

In May 2006, the *FPDT* partook in the struggle of flower vendors in Texcoco that, against previous agreements with the local government, were denied a place on the square where they had

worked for the last 20 years. The protest lead by the *Front* was again brutally repressed, and Atenco was flooded with more than 3000 policemen. Abusing their power, both the local and federal governments caused the death of Alexis Benhumea and Javier Santiago, a 14-year-old boy, and detained more than 150 people. According to victims' testimonies and the reports of human rights organisations, police forces inflicted physical and psychological torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, and sexual violence and torture against 27 women.

After an intensive national and international campaign and five years of continuous effort, in 2010 the Supreme Court of Justice freed 12 members of the *FPDT*, sentenced to more than 60 years in prison, yet it did not prosecute those responsible for the state repression: the former President Vicente Fox, the former governor of the Estado de México and now president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, and those responsible on police forces at municipal, local and federal levels.

From the beginning of their struggle until today, the *FPDT* has continuously faced repression, and they have also served as the government's example of punishment to the rest of Mexican society, now in turmoil and anger. The Mexican Government completely failed to bring justice to these victims of the abuse of power, and insists on building an airport, once again threatening the farmers' livelihood and the sustainability of the Valley of Mexico.

On the other hand, the *Union of Scientists Committed to Society* (Union de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad - UCCS), based in Mexico City, issued a document proving the project should have been rejected if official criteria were applied correctly. Mexico City in its entirety depends on the water basin where the airport is going to be built, and the government has not explained how they would find the amount of water needed for the city and the new airport. Furthermore, the plan would introduce a number of foreign species to the area that would cause a major ecological disaster. The airport would end all possibilities that Mexico City could recover from its ecological tragedy. Peña Nieto's new airport, like most mega-projects in Mexico, should be seen as a way to further enrich the rich and as a political tool to repress society.

Today, the *FPDT* needs supporters more than ever. Once again, the *FPDT* has announced they will continue their struggle against dispossession, reaffirming that their lands and lives are not for sale. With them, [London Mexico Solidarity](#) invites everyone interested in campaigning against airports and for land and human rights to keep informed about this situation, to get in touch with the Mexican and Atenco solidarity groups working across Europe, and show your support to the *Peoples Front in Defense of the Land*!

¡Zapata vive! ¡La lucha sigue!

* By London Mexico Solidarity, with information from [Centro Documentazione Conflitti Ambientali](#)
More information about LMS at <http://www.londonmexicosolidarity.org/>
For further information about *FPDT*: <http://atencofpdt.blogspot.co.uk/> (In Spanish)
<https://dorsetchiapassolidarity.wordpress.com/?s=atenco> (In English)