



UNFIT FOR LIVING

The Joan Wakelin Bursary was instituted in 2005 in memory of Joan Wakelin FRPS, a legacy from whom funds the Bursary. Run by The Society in association with *The Guardian*, it is awarded for a proposal for a social documentary essay on an overseas issue, and went in 2010 to Yevgenia Belorusets, for a project which has seen her photographing conditions in a house at 32 Gogol Street, in the historical centre of Kiev – Ukraine’s capital city

Number 32 Gogol Street is a rundown house in the heart of Kiev, Ukraine’s capital city. For over three years, Yevgenia Belorusets, 2010 recipient of The RPS and *The Guardian* Joan Wakelin Bursary, has been photographing and interviewing its resi-

dents, aiming to capture their everyday lives, their chores and recreation, and the interiors of their dwellings. “The goal of the project is to draw attention to the situation of the residents there”, she says, “as well as to that of residents of similar houses in Ukraine, and to support

their struggle for decent living conditions.”

Although the house has been declared unfit for living by the city authorities, some of its residents have lived there for more than two decades. “The house is too worn out to be reconstructed”, says Belorusets, “and must be



torn down. In such a situation, according to the Ukrainian housing code, residents should be evacuated and given flats of equivalent size in other buildings within the city limits.

“This is just one of numerous cases of violation of a basic human right to housing and adequate living conditions. While some have managed to leave the house, those residents without the financial means to find housing elsewhere remain. They regularly write letters to city authorities, initiate court trials and protest events, but their demand for decent housing remains unanswered.

“All services in the house - electricity, water, gas, heating - are out of order. Ceilings, floors and walls are cracked and rotten, and may fall apart at any moment. Several families live in communal flats in conditions of overcrowding.”

Although Beloruset's photographs are of a





specific building in downtown Kiev, she feels they are representative of the inadequate living conditions of millions of post-Soviet citizens.

“In Ukraine, over 40% of the population has to survive the cold without any central heating”, she says. “One in 10 is living with room temperatures below appropriate levels; 23% with frequent absence of electricity; 16% without tap water (almost 50% without hot water); 16% with cracks in the walls and leaking ceilings; and one in 10 shares a room with two or more other people.

“Living in dilapidated housing means that even most basic chores are often a challenge: a shower is taken quickly for fear that water will be turned off at any moment, while water for laundry must be heated in pails on a stove.

“The main heroine of the project died as a result of her dire housing conditions. Other residents are still hoping for change.”

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JOAN WAKELIN BURSARY 2011

With a deadline of 29 July, the 2011 Joan Wakelin Bursary offers £2000 for the production of an overseas photoessay. Entrants should submit up to 12 images, along with a written proposal for their photoessay (maximum 500 words) to: The Joan Wakelin Bursary, The Guardian Picture Desk, King's Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU. Those shortlisted will be invited for interview early in September, and the winning photoessay will be published by Guardian News and Media and the *RPS Journal* next spring.

If you have any queries, contact The Society's Awards Manager, Jo Macdonald, jo@rps.org, 01225 325721.



