

UN marks Chernobyl anniversary with a message of hope, fresh initiatives to help revitalize affected communities



The United Nations is marking the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident with a vital message of hope and an appeal to the international community to redouble efforts to assist the social and economic recovery of the regions hardest-hit by the 1986 reactor explosion.

Kemal Derviş, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, will commemorate the anniversary in his address at the General Assembly's Special Session on Chernobyl in New York on 28 April.

"As the UN solemnly marks the 20th Anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, we stand in solidarity with those affected by the tragedy and renew our commitment to assisting communities in their recovery," said Derviş. "Today, we also acknowledge that this is a time for hope as we move forward in building a better future for all those whose

lives have been changed by this tragedy."

The UN shifted its strategy on Chernobyl from emergency relief to long-term recovery and development in 2002, focusing on three areas: i) community economic and social development; ii) provision of factual and credible information and iii) policy advice. UNDP assumed responsibility for UN-wide coordination of Chernobyl issues in 2004.

UNDP sees a lack of social and economic opportunities - the result both of resettlements and economic restrictions imposed after Chernobyl, and of dislocations following the disintegration of the Soviet Union - as the biggest challenge facing affected communities in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the countries hardest hit by the nuclear accident.

Its emphasis on promoting social and economic development is in line with the recommendations of the Chernobyl Forum, a consortium of eight UN agencies and representatives of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine created in 2003 to help the affected populations, the region's governments, and international organizations gain a clear understanding of the impact of the Chernobyl accident on health and the natural environment.

"This year's anniversary is an occasion to remember the suffering and honor the victims of Chernobyl," said Ad Melkert, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Development Programme (UNDP) Associate Administrator. "At the same time as paying respect to the past, however, we need to take stock of the present and look ahead to the future. In assessing the prospects for recovery from Chernobyl, we see prospects for hope."

The Forum presented its findings, the work of hundreds of scientists, economists and health experts, last September. The findings, while emphasizing that Chernobyl was a "very serious accident with major health consequences", offered a largely reassuring assessment of the health and environmental impact of the accident. They provide further impetus to UN efforts to promote social and economic development as the most fruitful response to the Chernobyl legacy.

United Nations specialized agencies have launched a host of initiatives to assist sustainable development in affected communities, including the World Bank's recent approval of a \$50 million loan to Belarus for an energy efficiency project in Chernobyl-hit areas. The World Health Organization (WHO), which this month released the most comprehensive scientific report so far on the health impacts of the accident, is continuing efforts to improve health care for affected populations through the establishment of telemedicine and educational programmes, and supporting research. UNICEF has renewed its call for the three countries to adopt and implement universal salt iodization to fight iodine deficiency, which is the world's leading cause of mental retardation and is a danger to pregnant women and young children.

In Belarus, UNDP is working through the Cooperation for Rehabilitation (CORE) programme to help restore community infrastructure and boost local incomes through the creation of new jobs.

In Ukraine, UNDP's Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme has helped found 207 community organizations in 139 villages, with almost 20,000 members. These organizations address priority community needs and also promote a new sense of self-reliance by implementing locally-designed projects. Typical

examples include school renovation projects and creation of new health clinics and youth centres. The youth centres are especially important in small villages, where there is often no place for the young to gain computer skills, learn about healthy lifestyles, or participate in social activities.

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director Kalman Mizsei underscored the profound impact these programmes have on community attitudes, "transforming a deep-seated helplessness into a spirit of activism".

"By encouraging residents to take fate into their own hands, we are confident we are helping to build sturdy local foundations for a robust democracy," said Mr. Mizsei.

Mr. Mizsei called on the sustained generosity of the international community to support this restoration of the region's economic and social vitality. The appeal was also backed by a statement released on behalf of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl:

"The Secretary-General believes that the best way for the international community to pay homage to those who suffered from Chernobyl is to provide generous support to programmes designed to help traumatized communities regain self-sufficiency, and affected families resume normal, healthy lives."

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Please visit the UN Chernobyl website: <http://chernobyl.undp.org>

International Atomic Energy Agency on "Chernobyl 20 years Later":
<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/Chernobyl/index.html>

World Health Organization press release on Chernobyl:
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2006/pr20/en/index.html>

UN Volunteers on assisting recovery of Chernobyl-affected communities:
http://www.unv.org/infobase/news_releases/2006/06_04_26_UKR_at.htm

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- ▣ 28 April 2006: [Special commemorative session of the UN General Assembly devoted to Chernobyl- statement by UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis](#)
- ▣ 26 April 2006: [Statement attributable to the spokesman for the Secretary-General on the 20th Anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster](#)
- ▣ 26 April 2006: [UN marks Chernobyl anniversary with a message of hope, fresh initiatives to help revitalize affected communities](#)
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- ▣ 19 April 2006: [Ad Melkert, Associate Administrator of UNDP, gives message of solidarity on Chernobyl, expresses hope for the future](#)
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- ▣ 6 September 2005: [Chernobyl Forum opening statement by Kalman Mizsei, United Nations Assistant Secretary General](#)

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