

## **A 50-Year long Tragedy**

### **Nuclear Accident Consequences of Mayak /Russia - a Photo Exhibition**

On 29 September 1957, at 4:20 p.m., a nuclear waste container exploded at the MAYAK nuclear complex in the city of Ozyorsk, Chelyabinsk Region, Urals, Russia.

This tragedy is the least known in the history of accidents at nuclear facilities. No official information on the accident was disclosed until the early 1990s, and then only in the face of mounting pressure from the public.

Radioactive material with an activity of around 20 million Curie was released into the atmosphere. Some of the radioactive substances were blown by the explosion up to an altitude of one to two kilometers, creating a cloud containing liquid and solid aerosol material. Four hours later, the cloud already had travelled a 100 kilometres; after ten hours, the radioactive substances came back down over a stretch of 300-350 kilometres, extending north-west from the MAYAK complex. The pollution affected an area of 23 000 square kilometres. Sections of three administrative regions (Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, and Tyumen) with a population of 270 000 spread over 217 settlements turned into a zone of radioactive contamination.

23 villages had to be evacuated because of the massive radioactive fall-out; they were then erased from the face of the earth. Around 10 000 people lost everything they had: personal belongings, livestock, and houses.

The MAYAK tragedy has continued into our time. Today, 50 years after the explosion, people are still living in areas contaminated by radiation, left to their fate by the state. They have been denied official status as victims affected by the accident and have received no kind of compensation whatsoever. Thus, they are condemned to live out their lives next to the MAYAK complex, in one of the most polluted areas on our planet. The complex still emits radioactive substances into the environment, but even this doesn't serve as an argument for the Russian authorities, who have closed their eyes to the suffering of their citizens. How long will this genocide go on, a genocide committed by the nuclear industry against those, for whose benefit it allegedly exists?

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The photo exhibition is about the consequences of the 1957 nuclear accident. For many years this accident remained the most severe nuclear accident to have occurred anywhere. It was also the least known, as was the fate of those it affected. The pictures in the exhibition are intended to show what is happening in the radioactive areas. They portray only a few of the thousands of people living in the contaminated villages. While the official press renders homage to the bravado of the high-tech nuclear power industry, people are still dying and children with

abnormalities are still being born next to MAYAK in Chelyabinsk Region. As a response to protests from environmental organisations, the Russian Federal Agency for Nuclear Energy (Rosatom) is staging a showy resettlement of the village of Muslyumovo – shifting it some two kilometres, which will do little to improve anyone's situation, except that of the construction companies that receive the contracts for the resettlement works – and the officials who stand behind them.

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Please find the exhibition on internet: <http://ecodefense.baltic.net.ru/stash/exhibition>

The exhibition was created after two photographers made a journey to the polluted villages in Chelyabinsk Region in August of 2007.

Concept, design, and organisation of the exhibition: Environmental group "Ecodefense!" (Russia) with the support of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, Germany

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