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## A New Earthquake Hits Haiti: Monsanto's deadly gift of 475 tons of genetically-modified seeds to Haitian farmers

by Fr. Jean-Yves Urfie

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Haiti's earthquake on 12 January this year has been a lucky business break for some. The transnational firm Monsanto is offering the country's farmers a deadly gift of 475 tonnes of genetically-modified (GM) seeds, along with associated fertiliser and pesticides, which will be handed out free by the WINNER project, with the backing of the US embassy in Haiti. Do Haitians know Monsanto made the "Agent Orange" defoliant sprayed over Vietnam by US planes during the war there, poisoning both US soldiers and Vietnamese civilians?

Do Haitians know that these GM seeds have been declared dangerous by many countries? They often come in kits along with a Monsanto herbicide called "Roundup," which contains glyphosate. In my native Brittany, it has already polluted the water table. But Monsanto insists its product is biodegradable. It is being sued for this by anti-fraud officials in Lyon.

A former employee of Monsanto, Linda Fischer, has just been named to head the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which monitors environmental issues. It's like giving a cat the job of looking after a mouse's welfare.

Monsanto has already begun distributing its GM maize seeds around Gonaïves, Kenscoff, Pétienville, Cabaret, Arcahaie, Croix-des-Bouquets and Mirebalais. Soon there will be only Monsanto seeds in Haiti. Then it will be goodbye to farmers' independence. Monsanto recently invested \$550 million in Brazil to manufacture the Roundup herbicide in the northeastern state of Bahia. But the country seems to be fighting back against the firm.

Monsanto is publicising the seeds as a generous gift. But Haitian farmers wishing to use them for future harvests will have to pay royalties to Monsanto. The Monsanto representative in Haiti is Jean-Robert Estimé, who served as foreign minister under the Duvalier family's 29-year dictatorship.

**Fr. Jean-Yves Urfie** is a member of the Holy Spirit Order and former chemistry teacher at Collège Saint Martial, Port-au-Prince.

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