

**Organisation: SOS Children of Chernobyl (SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V.)**

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When Rolf Konersmann heard of the town of Chernobyl in 1986 for the first time, he did not know that the consequences of the nuclear disaster would one day change his life.

He continued his everyday life until the spring of 1991 when his attention was called to the association "SOS` 86 - Children of Chernobyl" based in the Sauerland (in North Rhine-Westphalia, west Germany). An association which has worried and cared about the children of families from the contaminated region around Chernobyl already at this point of time.



To help, the organisation gave children and their families the opportunity to spend annually several weeks in Germany in order to offer their immune system a chance to recover from radiation exposure.

Rolf Konersmann was interested in the work of the association and together with his son and a friend he visited the founders of the association in Dorlar (Sauerland), Mr. and Mrs. Hussain, who informed Konersmann about the effects of radiation on the human organism.

After this meeting it was clear to Konersmann that the help for Chernobyl should also be coordinated in other parts of Germany, especially in Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate.

After a journey to Kiev, the preparation of the establishment of a registered society began. Although this process was hindered by the German association law, all formalities were completed in 1992. Proximately, the inaugural meeting and the registration at the local court took place on 1 September 1992 in Worms.

After a visit to the family of Prof. Voytenko, a doctor who works for a partner organization of "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." in Kiev, first contacts with the Chernobyl-relief organizations in Ukraine were established.

The just founded association's aims were and are to establish and maintain contacts between Germany and the Ukraine. To achieve this objectives, the association wants to cooperate with similar organizations that are engaged in the Ukraine and to organize holidays for convalescence for children of Chernobyl in German host families.

Furthermore, the club wants to help medical, humanitarian and social institutions in Ukraine which care for radiation-damaged children and their families. By organizing trips to the Ukraine and the maintenance of German-Ukrainian contacts, "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." wants to facilitate the communication between victims and their helpers.

The first 6 children from Chernobyl have been invited to Germany after having raised enough funds in the year of founding. This first action was greatly supported by the population and politics of the town of Lampertheim and with this positive response from the public, the association grew fast.

Meanwhile, the association "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." includes about 170 members. The number of children from Chernobyl invited to Germany has grown from 6 guests to more than 1300 children visiting Germany with their families in about 40 by the association organized recreation holidays.

In April, there will be the 78<sup>th</sup> association's transport of relief supplies to the Ukraine and in the coming summer, "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." is going to start the 38<sup>th</sup> informational trip from Germany to the Ukraine. Among other things the association has donated beds for a protectory, tractor for farmers, money and needed objects of utilities. For his engagement Rolf Konersmann, founder of "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." has received the honorary citizenship in Kiev; in Germany, he received the order of the Federal Cross of Merit.

In 2004, the association "SOS Chernobyl" has found highest recognition on an international level: The club was added to the list of recognized aid agencies by the UN and was honoured with the official UN seal.

In 2005 Konersmann was honoured with the Cross of Merit of the Ukrainian capital Kiev. He is the first foreigner to receive this top award given by the city of Kiev. During the ceremony distinction Kiev's Mayor Omelschenko said that no other German aid association has cared with so much effort for the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe than SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V.

But since in Germany, 25 years after the catastrophe of Chernobyl, with decreasing public interest the amount of donations for the families of the Chernobyl-affected families is greatly diminishing and some members of the association have terminated their membership, the work of "SOS Kinder von Tschernobyl e.V." is getting harder constantly.

Nevertheless, Rolf Konersmann is sure, that his association will cope with this problem and will be able to help people affected by Chernobyl in the future.