



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Marie-Thérèse and Bengt Danielsson (Polynesia)†

Joint Award with the Rongelap People / Senator Jeton Anjain (1991)



"...for exposing the tragic results of and advocating an end to French nuclear colonialism."

Bengt & Marie-Thérèse Danielsson

Bengt Danielsson was born in Sweden in 1921, obtained a Ph.D. in anthropology and was director of Sweden's National Museum of Ethnology. In 1947 he joined Thor Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki expedition, ending up in the South Seas. He married Marie-Thérèse, a French national, in 1948, after which they lived on Tahiti, where she was very active in local politics and women's environmental organisations. The Danielssons published numerous scientific studies on Polynesia, including a six-volume history of the islands, and popular books, many of which have been translated.

In addition to their anthropological and scientific work, the Danielssons ceaselessly sought to expose and campaign against French nuclear colonialism, with its widely destructive social and environmental impacts.

Although the French had 'ruled' French Polynesia since 1842, they had little use for the islands, which were therefore relatively untouched by colonialism until 1963, when President de Gaulle decided to use them for atomic testing, having been denied further use of the Sahara by Algerian independence in 1962. The islands were suddenly overrun by French troops, bureaucrats and other immigrants. The indigenous economy took a nose-dive (from virtual self-sufficiency in 1960 the islands now import 80 per cent of their food) and all the evils of maldevelopment appeared: slums, malnutrition, traffic congestion, etc. The Danielssons' account of this situation was first published in 1974 and then a revised version in 1986 as *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* (Penguin, London).

The Danielssons were also concerned with the health and environmental effects of the nuclear tests. Starting in 1966, 44 atmospheric tests were conducted there and, after international pressure drove them underground, more than 130 tests were carried out on the two tiny atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa. The environmental damage has been enormous and there are undoubtedly widespread health effects. However, the French government blocked all independent investigation and study of these effects so that their full extent is not known.

Shortly after receiving the Right Livelihood Award, Bengt's health deteriorated considerably and he died in July 1997. As a friend wrote to Marie-Thérèse: "At least you have the memory of a wonderful man, who made a magnificent contribution to the world of scholarship and to the people of

Polynesia." Marie-Thérèse Danielsson was then following along their common goals: to help the Polynesians to find the right way to a fair and rational independence and, at the same time, to obtain complete information on the harm caused by the French nuclear tests over 30 years. She died in 2003.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD
AWARD FOUNDATION

