

Forty years after the first bomb in Moruroa

A conference to promote recognition and justice for all victims of nuclear tests

More than thirty speakers, scientists, legal experts, parliamentarians and members of associations from French Polynesia, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, the United States, Japan, the Netherlands and France debated on June 29-30, at the President's palace in Papeete, on the rights of the victims of nuclear tests to be recognized by nuclear powers.

The role of scientists in our search for truth

The aim of our struggle is to bring to light the truth about the consequences of nuclear testing and the role of scientists and researchers is crucial for this struggle.

During this conference, we heard scientists explain very clearly that contamination and irradiation had widespread consequences including on the gene pool of the victims. Today, damage found on the chromosomes of Polynesian thyroid cancer patients who lived 1000 km away from Moruroa is ten times higher than damage found on average nuclear workers, told us Professor Claude Parmentier, oncologist at the Institut Gustave Roussy in France.

Researchers tell us that many of those who worked on nuclear sites die earlier. Average life expectancy for the veterans from New Zealand is for example 51 years! - and for most of them a life marred by suffering and cancers.

Researchers tell us that conducting credible surveys is becoming more and more difficult as the impact of radiations that were absorbed 20, 30 or even 40 years earlier is getting more difficult to discern from damages due to old age or other illnesses. This unfortunately supports the interests of nuclear states that trivialize the impact of their tests and use "national security" as a pretext to deny access to crucial data concerning the tests so that research work that could contradict the official version of "clean" tests is being delayed.

Current research work and particularly research work showing damage on gene pool is crucial in order to make nuclear powers acknowledge responsibility towards the victims.

Time for legal and political action

As we all know, it takes a long time for scientific research to be completed. M. Jean-Paul Teissonnière, lawyer of the association of former nuclear test workers Moruroa e tatou, reminded the participants of the conference that solutions to the problems of the victims and calls for compensations should not depend solely on scientific evidence. Political action, political decisions and legal argumentation are also ways of bringing forward truth and justice.

Mrs Carah Ong pointed out at this conference that compensation by the American government for the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands and the populations affected by test fallout in Nevada was not achieved primarily by the result of scientific studies. From the moment the American Congress acknowledged that atmospheric tests were not clean and admitted the presumption of a link between a number of specific cancers and the tests, the rights of the victims could be acknowledged.

Today, a similar political move by French authorities is indispensable for the rights of the victims of French nuclear tests to be acknowledged.

This reflection highlights the importance of lobbying by our parliamentarians. It is vital for our elected representatives to set up enquiry commissions, to table bills at their Parliaments and to start various actions in order to respond quickly to those who are confronted in their daily lives with the impact of nuclear testing. Lobbying and legal actions are necessary in order to convince the authorities to take responsibility on the nuclear policy conducted by their predecessors.

The role of civil society

Yet parliamentarians reminded the participants of the conference that they were limited in their action without the support of citizens and civil society organisations. It is the role of civil society to speak out about the impact of the tests on health and to demand compensation for victims, workers and affected populations.

Testimonies and information given at this conference are indispensable for the public to realize the actual impact of the nuclear tests as well as show the elected representatives how urgent it is to meet the expectations of the victims. The suffering and strong discontent of the former test site workers moved the parliamentarians as well as the public. The strong words that were said will have to give a human face to the law we will have to implement in order to do justice to the victims.

International solidarity is indispensable

An impact of nuclear testing on health and environment are experienced by many peoples in the world. The testing nations are of course the ones who should compensate the victims. But there is also a responsibility by the international community and the leaders of great powers who have led the world into the race for nuclear armaments, which is today still taking place. Similarly to the bill on anti-personnel landmines, the drafting of a bill on international assistance for nuclear test victims has been considered. However, in light of the fact that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has not yet been implemented, should the signing of this treaty not be a priority?

Our next conference at the French Presidential Palace?

Let us acknowledge that we have moved forward as far as the recognition of the rights of the victims of French nuclear tests is concerned. Here, in French Polynesia, considerable progress has been made. The former test workers and Moruroa e tatou are no longer alone in their struggle for the French state to acknowledge its responsibility. The elected representatives of the majority of the Assembly of French Polynesia are fighting on their side, as does the government of French Polynesia. We are not holding this conference in any unidentified location: we are calling for the rights of the nuclear test victims to be respected at the Presidential Palace!

Why not consider having our next conference at the Elysée, the French Presidential Palace? Why not? Our next meeting could be hosted by the French President, a female or male President, thus honouring the "country of Human Rights" in acknowledging France's responsibility towards the victims of nuclear tests.

Final remarks

The participants of the conference who gathered from the 29th – 30th June 2006 in Papeete at the invitation of the government of French Polynesia to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first nuclear test in Moruroa call on their respective governments to take the following actions so that truth and justice be given to the men and women who have suffered and continue to suffer today from the consequences of nuclear testing:

- That the victims of nuclear tests be heard and that compensation be given according to the seriousness of damage to their health
- That the zones, islands and atolls devastated and contaminated by nuclear explosions be cleaned so that we, and the future generations may live in a clean environment that is forever free from nuclear threat.
- That the international community be officially called upon in order to put an end to half a century of cold war. An international legislation should ensure that nuclear states acknowledge their responsibility with regard to the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bikini, Enewetak, from Nevada, Montobello, Emu field, Maralinga, Malden Islands and Christmas Islands, Johnston, Reggane, In Eker, Moruroa and Fangataufa, Kasakstan, from New Zealand, Siberia, Lop Nor (China), India and Pakistan.

Similarly to what has been done for the victims of anti-personnel landmines with the Treaty of Ottawa, the international community should take care of all the victims of nuclear tests.