



## Special commemorative session of the UN General Assembly devoted to Chernobyl - statement by UNDP Administrator Kemal Derviş



**NEW YORK, 28 April 2006**

Statement by Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and UN Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl on the Occasion of the Special Commemorative Session of the UN General Assembly Devoted to Chernobyl

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to have this opportunity to address this body today as we mark 20 years since the world's worst nuclear accident occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

As the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, I am pleased that the United Nations has been able to play a prominent role in the many commemorative events that have been held to mark this solemn 20th anniversary. It is an occasion both to remember the enormous human cost of the Chernobyl disaster and take stock of the many problems that linger two decades later. It is also a time to look ahead and seek the solutions that hold the promise of hope and recovery for the five million residents of Chernobyl-affected areas.

Chernobyl was a devastating tragedy. Hundreds of emergency workers risked their lives in responding to the accident, and some sadly perished; hundreds of thousands laboured to build the shelter around the damaged reactor; more than 330,000 people were uprooted from their towns and villages; 5,000 people who were children at the time of the accident have contracted thyroid cancer. Millions in the region were left traumatized by lingering fears about their health. We should never forget the loss and pain caused by the disaster.

The impact of the accident and the policies adopted to mitigate its consequences were compounded by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The region's mostly rural economy was devastated. Livelihoods lost 20 years ago have not yet been recovered. Farming villages have struggled to overcome the stigma of living in "contaminated" regions. Many communities have sunk into resignation and apathy.

In recounting the enormous human cost of the Chernobyl tragedy, however, it's important to remember that while this is undoubtedly a tremendously sad commemoration -- it is not a hopeless one.

Much has been done to cope with the legacy of Chernobyl. Granted, the initial silence on the accident was reprehensible, and most Soviet citizens as well as the international community remained unaware for days that the accident had happened. The cover-up endangered millions of people, and has left a deep legacy of mistrust among those who were denied timely, credible information. That said, both the Soviet government and, after 1991, the newly independent states of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine have devoted vast resources and great ingenuity to protecting the population from the effects of radiation and to mitigating the consequences of the accident. These efforts have been largely successful.

During the last two decades, the governments and populations of the affected regions have enjoyed the support of a broad range of United Nations initiatives.

As chronicled in the Secretary-General's regular reports to the General Assembly, many agencies have been active in relief and recovery, they include: the International Atomic Energy Agency, the WHO, FAO, UNESCO, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) UNICEF, UNEP, UNFPA, UN-OCHA, UNDP, as well as the World Bank.

UN member states, particularly Canada, the European Union, Japan, Switzerland, and the US, have also been generous contributors to Chernobyl recovery efforts. I would like to express my deep gratitude for their

invaluable support.

However, much more remains to be done to promote the region's recovery.

Renewed efforts should gain new impetus from the findings of the UN Chernobyl Forum. The Forum, an authoritative body comprised of eight UN agencies and the three most-affected governments, recently concluded that most of the five million people who live in Chernobyl-affected areas need not live in fear of radiation. Many of the areas previously designated as contaminated are now suitable for habitation and cultivation - though precautions are still necessary in some areas. These findings mean that many affected communities can regain the confidence they need to return to a "normal life". Copies of the Chernobyl Forum report are available on the side of the General Assembly Hall.

For UNDP, we see the biggest challenge now facing affected territories as being the need to create new jobs, promote investment and growth, restore a sense of community self-reliance, and improve local living standards. In short, the region needs sustainable social and economic development. There are many success stories worldwide that the region can emulate. We continue to strive to share these with the three most-affected countries. This is of course very much UNDP's mandate: to work together with the three governments, the affected communities, as well as with other UN agencies and international organizations, to find the right solutions to the development challenges posed by Chernobyl. Our field work in affected communities is already yielding fruit, and we count on the continued generosity of UN member states to expand these efforts.

Excellencies,

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. Today, while the anniversary is filled with sadness, 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.

Thank you.

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