



Presented by: **Karipbek KUYUKOV / Atom Project, Kazakhstan**

Artist and honorary ambassador of the ATOM project

Karipbek Kuyukov is an artist and nuclear nonproliferation activist born without arms as a result of his parents exposure to radiation from nuclear weapons testing. He has devoted his life and art to making sure that no one else suffers the devastating effects of nuclear weapons testing. He was born in 1968 in the village of Yegindybulak, 100 km from the former Semipalatinsk test site. His parents were living witnesses of nuclear tests - his father worked as a driver and often traveled through the steppe into the territory of the test site, while his mother said that she saw a bright flash, after which it grew dark, as at night.

Before the birth of Karipbek Kuyukov, his family had two children, but they did not live to be 1 year old. When Karipbek was born, his mother experienced such a severe shock that she could not approach the child for three days. Then the doctors called his father and offered to give him an injection, but his father refused...

In 1989 he became an active participant in the anti-nuclear movement Nevada Semipalatinsk. Exhibitions of Karipbek Kuyukov's paintings have been held in Japan, the USA, Germany and Turkey.

In 2013, Karipbek Kuyukov became an honorary ambassador of the ATOM project.

The Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan - the leader of the nation, presents.

Atomic land. The Soviet Union's first nuclear bomb was tested here. Almost 500 explosions took place here. People lived here and children were born. The main weapon in the Cold War was the atom. But the only victim was its own people.

We *aul* (village) boys didn't know what it meant at the time, the Cold War. They were just saying that the Americans were the enemies. And that they want to conquer the whole world. Of course, if they have bombs, then we must have them too. Each nuclear explosion means hundreds of crippled lives. Thousands of children who, from birth, were condemned to torment. There are only two nations in the world who have experienced the horror of the atom. They are the Japanese and the Kazakhs. Somebody had to put an end to it. It is necessary to create nuclear free zones in other parts of the world.

The doctors offered to end my life with an injection so this boy would not exist. But my father refused. He looked at me and said, I'm taking him home. So I survived and stayed with my family. The military would arrive and take people away. They would take them somewhere. After the nuclear tests, they would bring them back. When they arrived to take these people they were wearing gas masks, special outfits, but people didn't understand what that meant. And then they were sent back home and given a hundred grams of vodka. They were told it would help protect them against radiation. When the villagers returned home, they saw all their chickens were dead, and all the birds were lying dead on the ground, and the dogs were half dead too, and half their fur missing. Of course, it looked very odd, but as you can imagine, these were the days of the Soviet Union and no-one dared say anything.



I think my mission on earth is to fight to become one of the last victims in the history of nuclear testing. To ensure that this nuclear madness never happens again. So we can look with pride in the eyes of a new generation, the children who will live after us.

The nuclear horror, the horror of the people, the horror of the mothers. Thousands of children were born disabled because of the testing at the Semipalatinsk test site. Some were fated to death, while others were given life by fate. So many years have passed, and I still can't imagine how my parents felt when they saw me in the maternity hospital. I know that the doctors tried to convince them to give me up. They said there were no chances and that they would suffer their whole lives, but my father wouldn't even hear them. I am grateful to them for that. Radiation caused severe genetic failures. According to scientists, echoes of nuclear explosions will affect more than one generation.

Sometimes I say that I cling to life with my teeth. That's true. But I don't consider myself a hero. I certainly don't. You just have to fight. Never despair, no matter what happens. After all, that's what life is for. Only now do you realize what an important decision it was. To give up the fourth largest nuclear arsenal. Ban testing altogether. Set an example to the whole world. Now the rest of the countries, too, must provide assurances.

Apocalypse. Judgment Day. The end of the world. In the 20th century, the earth was one step away from this. Atomic madness was sweeping the planet. Politicians were gauging their ambitions. And people waited for the nuclear winter. In the late 1980s, the subject of the landfill was one of the most pressing. Just imagine, the Soviet Union is falling apart before your eyes, everyone is talking about transparency and democracy. And here in Kazakhstan, in spite of everything, explosions continue. The military does not want to stop them. Exhausted mothers gave birth to sick children. The exhausted earth gave out its spirit. We were silent for a long time, and the first voice was heard. And at the first voice, I see the people gathered here. The possession of a nuclear bomb is a temptation for any politician. And now, 25 years later, you realize that it was the only right decision to give up nuclear weapons.

I call for the main goal of the 21st century - to be a world without nuclear weapons. The new generation. They are no longer children of the polygon. They will have a different future because they have a different present.

Disclaimer

This transcript is at the responsibility of Peace Boat and may not be completely the same as the original testimony. The original testimony was presented online at the World Nuclear Survivors Forum 2021 on December 2-3, where over 30 nuclear survivors from five continents around the world shared their voices with more than 1000 people. The Forum was hosted by Peace Boat in partnership with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The stories and panel discussions are all available for viewing on demand via Youtube or on our website here: <https://nuclearsurvivors.org>