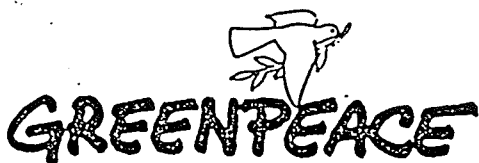


A MESSAGE OF PEACE
from
PALOMARES
(Spain)

Where 20 years ago four
nuclear bombs fell

**FOR A NUCLEAR FREE
MEDITERRANEAN**



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NUCLEAR DANGER

THE RESIDENTS OF PALOMARES, WITNESSES TO DANGERS OF NUCLEAR ARMS

Palomares, a small town in Andalucia, has gone down in history as a result of having suffered one of the most serious military nuclear accidents. On the morning of January 17th 1966, the sky over the town was filled with flames when aircraft belonging to the United States Army collided in flight while refuelling. A few days later it was found that one of the aircraft in the accident was carrying thermonuclear bombs officially four in number.

After three months of feverish activity, the 1,700 soldiers shipped into the area disappeared after having partly decontaminated the town and its surroundings.

Two of the bombs had disseminated into the environment plutonium and americium in a conventional explosion as the burning parachutes fell. The third bomb was recovered immediately while the fourth, lost at sea, was picked up 88 days after the accident.

In February of that year, the so-called "Indalo" research plan came into effect. Its aims are still unknown in spite of the fact that, since then, the United States Atomic Energy Commission has dedicated 150,000 dollars per annum to the study and observation of the effects of radioactive contamination on the environment and its inhabitants.

Eighteen years later, the residents of Palomares and Greenpeace are beginning a campaign to secure the right to file claims from expiring now that 20 years have passed since the accident. This campaign has obtained important results, but there are still matters remaining to be clarified. Meanwhile, those responsible on the Spanish Nuclear Energy Board have admitted that the residual radioactive contamination is greater than that permitted for the population. Its effects, which nobody wants to become public, are unknown. However, the risk continues.

A FEW DETAILS

The B-52 aircraft, as on so many other occasions, had been seen by the residents, were refuelled over the town. It appears that they had taken off the day before from a base in North Carolina and had refuelled over Zaragoza, continuing their almost routine flight towards the Soviet Union. One the aircraft reached the Turkish-Soviet border, they began the return journey to the United States base, being refuelled once more for the Atlantic crossing. The tanker aircraft were from the base at Moron, in Andalucia, and from Zaragoza. Their activity was repeated every day, with the express permission of the Spanish government.

When the accident occurred, operation "Broken Arrow" came into operation at one. In a few hours the first United States helicopters appeared and, in a few days, more than 1,700 soldiers were posted and established camp near the beach. All these forces, under the command of General Wilson, who had been present during several nuclear tests in the Pacific, were

assigned to the completion of a plan to gather up the remains of the aircraft and recover the bomb.

The town and the environment had been contaminated. In accordance with a plan drawn up by experts, the residents living close to the damaged bombs were removed from their homes. A few days later, a total of 1,950 persons underwent external contamination controls; 100 of these were selected and transferred to Madrid. Thus began the Indalo Project. The environmental decontamination work culminated with the collection of 1,750 tons of contaminated materials which were transported in drums to the United States. 854 properties were given certificates stating that they had been "decontaminated".

During the last 20 years, hundreds of residents have undergone controls in Madrid, without being informed of the results. It has been noted that some have been recontaminated as a consequence of breathing in dust raised during agricultural and other activities. The residents filed more than 500 claims for immediate nuclear dangers to crops, fields, livestock and property. The Claims Commission created for these purposes refused to accept the sums sought by those affected, and eventually paid less than ten per cent of the amount claimed (a total of 700,000 dollars). A complete and bitter experience, made possible by the absence of democratic liberties.

The Spanish government played down the importance of the Palomares accident. Apart from the famous swim, the legend of some hero ..., the truth is that the residents of Palomares have no happy memory of the event.

SOME RECENT HISTORY

On January 17th 1984, a full meeting of the municipal council of Cuevas del Almanzora resolved to declare the entire municipal district a Nuclear Free-Zone, and to claim detailed information from the Spanish Nuclear Energy Board (JEN) on the clinical histories of the residents who have been subjected to observation over these eighteen years in Madrid.

