UK Government threatens recuperative holidays for Chernobyl Children

Thursday 15 August, 2013

Children from Belarus, the country worst affected by the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, are currently enjoying happy summer holidays with English families.

Many of the children are in remission from cancer or have diabetes or other serious health problems and four weeks of fresh air and clean food gives a great boost to their immune systmes, helping them to fight further illness.

'For the teenagers who have had cancer' said Chernobyl Children's Project National Co-ordinator, Julie Gater 'the holiday is also of enormous psychological benefit. They are so impressed that families living 1,000 miles away are prepared so raise the funds, organise events and invite these young people into their homes. They get to see a different way of life, enjoy many new expereinces and make lasting friendships'.

When the Chernobyl nuclear power station blew up 27 years ago it spewed out tons of radioactive debris and dust which was blown right across Europe and beyond. The hillsides of Cumbria and Wales received significant doses and it was only last year that the farmers there got the final all clear for their sheep.

But the heaviest fallout landed in Belarus and it is the children there who suffer most – from cancers, diabetes, heart and respiratory problems and damage to their immune systems.

And some of those who were babies or young children at the time of the accident are now the young parents of children born with leukaemia or with genetic disorders.

Belarus will remain contaminated for many decades to come, so it is vital that charities continue to offer recuperative holidays abroad.

'That is why it is so disappointing'; says Executive Director Linda Walker 'that the British Government has decided to charge us for all the children's visas in future. Ever since charities started to bring children form the Chernobyl area the visas have been free, both in Britain and all across Europe. And now it will cost us £86 for a visa for every child who comes for a holiday. This is a big additional cost to the charities, and is a blow to us at a time when fund raising is getting harder, and has caused some Chernobyl charities to close down.

No other country in Europe is proposing to charge for visas for Chernobyl Children. We cannot understand why the UK Government is taking such a hard line on this'.

Fortunately the children are not aware of these problems and continue to enjoy our unusually sunny summer!'

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