

Activities of Chernobyl Children's Fund, Japan

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Chernobyl Children's Fund, Japan (CCFJ) was established in 1991 by HIROKAWA, Ryuichi, a photojournalist, senior advisor of CCFJ at present. Since its establishment CCFJ has been actively supporting people of the stricken areas: donating medicines and medical equipments, supporting the administration of sanatoriums and local relief organizations, giving financial aid for children's recuperation and the medical care of children having had thyroid gland operations.

In 2006, twenty years after the accident, CCFJ has carried on some projects. We would like to impart information about these efforts, while referring, simultaneously, to activities of CCFJ in the past and future.

❖ **Chernobyl Photo Exhibition in Belarus**

As part of the 20-year campaign we organized and held a photo exhibition in Belarus in 2006. Chernobyl is becoming a mere disastrous past even in Belarus as well as in Japan. Or top government officials expect that the Chernobyl disaster should be over completely. How far can people in Belarus know about the accident when they are not given enough information? It is quite dubious. Hirokawa as a photojournalist had an ambition to make known the reality of Chernobyl by exhibiting his photos to doctors, specialists and all people concerned with hospitals.



Mother and child in the contaminated area. Photo by Hirokawa.

In April 2006, we exhibited the photos at the venue of the International Conferences held in Minsk and Gomel. Having made an official proposal to the conference office for the exhibition, our negotiation with the office began around June 2005. After number of twists and turns, it was realized thanks to much help of the volunteers. The exhibition was held for five days in Minsk and two days in Gomel. Many people came to see it during the period: participants of the conference from and out of Belarus, members of citizen's organizations from various countries as well as ordinary citizens. It was especially impressive to see school students, led by their teachers, watching the photos so eagerly. People of Belarus were moved, above all, by the



Volunteer students at the photo exhibition in Minsk.

fact it is all Japanese who took such touching photos and managed the exhibition.

✧ **Fund-Raising Activities in Japan**

Chernobyl Aid Calendar

Since 1996 CCFJ has been making aid calendars. This project of Hirokawa's photo calendar was intended to make known the state of the stricken areas, and at the same time to raise the fund from its profit. The 2006 calendar was entitled '20- years old stigma of Chernobyl'. We carefully selected photos which Hirokawa took during his visits to the stricken areas for over many years and the calendar received a high reputation.

Aid Concerts

All the events we organize are entitled with the word 'aid' on top, because they are not mere events but always assigned to be fund raising campaigns. Every year on/around 26 April we organize aid concerts. This year we planned the concerts of Ukrainian singers Natasha and her sister Katya. We managed to hold nine concerts all over the country with the help of citizen's organizations. Many audience came to the performances of Natasha and Katya with the collaboration of a bayan player, enjoyed Ukrainian traditional music and had chances to think about Chernobyl and relief activities.

In 1996, to mark the 10th anniversary of the accident, we invited 'Chervona Kalina', a children's traditional music group, from Ukraine. They performed in various places in Japan. Natasha was a member of this group then. This music group was born from a music teacher's proposal in Pripyat, now a ruined city, who appealed to the children of evacuated families to form a music group, hoping the children would recover their health and hopes and expectations through their music activities. The group is still active, and children are practicing to sing and dance. In April 2006 they performed a stage in Kiev, together with previous members of the group who are already grown ups.

As for the 20th anniversary campaign, we also organized a summer concert. It was another fund raising concert with collaboration of Belarussian ballet and Ukrainian songs joined with a Japanese citizen's choir. All our activities are greatly supported by volunteers. Without their dedicated participation, we have not been able to continue to hold aid concerts for these years. They ask shops around the concert halls to put



Rehearsal of Chervona Kalina. Photo by Hirokawa.

on posters, distributing leaflets to make known the concerts and so on.

Money collected through concerts is all used for children of stricken areas, for the purchase of medicines and the payment for recuperation.

CCFJ News "Chernobyl Children"

We issue a quarterly newsletter, a circulation of about three thousand, giving financial reports to donors. The reports mention the state of donation, the uses of the money, conditions and states of children of stricken areas, events etc. All the operations for issuing newsletter: editing, printing, posting, are done by volunteers and the staffs of CCFJ office.

CCFJ news from 1997 can be also read in our homepage [<http://www.co.jp/cherno/index.html>]

Chernobyl Photo Exhibition and Children's Art Exhibition

'Photo exhibitions' and 'art exhibitions' play the biggest role in our publicity activity. The photos selected for the exhibition were taken by Hirokawa during his visits to stricken areas that count nearly fifty times. A sister organization, Supporting Group of HIROKAWA, Ryuichi Nonnuclear Peace Photo Exhibition possesses and manages about one hundred pieces of exhibition photos and pictures each.

In 1996, ten years after the accident, an Ukrainian organization appealed to children over the country for pictures about the Chernobyl accident. A selection of those children's pictures was sent to CCFJ as a gift. Another selection of children's pictures was sent from a Belarussian organization, too. We have chosen from these selections one hundred pictures to lend out for exhibitions. Later they were gathered into a book of children's pictures and poems 'Ikiteitai' ('We want to live!' 1998, Edited by CCFJ, issued by Shogakukan) which has been read by many people.