In spite of the fact that the clinical records have still not been handed over to those concerned, finally, and at the end of many delays and pressures, on November 6th 1985 officials from the JEN went to Palomares to hand over some clinical reports in summary form. There, and before the cameras of Spanish Television, one of the JEN officials admitted that the residents of the zone were exposed to radiation levels in excess of those legally authorized.

From that moment on, Greenpeace began to work to ensure that residents' rights, and those of persons affected, to file claims would not expire under the Spanish law, which excuses the authors of the damage from liability after twenty years.

Groups of experts prepared a report which showed the negligence of the authorities responsible for the matter and their incapacity to take care of this public health problem. On the other hand, the Ombudsman received a claim delivered by Greenpeace and the Mayor of Palomares, thus attending to the residents' concerns and initiating an investigation into the autho-

rities' conduct. Finally, a meeting of the residents of Palomares resolved to send a letter to the government asking for recognition of the fact that they were exposed to a radioactive risk, and for the right to file claims not to expire, given the continued presence of plutonium and americium in the environment which could cause delayed nuclear damage normally occurring many years following the inhalation of these toxic elements.

On the twentieth anniversary, the people of Palomares were proud and satisfied to be able to file a joint claim, with the complete support of the municipal authority. This claim had been submitted two days earlier to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, and had been delivered to the Embassy of the United States.

OUR OBJECTIVES

Once Greenpeace had access to all the documents and evidence available -some documents are inaccessible even now- a period was established for study and investigation in collaboration with a broad group of experts and with the Analysis and Health Programs Centre (CAPS) in Barcelona, the official advisors to the Mayor of Palomares.

Since then we have been marking out specific objectives, which have been widely discussed with the residents of Palomares in a number of meetings and assemblies. These objectives are as follows:

- 1.- The necessary measures to ensure that the residents are no longer exposed to the risk of inhalation of plutonium and americium. The area of Palomares must be decontaminated, once more.
- 2.- Sanitary surveillance of the population of the area must include all persons exposed to the risk of radioactive contamination. Information must no longer be kept secret, although the right to privacy must be respected. The surveillance must be carried out on-site, so as to avoid unnecessary travel; the residents and those affected must be given information on the purposes of the controls.
- 3.- An Investigation Commission must be appointed in the light of the doubts as to the validity of the data held by the JEN and the gaps in the information on the accident in all those aspects affecting the peace of mind, health, safety and rights of the people living in the zone.
- 4.- The residents must have access to the most complete analytical evidence for the prevention or detection of any nuclear damage.
- 5.- Those affected must have the right to file claims as long as they are exposed to this risk of environmental contamination and the internally accumulated contamination of the human body may cause delayed nuclear damage.
- 6.- The danger of the transport of nuclear weapons and of radioactive materials is underestimated. This is why it is necessary to secure the guarantees that no aircraft should fly over mainland

territory while carrying nuclear weapons, and the nuclear powers should be made to respect this decision. Of course this desire must include the ban on in-flight refuelling over Spanish territory and territorial waters.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED ?

Thanks to the letter of claim submitted by the men and women of Palomares, the Government and public opinion received concrete evidence of the area's claims.

Months later, the ministry of Foreign Affairs advised Greenpeace and the Mayor of Palomares that, on January 17th of this year, on the very day of the expiration of the residents' rights, a Verbal Note had been delivered to the United States Embassy stating that the rights of the residents of Palomares could not be deemed to have expired. This significant victory for pressure ensures the legal rights of the residents to file claims should delayed nuclear damage come to light.

To our way of thinking, the absurd period of 20 years established in the Spanish Nuclear Energy Act should be removed, since the effects of radiation may be revealed subsequent to such a term.

A second victory was that, for the first time, the JEN has handed over the surveillance plan. Although this has yet to happen with the 1966 agreements which led to the Indalo Project -between the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and the JEN- the residents do have, for the first time, the surveillance plan for 1986. This document has been analysed by experts who have been able to point to its strengths and weaknesses.

In the third place, we have succeeded in getting the Health and Consumer Council of the Regional Government of Andalucia, the senior health authority in the region, to undertake a sanitary study which will reveal the possible effects until the present of this accident, and the measures required to prevent a future risk.

The people of Palomares and their local authorities have been shown that they are able to defend their rights and health from a little-known and hidden risk. Their struggle is not just the defence of some individual rights; they represent mankind, each day more concerned about the dangers of nuclear arms and the effects of artificial radioactivity (Bikini, Rongelap, Mururoa, Chernobyl, ...). Their fight is a fine example to all the peoples of the world.