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Preserving the land and livelihood of the indigenous population of Altai

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The whole world hears about the sanctity of the land of Altai, Mt. Belukha, the Katun River, and about the spiritual culture of the people living on this ground. But only a few know about the conditions in which these people live there today. Their temperament is not to shout to the whole world, asking for help, which is why those of us who understand what irreversible processes are occurring in Altai, ask for help from friends, to keep even part—the most basic territories: the primordial land of the ancestors.

For several years our organization has been rendering direct help to the population of Ust Koksa region to register shares in the property and agricultural lands received due to privatization (Decrees and Decisions of the President of the Russian Federation 1991, 1992, 1993, fixed Ф3 №101 «About the turnover of agricultural lands» (from 7/27/2002)).

2009 is the last opportunity for inhabitants of Republic Altai for “free-of-charge” reception of land shares [free *after* ~\$2000/household registration costs]. In connection with recent social and economic processes in Russia, the majority of the population of the Republic—about 90%—have remained without work. People live only in a subsistence economy [growing their own food, herding, and hunting].

The drought of summer of 2008 has finally undermined many farms. The population has been forced to hand over most of its beef cattle for nothing.

The occurrence in Ust-Koksa region of secondhand land dealers (“black realtors”) has aggravated the situation even more. It is almost impossible to register the land quickly and legally.

Attempts to gather people into agricultural cooperatives [to reduce costs] do not always go right. Currently in Tyungur village, CPK “Tyungur+” has been created and includes 126 people. It is a positive moment, but there are a number of the complexities connected with official registration of papers: among the members of the CPK were many elderly who have since died, and whose documents (for the heirs) can only be made out through notary's offices and the courts, which complicates and delays registration of the lands

Our organization has used a different approach. We unite people in groups of 5-6 people in extended families, with an interested representative who makes all decisions connected with the land and official registration of papers. The last group of 10 people, who received help from Altai Mir University in 2008, has advanced far ahead of people who have been working on this land issue for 3-4 years.

We help people who wish to keep the lands, to work and live on it. Our association offers new ways to form special groups of Altai extended families. Many of them have kept practically all of knowledge and the skills connected with a traditional way of life, and possess historical technologies and crafts. These are various forms of local crafts, ways of hunting, fishing and preparation of game, meat, creation of apiaries and gathering of honey.

Today, all systems of traditional life should be connected with a functioning social complex in the area. Alongside creation of a life-support system, we offer local residents (with attraction of experts) development and realization of special social programs to improve conditions and standard of living.

The first step to cooperation with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is to address questions of development of rural and forestry economy—the foodstuffs that have been made in autumn 2008. We hope for a continuation of cooperation, but we will already be at a higher level when people are able to register their lands.