

- Another Moruroa nuclear veteran dies of leukaemia



Moruroa nuclear veteran Alfred Pautehea who was vocal in the nuclear veterans' plight to have their illness recognised as nuclear-related, has died of leukaemia on 21 February in his island home of Atuona (Marquesas Islands, North of Tahiti).

Pautehea became aware of his illness, a blood cancer, three years ago. Between 1968 and 1979, he had been working on several military airstrips of French Polynesia's Moruroa and Fangataufa nuclear experimentation site, which was operational between the 1960s and was dismantled early 1996. In November last year, Pautehea was in Paris, as part of a nuclear veterans' press conference, when he offered his testimony on French national television. He said at the time he was now aware of his illness and did not know how much longer he had to live. "But I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing this for my family, my friends and the generations to come. What we want is a (French) law that finally recognises our illnesses as work-related". "I'm worried about my six children, especially because two of them show abnormalities that are proving difficult to explain".

Moruroa e Tatou groups some three thousand nuclear veterans from French Polynesia, the association said in a release. In November, Moruroa e Tatou had also initiated legal action in a Paris tribunal, on the same matter. "I was part of the team that had to repair Fangataufa's airstrip after the nuclear tests. We were close to areas that were marked as contaminated. The area was materialised by red and white ribbons", Pautehea said. "Our French metropolitan friends working on the same site were given heavy equipment, overalls and a small portable radioactivity meter. We, the Polynesian workers, were given no protection and no meter". Pautehea said he and other locals were given desalinated water to drink, whereas French workers were given bottled mineral water. "We just took what we were given. I did this job without asking any question, because we trusted our bosses who told us we had nothing to fear". "Also, we knew we couldn't ask too many questions, because if we did, we would have been sacked on the spot and banned to work in Moruroa again". In April last year, French nuclear veterans association AVEN vowed to intensify its campaign and build on recent favourable court rulings. AVEN (association of nuclear tests veterans) said it now intended to launch more legal actions against French military pensions tribunals. The association wants to claim damages for nuclear veterans who had served in the French army at the time of nuclear testing in the African Sahara desert and in French Polynesia's Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls.

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