



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 3rd October 2012

NFLA remembers the 60th anniversary of the first British atomic weapon test and the ongoing veterans campaign for justice

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) welcomes the opening of a memorial to British nuclear test veterans at the National Memorial Arboretum as the sixtieth anniversary of the first British atomic weapon test takes place this week. At its most recent meeting, the NFLA Steering Committee agreed that the anniversary should be commemorated by giving its full public support for the work of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association (BNTVA) (1).

The British atomic tests programme, known as 'Operation Grapple' began shortly after the end of the Second World War as the UK Government sought to ensure it possessed its own nuclear weapons programme independent of the United States. Exhaustive research took place on the programme and the weapons were tested at sites in the Pacific Ocean including off the Monte Bello Islands, Maralinga, Western Australia and off Christmas Island. Over 20,000 UK military service personnel, civilian scientists and merchant seamen witnessed the tests throughout the 1950s and 1960s, following the first successful test on October 2nd 1952 (2).

The BNTVA was established due to concerns from many ex-service personnel of serious health problems that a number of them have endured may have been derived to exposure to radiation from the tests. A long and ongoing BNTVA campaign for independent scientific research, compensation and above all for a public acknowledgement of justice from the UK Government still continues. In March 2012 the UK Supreme Court voted narrowly to reject a legal claim from the BNTVA to take forward cases of veterans claiming compensation for illnesses incurred, due partially to the length of time that has passed since the atomic tests (3).

The UK Government is the only government from a state that has conducted atomic weapons tests that has not readily given adequate compensation to veteran servicemen who witnessed them – the United States, France, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and even the Isle of Man have all done so in the past decade. The NFLA remain saddened that after such a long period of time members of the BNTVA still have not been adequately compensated for the illnesses they believe are related to radiation exposure.

On October 3rd at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire the BNTVA will unveil a memorial to all its deceased members. The NFLA supports the construction of this memorial as a fitting testament to their campaign – many NFLA members have also erected memorials to local deceased members across the UK (4).

NFLA Chair Councillor Brian Goodall said:

"The NFLA fully supports the work of the BNTVA in its quest for justice and compensation to its members and families. 60 years after the first UK Government atomic test I find it staggering that this small group of proud men are still waiting for justice. I call on the UK Government to show compassion and leadership and end all the legal posturing by granting acknowledgement to the BNTVA's call for justice. It surely is about time they did.

The anniversary of the first test is also a reminder that the UK remains a nuclear weapon state. I also urge all political parties to review their position on the replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons programme and advocate more peaceful alternatives for a future nuclear weapons free world."

Ends

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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Further information - Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary - 00 44 161 234 3244 or 00 44 7771 930186.

Notes to editors:

- (1) British Nuclear Test Veterans Association website, <http://www.bntva.org.uk>
- (2) Ministry of Defence, 'UK Atmospheric Test Programme',
[http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/HealthandSafety/Nuclear Tests/](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/HealthandSafety/NuclearTests/)
- (3) BBC News, 'Veterans lose nuclear weapons test damages bid', 14th March 2012
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17364359>
- (4) There are memorial stones to British nuclear test veterans across the UK, such as at Leeds, Manchester and Paisley.

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