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IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY
RESOLUTION 40/88 ON THE IMMEDIATE
CESSATION AND PROHIBITION OF
NUCLEAR-WEAPON TESTS
REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
RECOMMENDATIONS AND DECISIONS
ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AT ITS TENTH SPECIAL SESSION

Letter dated 14 May 1986 from the Permanent Representative of
the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the address given on Soviet television on 14 May 1986 by M. S. Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

I request you to have this text distributed as an official document of the General Assembly under items 57 and 64 of the preliminary list.

Y. V. DUBININ

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ANNEX

Address given on Soviet television on 14 May 1986 by
the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the
Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)

As you all know, a misfortune has befallen us: I am referring to the accident at the Chernobyl atomic-power station. It has been a painful experience for Soviet people and has caused anxiety to the world at large. It is the first time that we have encountered such an awesome force as nuclear energy which has got out of control.

In view of the extraordinary and dangerous nature of what happened at Chernobyl, the Politburo took charge of the entire organization of the work needed to ensure the speediest possible action to control the accident and limit its effects. A government commission was set up and immediately left for the scene of the accident, while within the Politburo a group was formed under Nikolai Ivanovich Ryzhkov in order to deal with operational matters.

All the work is being conducted around the clock. The scientific, technical and economic capabilities of the entire country have been called into action. Agencies of many Soviet ministries and departments are operating in the area of the accident, under ministerial leadership; also taking part in the operation are prominent scientists and specialists, units of the Soviet Army and branches of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

A huge share of the work and the responsibility has been taken over by party, government and economic bodies of the Ukraine and Byelorussia. The staff operating the Chernobyl atomic-power station are working selflessly and courageously.

So what actually happened?

Experts report that, during a scheduled shut-down of the fourth reactor-unit, the capacity suddenly surged. A large amount of steam was emitted, followed by a reaction, and this resulted in the formation of hydrogen, which exploded, damaging the reactor and thereby causing the release of radioactive material.

It is still too early to pass final judgement on the causes of the accident. All aspects of the problem - the design and project work and the technical and operational aspects - are under the close scrutiny of the Government Commission. It goes without saying that, when the investigation of the causes of the accident is complete, all the necessary conclusions will be drawn and the measures taken to prevent a repetition of anything of this kind.

As I have said already, it is the first time we have been faced with such an emergency, which demanded quick action to curb the dangerous force of the atom that was out of control and to keep the scale of the accident down to the minimum.

The seriousness of the situation was obvious. There was a need to evaluate it urgently and competently. And as soon as we received reliable preliminary

information it was made available to the Soviet people and sent through the diplomatic channel to the Governments of foreign countries.

On the basis of this information, practical work was undertaken in order to contain the accident and limit its grave consequences.

In the situation that developed, we considered it our top-priority duty - a duty of special importance - to ensure the safety of the population and provide effective aid to those who had suffered. Within a matter of hours, the inhabitants of the settlement near the station had been evacuated and then, when it had become clear that there was a potential threat to the health of people in the surrounding locality, they too were moved to safe areas.

All this complex work required the utmost speed, organization and precision.

And yet, the measures taken were unable to save many people. Two died at the time of the accident: Vladimir Nikolaevich Shashenok, an automatic-system-maintenance engineer, and Valery Ivanovich Khodemchuk, a power-plant operative. As of today, 299 people have been admitted to hospital after being diagnosed as having radiation disease of varying degrees of gravity. Seven of them have died. All possible treatment is being given to the remaining people. The country's best scientific and medical personnel and specialized clinics in Moscow and other cities have been called upon, and they have at their disposal the most modern medical facilities.

On behalf of the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Government I express profound condolences to the families and relatives of the deceased, to the work teams, and to all who have suffered this misfortune, all who have suffered personal grief. The Soviet Government will take care of the families of those who died and those who are suffering.

The inhabitants of the areas where the evacuees were warmly welcomed deserve the highest appreciation. They responded to the misfortune of their neighbours as though it were their own, and in the best traditions of our people displayed consideration, responsiveness and attention.

The CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Government are receiving thousands upon thousands of letters and telegrams from Soviet people and also from foreign citizens expressing sympathy and support for the victims. Many Soviet families are ready to take children in for the summer and are offering material help. Quite a number of people have requested to be sent to work in the area of the accident.

These manifestations of humane concern, genuine humanism and high moral standards cannot but move every one of us.

Assistance to the people, I repeat, remains our top-priority task.

At the same time, vigorous measures are being taken at the station itself and in the surrounding area to limit the scale of the accident. Despite the most difficult conditions, efforts were successful in extinguishing the fire and preventing it from spreading to the other power units. The staff of the station shut down the other three reactors and made their condition safe. These are under constant surveillance.

