Minamata Disease still lingers

SHIRANUI SEA, Japan (AP) — The dawn is still only a faint glow beyond distant mountains, but fisherman Akinori Mori and his wife, Itsuko, are already hard at work on their boat, reeling in nets of squid, fish and crabs.

"We're doing our best to save our home," Mori said as he assembled his nets earlier this week.

Japan's Minamata Disease still lingers

Today, the legacy known as Minamata Disease is only a dim memory to the rest of the world, and few outside Japan would recognize Chisso Corp. as the company that polluted Minamata Bay and the Shiranui Sea with deadly methylmercury.

Starting 50 years ago, whole neighborhoods were poisoned by mercury-contaminated fish and shrimp caught in nets of squid, fish and crabs. Babies were born with horrifying deformities.

In the early 1950s, growing numbers of fish were found floating dead in the bay, which feeds Minamata. "The country isn't helping these people enough," said Toyokazu Takahashi, who organized victims' units in Minamata.

"Minamata Disease has been going on for 50 years, but it still hasn't been resolved," said Takahiko Kato, managing director of Holo Flowers, a non-profit aid center in Minamata.

"The story is still unfolding for these people.

The disease in Minamata began in 1950.

In the 1960s, growing numbers of fish soon flocked about its death, which brooked not the city's troubles.

Victims, shunned by neighbors who feared the illness was contagious, hid behind closed doors.

But some fish have been found with high concentrations of methylmercury, and unusually rapid deterioration of those with the illness.

"Today, the tragedy known as Minamata Disease is only a dim memory to the rest of the world, and few outside Japan would recognize Chisso Corp. as the company that polluted Minamata Bay and the Shiranui Sea with deadly methylmercury."