

EDITORIALE

LEADER

di / by

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1985-2015 - THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE STAVA TAILINGS DAM DISASTER (NORTHERN ITALY)

19 July 1985 - Stava, autonomous region of Trento (northern Italy), 12:22:22. Yet another disaster: the downhill flow of about 180,000 m³ of sand and mud due to the collapse of fluorite tailings ponds located on the slopes of Mount Prestavel. The ponds, containing sand and mud, lay at an elevation of 1,300-1,400 m above sea level. After undergoing liquefaction, the material reached the valley bottom at an estimated speed of about 90 km/h, destroying 62 buildings and 8 bridges and killing 268 people (including 28 children below 10 years of age and 31 young people in the 10-18 age range). This event, following the Vajont dam disaster (with roughly 2,000 casualties), took on tragic dimensions, because it involved man-made tailings ponds from mining operations. In particular, the settling ponds were built on a high slope of a valley accommodating two villages, Tesero and Stava. The disaster confirmed the crucial importance of managing dangerous activities by giving priority to safety, relying on knowledge and not merely on profit-making considerations. Almost invariably, these events have an impact on the future of people and of entire communities.

Pages of sorrow, solidarity and claims for justice have been written about Stava. In the thirty years since the disaster, the voice of technical experts and researchers but, above all, of the victims' families has never weakened. These people have courageously and resolutely moved the issue forward: *Stava is not to be forgotten*. The leitmotiv has been: *not to be forgotten, so that these disasters never happen again*. Needless to say, our solidarity and sympathy will never fill the gap of the loss of identity caused by the death of entire families.

In view of the thirtieth anniversary of the Stava disaster, we met an extraordinary person, *Simona Zelasco*, who became an orphan in a matter of few seconds, when she was 17. Courageously, year after year, overcoming her sorrow, Simona has reminded all of us and institutions that *we should not forget... we should draw lessons from what happened at Stava on 19 July 1985... we should learn to say no when the lives of people, the safety of our communities and environmental protection are at risk and yet, often, we forget everything*. Thinking of the thirti-

eth anniversary of Stava, she whispered: *at a certain point, we heard a noise, which was becoming stronger and stronger. We all went to the balcony. In front of us, there was another small home with a child inside. At 12:22:55, the wave of water and mud swept everything. All of a sudden, I was alone, orphan, not knowing what to do. I was 17. My life has since been dominated by bereavement: from my university graduation to my first love disappointment, I have remained an orphan. I have been unable to share all this with my beloved ones. At Stava, I lost my parents, my brothers, everything. I do not know whether there is a grief scale, but what happened left me with a profound sense of injustice and fear*.

Listening to these words produces a sense of emptiness and dismay in every person, especially among researchers who, throughout their lives and day by day, have been engaged in disseminating the achievements of knowledge, with loads of publications, reports, conference presentations and recommendations to institutions: perhaps *useless preaching*.



Simona Zelasco, thirty years after the disaster: an example of strength and courage