“A comparison between two artificial constructions”, Dominique Béroule, November 2006

Video duration 7:12

Dear Japanese friends, I am Dom of Chevreuse, speaking from Paris, France.
I'm now cycling towards a famous monument you may have heard of, which is named "the Eiffel Tower".

When talking about Genetically Modified Organisms, there’s an expression which may be useful; this expression is: "Artificial Genetic Construction" (AGC), referring to the man-made chain of genes pieces originating from different species, which is put into a target organism. If this target organism can stand the intrusion of the AGC, then it becomes genetically modified. It becomes a GMO.
An AGC shouldn’t be confused with a natural gene. If a gene is safe in its natural DNA environment, it doesn’t mean that an AGC which contains a restricted version of this natural gene will necessarily be safe as well. This is the assumption initially made by Arpad Pusztaï for trying to explain these unexpected health troubles found in laboratory animals fed with GM food.

There's a general feature which is shared by any given Artificial Genetic Construction and the Eiffel Tower, which is that they are both based on scientific knowledge. But contrary to an AGC, the Eiffel Tower relies on well known and complete scientific models, which makes its behavior fully predictable. In fact, its profile was calculated to withstand winds running up to 400 km/h. So, it’s very stable. Beside this, it is now recognized that an AGC is particularly unstable and may vary across time in a way which is not predictable.

The Eiffel Tower is well located in time and space. It is clearly associated with a single location on earth; it’s very visible: you cannot miss it from all around Paris. Not only in space, but it’s also restricted in time, within a certain interval. It’s been built at the end of the 19th century on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition, and has been designed for being easily dismounted, if necessary. So, we know where it is, where it stands and we can control how long it will last, whereas GM plants may widely spread in a non reversible way.

An instance of this uncontrolled propagation of AGC occurred this year at a global level. Long grain rice cultivated in five states of the USA has first been contaminated by the so-called LL rice 601 owned by the Bayer company. This rice has then been exported towards several countries, including European ones and Japan. Japan and Europe have swiftly reacted to this contamination by stopping the import; but so far, since January, 140 000 tons of contaminated products are present in our food chains and have not been recalled.
This is very worrying, and unfortunately not the only damage caused by the trading of GM crops these last months. Even food delivered by the United Nations Organization to South America has been found to contain AGCs, in Nicaragua.

But at the same time, what is comforting is the resistance of world citizens to GMOs in fields and plates, as expressed for instance during this Joint International GMO Opposition Day in which many citizens and one thousand organizations participated at almost 300 locations around the world. Thanks to this unprecedented mobilization, now there exists an international network of activists who are ready to support each other, exchange expertise, knowledge about their respective actions. Because one cannot believe that the problems caused by the trading of GMOs can only be solved at a local level. Having GM-free regions cannot be fully efficient if there remains a single region on earth where GM plants are cultivated and exported… and this is true as long as planes, trucks, honeybees, ground bacteria and the wind, still exist. So the topic you’re addressing in your meeting is quite central and definitely requires to be addressed at a global level.

So, I wish you a fruitful meeting.
Thank you for your attention.
Bye, bye.
…and please keep in touch with the rest of the world.