Everyone has undergone and is still undergoing a severe test, including firemen, transport and construction workers, medical personnel, special anti-chemical-protection units, helicopter crews, and other sections of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In these difficult conditions, much depended on a correct scientific evaluation of what was happening, because without such an evaluation it would have been impossible to work out and apply effective measures for coping with the accident and its after-effects. Prominent scientists from our Academy of Sciences and leading specialists from ministries and departments, in the USSR, the Ukraine and Byelorussia are coping successfully with this task.

I must say that people have acted heroically and selflessly and are continuing to do so. I think we shall still have the opportunity to name these courageous people and give them due credit for their exploits.

I have every reason to say that, despite the gravity of what happened, the damage turned out to be limited, largely because of the courage and skill of our people, their loyalty to duty and the well co-ordinated action being taken by everybody involved in dealing with the aftermath of the accident.

This task is being carried out not only in the vicinity of the atomic-power station itself, but also in scientific institutes and in many enterprises of the country which are supplying everything needed to those directly engaged in the difficult and dangerous struggle to cope with the accident.

Thanks to the effective measures taken, we may now say that the worst is behind us. The most serious consequences have been averted. Of course the end is not yet in sight. This is not the time to rest. Extensive work still lies ahead and this will take a long time. The level of radiation in the area surrounding the station and in the immediate vicinity still remains dangerous to human health.

The top-priority task today, therefore, is that of dealing with the effects of the accident. A large-scale programme to decontaminate the site of the electric-power station, the settlement and the buildings and installations has been drawn up and is being put into effect. The necessary manpower and material and technical resources have been assembled for that purpose. In order to prevent the radioactive contamination of the ground water, measures are being taken at the site of the station itself and in the surrounding area.

Units of the meteorological service are constantly monitoring the radiation level on the ground, on the water and in the atmosphere. They have at their disposal the necessary technical facilities and are using specially equipped planes, helicopters and ground monitoring stations.

It is absolutely clear: all these operations will take much time and will require no small effort. They must be carried out meticulously in a planned and organized manner. The land must be restored to a condition in which it is absolutely safe for the health and normal life of the people.

I cannot fail to mention one more aspect of this affair. I am thinking of the reaction abroad to what happened at Chernobyl. In the world as a whole, and this should be emphasized, the misfortune that we suffered and the actions we took in this complicated situation were treated with understanding.

We are deeply grateful to our friends from the socialist countries for showing solidarity with the Soviet people at a difficult moment. Our acknowledgements go also to politicians and public figures in other States for their genuine sympathy and support.

We extend our warm wishes to the foreign scientists and experts who expressed a willingness to help in overcoming the after-effects of the accident. I wish to single out the assistance given by American doctors R. Gale and P. Terasaki in treating the sick and also to thank the business circles in the countries which responded swiftly to our applications to buy certain kinds of technology, materials and medical supplies.

We are duly grateful for the objective attitude towards the events at the Chernobyl atomic-power station shown by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Hans Blix, its Director-General.

In other words, we are highly appreciative of the sympathy shown by all who responded with open hearts to our misfortune and our problems.

It is not possible, however, to pass over or draw no political conclusions from the way in which the Governments, politicians and mass media of a number of NATO countries, the United States of America in particular, greeted the incident in Chernobyl.

They launched an unbridled anti-Soviet campaign. Goodness only knows what they have said and written in recent days about "thousands of victims", "mass graves", "desolate Kiev", "the entire Ukraine poisoned" and so on and so forth.

All in all, we were confronted by a massive tangle of the most bare-faced, malicious lies. It is not pleasant to go over all this again, but I must. I must, so that international society will know what we had to face. I must be able to answer the question "what really dictated the need for this highly immoral campaign?".

The organizers of the campaign, of course, were not interested in the truth about the accident or the fate of people in Chernobyl, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, anywhere else or in any other country. They needed a pretext to grasp at in order to blacken the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, dull the impact of Soviet proposals on ending nuclear testing and abolishing nuclear weapons, and at the same time stifle growing criticism of the international conduct and militaristic policy of the United States.

To put it bluntly, several Western politicians are pursuing clearly defined goals: closing off any opportunity to smooth the course of international relations, and sowing new seeds of distrust and suspicion towards the socialist countries.

The same thing was clearly in evidence at the recent meeting in Tokyo of the leaders of "the Seven". What did they tell the world, what dangers did they warn mankind about? About Libya, which - without evidence - they accused of terrorism, and the fact that the Soviet Union had apparently given them "insufficient" information on the Chernobyl accident. Not a word about the real issue: how to end the arms race and rid the world of the nuclear threat. Not a word in reply to the Soviet initiatives, our specific proposals to halt nuclear testing, free mankind from nuclear and chemical weapons, and cut down on conventional armaments.

