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WE SHOWED OUR ENTHUSIASM! YOUR TURN, RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT!

The author of this paper represents Novosibirsk Regional Social Committee for Water Protection which started its activity in 1992 and consists of 12 persons who combine their social work with professional positions in different educational, ecological and scientific research organizations. Some of us are professors of medicine, senior managers in governmental ecological organizations and scientific research institutes.

The main directions of our activities are:

- natural waters conservancy;
- control of Government activities in water resources consumption and natural waters conservancy;
- natural waters ecological education and popularization in society.

We are the coordinators of Russian Rivers Network in West Siberia.

Russian Rivers Network (RRN) is the association of numerous public ecological organizations from all over Russia. It joins ecological groups from 23 regions of Russia from Far East to the west boundaries of our country. More than 100 organizations are the members of this Association. And 17 organizations from the main rivers basins are the coordinators of RRN in all parts of Russia. RRN was established at All-Russian joint conference of water ecological public organizations in Nizhniy Novgorod in 1999. It was the beginning of all our joint actions. Our coordinative center is in Nizhniy Novgorod. RRN was established under real financial support of the Netherlands Program MATRA and special coordinative organization Milleukontakt Oost-Europa (The Netherlands). Our Holland colleagues helped us with their experience in natural waters restoration. They invited Russian activists of public movement to study at special training courses in the Netherlands in order to get special knowledge in water management and water restoration. They visited all our joint conferences and helped us to organize All-Russian joint actions.

The mission of RRN is:

- Keeping of rivers and lakes for present and future generations - through partnership, cooperation and active participation.
- Satisfaction of public need in fresh water.
- Control of Government activity in waters management
- Advocacy of human rights to clean water

According to this mission RRN organizes and realizes different water ecological projects. Different quantities of public organizations took part in every project realization.

The main principles of RRN work are:

- creative work of every participant;
- partnership equal in rights;
- concrete actions for waters protection.

Every public organization can join our Association without any limits. We are glad to get new and new participants every year. It means that our water ecological movement becomes stronger with every year. The geography of our participants' locations is very wide. There is not any big river basin which is not presented in our Association. But it should be mentioned that the most numerous and active public organizations work in European part of Russia and in Ural region. There are special centers of public activities in Volga River basin because this river was the most contaminated in Russia in soviet times. Thirty eight highly developed industrial regions are

situated in the basin of this river. So public movement for water conservancy and water protection arose in Volga River basin in late seventies and early eighties of the last century. And it is traditionally that the Center of our Russian Rivers Network Association is in Nizhniy Novgorod. It is symbolic that the center of All-Russian Association is not in Moscow but on the bank of Volga River, the most contaminated and the biggest river in European part of Russia. We trust in our Coordinative Center in Nizhniy Novgorod. And we see that our leader Elena Kolpakova is full of energy. She and her assistants are able to organize great joint actions, different conferences and meetings. They are fighting for ecological legislation improvement organizing special numerous applications of public groups to Russian Government and State Duma. It's very difficult to find agreement with Russian Government because many of our ecological bills are not directed to real water conservancy.

Every year RRN organizes All-Russian actions of cleaning. We try to clean the banks of big and small rivers, of different lakes and artificial reservoirs in all parts of Russia. These actions are called Days of Joint Activity. Such days are organized in different regions traditionally in late spring when rivers are the most contaminated by garbage from the flood area.

But in 2005 we decided to organize special great All-Russian joint project of public movement organizations from Far East to the West of Russia. We called it River Ribbon. The idea was to realize joint action as relay race which would be started in the Far East of Russia and finished in the most west regions. The most important was to show this our activity for population and for local governments everywhere. We developed the plan of this joint action at the Annual RRN Conference in February 2005. Representatives of all regions took part in that conference. And we decided that it's important to organize such action in order to attract attention of Russian society to ecological problems of water bodies. We tried to show that natural waters are in danger in Russia and that many things depend on population. It should be mentioned here that ecological culture is not highly developed in Russia. In spite of special courses of ecology at schools and colleges our population is far from real ecological thinking. We are not used to care for nature. And it's very difficult to understand people when they through out garbage just at the same place where they have their rest. So our main purpose was to organize wide campaign of ecological agitation.

RRN developed special project which was financially supported by MATRA Program, the Netherlands. Numerous public groups from different regions of Russia made their own applications for funding to the named Program. And all projects were supported as the parts of All-Russian campaign.