**Hurt by the atom from Chernobyl.
By Orga Sokolovskaya, 14yr.**

These photos and pictures have been exhibited at various places such as CCFJ organized charity concert halls, citizen's organizations, city halls, schools, kindergartens, churches and temples.

◇ **Relief Activities in Stricken Areas**

In the beginning of its foundation CCFJ tried to do any support as much as possible. Eventually it turned to focus on the aid for children having had thyroid gland operations. Those children having had their thyroid removed by operation would no longer be able to produce thyroid hormone; consequently, they have to take hormone drugs throughout their lives. They also have to take vitamins and calcium tablets at the same time. Moreover, the children are facing the risk of breaking out of some other disease or spreading cancer to other organs. Some children must have many operations, and even more, many years after operations they might have to suffer from various symptoms: headache, heartache, exhaustion, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to support these children by providing them with medicines and occasions for

recuperation.

Support for the Children Having Had Thyroid Gland Operations and Support for Young Families

< Special recuperation >

CCFJ staffs with several volunteers have been visiting the stricken areas in summer to join the special summer recuperation at the sanatorium 'South'(Yuzhanka) in Ukraine and the sanatorium 'Hope 21'(Nadezda XXI vek) in Belarus. This special summer recuperation, having been held since 1996, is planned for the children having had thyroid operations, and CCFJ bears the total recuperation charge. However, as the situation has been changing, we now also accept elder age groups and children gone through other operations than thyroid. About fifty to eighty children in Ukraine and about seventy to one hundred fifty children in Belarus each year joined the recuperation.

< Foster parents system >

Originally it was the system to support the children gone through thyroid gland operations by sending fifty dollars per month to each child for the period of at least two years. This system, too, has been changed from supporting only 'the children having had thyroid operations' to 'the children of families in need and victims of Chernobyl'. A hundred children at present are supported by this system and two hundred children in total have had this aid.

< Scholarship system >



Sanatorium "Hope 21" in Belarus

This system of scholarship is addressed to the children having had thyroid operations. We send fifty dollars per month to each student, the same amount as foster children aid, to support until their graduation from colleges. Presently fifty students are receiving the scholarship and eighty students in total have been granted with this scholarship.

< Support for young families >

We have been supporting children who had thyroid gland operations mainly through above-mentioned three systems. Most children we have been supporting have now grown up and it is a time we should even consider the renaming of our organization. We have been discussing the matter these few years. Considering the present situation we have come to a conclusion that we should continue to support those grownups' children having had thyroid operations who are now facing such problems as marriage and birth. We think continuous support is important for them. If one of the parents has thyroid disease and their baby has



Sanatorium "South" in Ukraine

health problems, it is impossible for them to work fully as a healthy person even though they need money for medical treatments. CCFJ thus decided to support actively such young families with babies. At present we send fifty dollars per month to twenty four families.

In 2006, a couple who both had thyroid operations, experienced recuperations and received medicines with support of CCFJ have got married. It is happy news and we would like to watch over them fondly.

Supporting Local Relief Organizations and Management of Sanatoriums

We have been supporting the running expenses of the Sanatorium 'Hope 21' which has a function of school as well. It was built by Belarusian government in cooperation with a German citizen's organization. CCFJ has been collaborating to support the sanatorium from the beginning of its foundation. At first we mainly donated equipments needed for the sanatorium. Now we 100% support the special recuperation expenses and part of the rotational recuperation expenses of children who join in school class units from contaminated areas.

The amount of the backup money from Belarusian government and the donation from Germany are gradually decreasing. However, this is the best place for children for recuperation where they can also study and have safe food. Moreover, it is a beautiful place surrounded by forests and a lake and it can accommodate three hundred children at the same time.

In Ukraine we support the sanatorium 'South' located by the coast of the Black Sea. The sanatorium is managed by a support group in Kiev, 'the Help for Families of Chernobyl', and run only during summer. From the end of June to the end of August fifty children at a time recuperate in rotation. With cooperation of the local support group and hospitals CCFJ choose the children, attend the recuperation with them and proceed to send doctors to the sanatorium. The special recuperation for the children who had thyroid operations is also held there.

Since the summer 1996 we have been organizing a 'Japanese Week' at 'Hope 21' in Belarus and at 'South' in Ukraine during the special recuperation. Japanese volunteers join to carry out this special week. In 1998 eighteen volunteers flew from Japan to introduce Japanese culture and had enjoyable time with children.

CCFJ is helping the activities of local relief groups. We support the salary of the staffs, the office rents and communication expenses. We have sent them office equipments such as fax and personal computers. Through the groups we also send medicines to the children having had thyroid operations.

❖ **Relief Activity in the Future**

CCFJ have been supporting various local relief groups, some with big budget and others with small. We are also supporting some groups which were found during Hirokawa's visits to stricken areas to be in need of emergent help. Many relief groups and hospitals are receiving our help. All our supporting activities are always arranged through the local groups including personal support to foster children.

Unfortunately the amount of the donation has been on decline since 2001. Twenty years have passed from the Chernobyl accident. There are many people in the world suffering from wars, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters. We must give priority to people who need the most urgent help. We will not forget to turn our eyes to the world and, at the same time, we will never turn our back to the victims of Chernobyl. We are going to continue our best efforts to support them.

(Translated into English by HASEGAWA Kaoru)