How should we take all this? One is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the leaders of the capitalist Powers meeting in Tokyo wanted to use Chernobyl to distract world attention from these matters, which are awkward for them although very present and important for the world as a whole.

The accident at the Chernobyl station and the reaction to it have become a kind of test of political morals. Once again two different approaches, two different types of conduct have become apparent.

The ruling circles in the United States and their most fervent allies - among which I would single out the Federal Republic of Germany - saw in the event nothing more than another opportunity to impede the growth and enrichment of an already difficult dialogue between the East and the West, and to justify the nuclear-arms race.

As if that were not enough, an attempt was made to show the world that negotiations - never mind agreements - with the USSR were impossible, and hence give the green light to a continuing military build-up.

Our reaction to this tragedy has been entirely different. We regard it as another warning bell, another ominous reminder that a new kind of political thinking and new policies are needed in the nuclear age.

We are the more strongly confirmed in our conviction that the foreign policy course elaborated at the Twenty-seventh Congress of CPSU is the correct one and that our proposals for the complete eradication of nuclear weapons, an end to nuclear explosions, and the establishment of a comprehensive system of international security answer the unforgiving demands the nuclear age makes of every country's political leadership.

The question of "inadequate" information, around which a special - in substance political - campaign was constructed, is in this case contrived. As confirmation, consider this. Everybody remembers that the American authorities took 10 days to inform their own Congress, and months to notify the world community, what kind of tragedy had taken place at the Three-Mile Island nuclear-power plant in 1979.

I have already told you what action we took.

This allows one to judge who takes what attitude to the question of keeping their own people and foreign countries informed.

That, however, is not the main point. We believe that the accident at Chernobyl, like accidents in American, British and other nuclear-power stations, raises serious questions for all States which must be addressed responsibly.

There are, today, over 370 nuclear reactors in operation in countries around the world. This is fact. It is hard to imagine the future of the world economy without the development of nuclear-power generation. The Soviet Union now has in operation 40 reactors with a combined capacity of over 28 million kilowatts. Peaceful atomic energy is of substantial benefit to mankind.

Clearly, however, it is now incumbent on us to act with still more caution and concentrate our scientific and technological efforts on ensuring safe mastery of the enormous and menacing forces contained within the atomic nucleus.

To us, the incontrovertible lesson at Chernobyl is that, as the scientific and technical revolution progresses questions of technological reliability and safety, discipline, order and proper organization are coming to be of primordial importance. Our standards everywhere, on all such matters, must be exacting.

Another thing. We think there is a need for serious enhancement of co-operation under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). What might this cover?

First. Setting up an international system for the safe development of nuclear-power generation, based on close co-operation by all States engaged in the field. Under such a system, we would have to arrange for routine notification and provision of information in the event of accidents or malfunctions at atomic-power plants, especially when accompanied by releases of radioactivity. It would be equally necessary to organize international machinery, bilateral and multilateral, to allow prompt mutual assistance if a dangerous situation should arise.

Second. To discuss this whole range of issues, there would be merit in convening an influential ad hoc international conference in Vienna under IAEA auspices.

Third. As IAEA was founded in 1957 and its facilities and staff are not on a par with the sophistication of modern nuclear-power generation, it would be wise to enhance the role and capacity of this unique international organization. The Soviet Union would be willing to do so.

Fourth. We are convinced that the United Nations and some of its specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, should be more closely involved with efforts to secure the safe development of peaceful nuclear operations.

It is important not to forget that our mutually dependent world has problems with military as well as civilian applications of the atom. This today is the central issue. The accident in Chernobyl has once again illuminated the abyss that awaits us if nuclear war breaks out. Our accumulated nuclear arsenals are the stuff of thousands upon thousands of disasters far more terrible than Chernobyl.

In the light of the heightened concern over nuclear matters, the Soviet Government, having weighed all the considerations associated with the security of its people and mankind as a whole, has decided to extend its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing until 6 August this year, the day when, over 40 years ago, the first atomic bomb was dropped on the town of Hiroshima causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

We appeal once again to the United States to consider with all due solemnity the danger hanging over mankind and to heed world opinion. Let those who lead the United States show by their actions that they care about people's lives and health.

I reaffirm my suggestion to President Reagan that we meet immediately in the capital of any European State that is willing to receive us or, say, in Hiroshima, to agree on a ban on nuclear tests.

The nuclear age peremptorily demands a new approach to international relations, combining the efforts of States that have different social systems for the sake of putting an end to the lethal arms race and securing a radical improvement in the world political climate. This will open wide horizons for fruitful co-operation by all countries and nations. Every one on earth stands to gain!