Every year Nizhniy Novgorod meets guests of Annual International Forum "Great Rivers". So it was in May 2005. And Non-Government organizations took part in that Forum. We used the Forum as the start for our All-Russian action. The idea was to send first quilts with the symbols of RRN, Millieukontakt Oost-Europa (our coordinator from MATRA Program) and Public Movement of Nizhniy Novgorod "Let's Help Our River" to the Far East of Russia by plane and then to start relay race of ecological cleaning from there. Every region should get River Ribbon and add their own quilt to it as the symbol of special cleaning actions on their rivers. We wanted to see the wave of public activity and to show to our society that we can do much if we are together.

It should be underlined that nobody of ecological activists gets any salaries. Our work is not paid absolutely even if we are granted by different funds for our actions. So it may be said that all ecologists work with gusto and enthusiasm only. We are joined by ideas of nature and waters conservancy and restoration. We understand that if society would be silent Government would do nothing in this direction.

The main centers of River Ribbon actions were: Khabarovsk, Chita, Irkutsk, Olyokminsk (Republic Sakha-Yakutia), Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Kamensk-Uralsky, Nizhniy Tagil, Perm, Kasan, Saratov, Volgograd, Rostov-on-Don,

Novocherkassk, Nizhniy Novgorod; and from the other side: Pechora, Cherepovets, Vologda, Yaroslavl, Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod. You can see that so many cities were involved in our campaign. The overall distance of relay race was more than 7 thousand kilometers. And it was not the end! We could not expect that our campaign would be continuing in Ukraine, Moldova and even in the USA.

The first stop was in Khabarovsk. It was the beginning so it was not easy to start without any experience. The leader of RRN Elena Kolpakova came to Khabarovsk personally and helped with organizing. And we understood that our idea was excellent: everything was realized so as we planned. Three big groups of school pupils, representatives of school ecological clubs, and three groups of students took part in cleaning actions. They worked on the banks of Amur River and on the other city rivers. And 6 reports were made by local TV channels about water cleaning actions. One report was shown by All-Russian TV channel. We could understand that it was the main result. We can do much work in order to conserve natural waters and to clean rivers banks but if population doesn't see this work all garbage will be on the bank again and local Government would not prevent natural waters contamination.

Then River Ribbon came to Chita. famous ecological center "Dauria" which works in Chita since early ninetieth met the relay race and organized water cleaning actions in Chita. Activists from Chita made everything with special responsibility. They invited many public groups of ecologists to take part in River Ribbon actions. And 6 different groups of school children and students took part. They cleaned the city river Chitinka. Then they River Ribbon to the nearest town Petrov-Zabaikalsky. 6 ecological groups and population of the town took part in the actions. Then they organized special ecological concert in order to attract attention to the important action.

The next stop was in Republic Buryatia, in its capital Ulan-Ude. Special national coloring was introduced to official ceremony of River Ribbon meeting by local national dancing group. Attention of local population was attracted to our action successfully. River Ribbon was brought to the village Turka on the bank of Baikal Lake. It was planned to organize ecological park on this place. It was the most contaminated place on the bank of our wonderful Lake; a petroleum storage depot was at this place earlier. And ecologists organized local population to plant larches and willows at this very beautiful bank of the lake. "No oil but clean nature only!" was their slogan. School children worked with their parents and teachers. And it is symbolic that River Ribbon came to this village just on the Day of Environment Protection which we celebrate on the 5th of June. 11 ecological groups took part in cleaning actions on Baikal Lake. They showed to the local population that it's possible to take care of nature themselves. More than 100 persons took active part in cleaning of banks and planting the trees.

Very interesting and significant actions were organized in Irkutsk where River Ribbon came after Buryatia.

It's important to understand that Siberian cities don't have any lack of fresh water. The rivers are full-flowing there. And industry is not so developed that it would be very dangerous for natural waters. But the main problem is to introduce special ecological culture to the society. It's difficult to understand that local population and its activity can change the status of waters to the worse. So ecologists must pay special attention to ecological education. It's very important to conserve this clean nature for future generations and for our planet.

Numerous TV channels and newspapers gave different reports about ecological actions in Irkutsk and its region. The main regional newspaper devoted its big leading article to our campaign. It was very interesting that even railway station managers decided to communicate the arrival of All-Russian relay race to Irkutsk when ecologists met River Ribbon at the station. Population of several villages took part in actions in Irkutsk region. People saw that there are many special ecological groups of students and children who are ready to work much for nature conservancy. Regional Government sent their representatives to take part in all actions. The most interesting was cleaning and restoration of wonderful spring. This action was showed by all TV programs in Irkutsk. And it was our first experience when one of the businessmen offered his

help and asked what he could do for nature. Baikal ecologists took this assistance with pleasure: all bags with garbage were removed to special dump on his truck. Try to understand please that Russian society is not ecologically educated yet and such assistance is not often unfortunately. There are so many rich people in Russia but unfortunately the most part of them can't understand that nature needs their active assistance and care.

