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## ALGERIA: 60 YEARS ON, FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTS LEAVE BITTER FALLOUT

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By Elizabeth Bryant (Paris)

Decades after the first French nuclear test in Algeria, thousands of victims are still waiting for compensation from the government. Why is France dragging its feet over the issue?

Jean-Claude Hervieux still remembers joining a crowd of soldiers and high-level officials in Algeria's Sahara desert to witness one of France's first nuclear tests. Things didn't go exactly as planned.

Instead of being contained underground, radioactive dust and rock escaped into the atmosphere. Everyone ran, including two French ministers. At military barracks, the group showered and had their radiation levels checked as a crude means of decontamination. "You don't see nude ministers very often," Hervieux chuckled.

But as France marks the 60th anniversary of its first nuclear test □ near Algeria's border with Mauritania, on February 13, 1960 □ there is not much to laugh about. Critics have long claimed more than three decades of nuclear testing may have left many victims, first in Algeria and later in French Polynesia, where the bulk of testing took place.

But so far, only hundreds have been compensated, including just one Algerian. And as key nuclear testing anniversaries tick by, the unresolved fallout of the nuclear explosions has also fed into longstanding tensions between Paris and its former colony.

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