Information about especially successful campaign in Irkutsk was very important for the next cities. We were getting new experience for future activities.

River Ribbon came to the North by plane. Flyers helped us to get our poster of blue cloth to the most cold places of Russia. Town Olyokminsk met River Ribbon. And 5 other villages took part in our actions. Imagine please, the distance between two villages is about 300 kilometers. But River Ribbon actions were everywhere around Olyokminsk. And all TV channels demonstrated them by their programs. Very wide area of Yakutia is clean up to this moment except those places where people live. So it's very important for local population to understand that it's easier to conserve nature than to restore it later. Accomplishment of springs with clean fresh water was one of the main parts of local ecologists' activities.

River Ribbon became longer and longer in every city because all participants added their own quilt with information about their good deeds to our blue Ribbon.

Krasnoyarsk, the other Siberian big city, used all positive experience and introduced its own peculiarity to our campaign. Ecologists tried to decorate the river banks after cleaning them. Special pleasure-grounds were built by them on the banks Yenisey and the other small rivers in the city for children and their parents. Population of the city had seen that they can do something very useful for nature and for themselves even when local Government did not pay enough attention to it. Ecologists in Krasnoyarsk organized special festival of children drawings devoted to ecological problems of natural waters. 6 ecological groups took part in cleaning actions. 4 TV channels demonstrated special reports about this activity and articles were published in 5 regional newspapers.

At the same time ecologists in Novosibirsk region and in different Ural cities organized their actions while waiting for River Ribbon in their parts of Russia.

11 ecological groups from Novosibirsk and its region took part in our actions. Children and their leaders from very far villages cleaned banks of their native rivers. Then they all came to Novosibirsk to meet River Ribbon. It was real bright holiday there. We organized special concert on the bank of Ob River. And the most active ecologists from villages and from the city got diplomas and presents from RRN for their work. Children could see themselves in TV programs and they were proud of their good deeds. The representatives of regional Government and many special water managing organizations took part in our holiday. They were surprised to see the enthusiasm of children and their leaders. It was a question who paid more attention to the natural waters well-being: ecologists-activists or representatives of water management.

Special actions for gardeners who have their plots near the river were organized in Novosibirsk. It's a great problem in Russia that everywhere gardeners don't understand simple ecological rules; they through out home garbage just near their plots. And it may be very harmful for river water and for nature. It's strange to hear but ecological culture of local population is at its very low level. It should be mentioned here that we saw numerous dumps full of garbage later after our actions in autumn... So the main problem is in special ecological legislation and ecological education. All participants of our public movement take part in ecological enlightenment. And maybe it's the main our task.

Great action was organized in the next city Omsk. Pupils of 9 schools and colleges came to clean the bank of Om River in the city. And then ecological groups met at their conference devoted to the results of River Ribbon actions. It should be mentioned that Omsk is almost single city in Russia where special Water Council works. This Council consists of Government and ecologists of public movement.

At the same time ecologists in Ural cities and in the European part of Russia had special actions while waiting for River Ribbon. They knew about all positive experiences from Siberian regions and tried to take everything into account.

On the 19th of July River Ribbon came to Yekaterinburg. It's the main big city in Ural Mountains. River Ribbon became 15m long poster of different blue quilts from the east part of Russia. 7 local TV channels made reports of the meeting the River Ribbon at the railways station of Yekaterinburg. Articles were published in 6 newspapers and different interviews sounded on 3 radio channels. So the attention of media to River Ribbon was very high. And Ural showed its activity! Ecological actions at local rivers were organized in four big cities. Concerts and cleaning the rivers banks, meetings with Government and with local gardeners – everything was done by Ural ecologists. It was great ecological holiday in wonderful Russian region which needs care because was industrialized many years ago. In one village together with local Administration ecologists organized special ecological festival devoted to the problems of native river. One of the peculiarities in Ural was the cleaning of tourists' stations at river banks. Ecologists realized that not all tourists understand the importance of leaving the clean area after their visit. And it's great problem for rivers there because Ural rivers are very popular among water tourists and bad traces of this tourism are obvious.

In one Ural city Kamensk-Uralsky ecologists placed River Ribbon along the bridge through the river. And all people could write their wishes for the river and for local Government in order to improve the situation with natural waters care. Population was very active.

On the 25th of July River Ribbon overcame Ural and the boundary line between Asia and Europe. European cities were waiting for River Ribbon and organizing many actions while this.

More than 10 big cities took part in relay race in European part of Russia.

The most interesting experience was in Nizhniy Novgorod region. One of the local Administration and its leader took very active part in all actions of ecologists. The Chairman of the Sergach Administration took part in all cleaning actions personally and organized the employees of local enterprises to assist public movement.
