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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Action undertaken in 1998-1999 to study, mitigate and minimize the effects of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. In December 1990, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/190, in which it requested the Secretary-General to mobilize international cooperation to provide support and assistance to the areas most affected by the Chernobyl accident. Since 1993, this responsibility has rested with the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, as set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182.

2. In resolution 52/172 of 16 December 1997 the General Assembly expressed profound concern about the ongoing effects of the Chernobyl disaster on the lives and health of people, in particular children, in the affected areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. It also requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts in the implementation of the relevant resolutions, with a view to encouraging the regular exchange of information, cooperation and coordination. Further, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of resolution 52/172 at its fifty-fourth session. This report is submitted in response to that request.

3. The present report describes the action undertaken in 1998-1999 by the United Nations system, and by other entities to mitigate the lingering effects of the Chernobyl disaster. It also provides an overview of the strategy, coordination activities, and the role of the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl. Most importantly, the report documents the difficulty of mobilizing resources to mitigate a disaster whose effects will span generations. The report concludes with observations regarding international efforts to address the continuous suffering of the affected population and to meet the world's collective responsibility to repair the damage.

II. General situation

4. The unprecedented nuclear accident at Chernobyl has had extremely complex consequences. It directly affected over 7 million people, including more than 3 million children, and contaminated a total area of 155,000 sq km. Thirteen years after the catastrophe, Chernobyl is still a major environmental and humanitarian problem.

5. Belarus received the majority of the radioactive fallout. As a result, 23 per cent of its territory and population was seriously affected. One hundred nine thousand persons, living in 415 locations affected by the Chernobyl accident, have been resettled; 20 per cent of the forests are still contaminated; and 6,000 sq km of agricultural land are mandatorily uncultivated at present. Some 9 per cent of the national expenditures is allocated for mitigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

6. In Ukraine, almost 3.5 million people have been directly affected by the accident, 1.3 million of whom were children. Today, half a million children continue to live in contaminated territories. The number of permanent invalids due to Chernobyl is over 5,000, and 91,200 people had to be resettled from the 30-kilometre exclusion zone around the site of the accident. Given the deterioration in the country's economic and social situation, in the first quarter of 1999 only half of planned governmental assistance was delivered to the population affected by Chernobyl.

7. In the Russian Federation, approximately 57,000 sq km, with a population of 2.7 million, were contaminated, including over 200,000 participants in the emergency work, 46,000 of whom are today disabled. While 50,000 people have been resettled from the most contaminated areas. 1.8 million people continue to live in contaminated areas, including 300,000 children. Today, 570,000 civilians are registered as affected. National assistance to the affected population amounted to only 60 per cent of what was needed in 1998.

8. Significant needs remain in the areas of health and environment in the three countries. The most pressing needs are in psycho-social rehabilitation, especially for children, and housing for the liquidators. It is also necessary to strengthen primary health care in the affected regions and to improve the prevention, detection and treatment of illnesses. It is important to support the social and psychological rehabilitation centres and address the psychological trauma which resulted from prolonged panic in the hearts and minds of people, the long reign of despair and confusion and the unprecedented socio-economic impact.

9. It is also imperative to bolster the economic recovery of these regions by encouraging local industries to produce healthful products, to control their radiation levels and to address the issue of environmental decontamination. While significant international attention has been paid to the technical and engineering aspects of the accident, to date the international community has not devoted sufficient resources to help heal the human suffering in the affected countries. Regardless of how difficult it is to draw a clear distinction between the problems caused by the disaster and

those brought on by political and social change, there is recognition that adverse conditions exist. These are legitimate needs that must be met and balanced with the need to contain the radiological hazard of Chernobyl.

III. Coordination, advocacy and resource mobilization

10. As United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs has taken a leading role in international cooperation and assistance efforts through coordination, strategy formulation and promotion, resource mobilization, advocacy and public awareness activities, as requested in a series of resolutions of the General Assembly in 1990-1997, most recently resolution 52/172. During the reporting period, the Coordinator defined a new strategy based on a better prioritized assistance programme, increased local coordination and a more targeted approach to public information and resource mobilization.

11. In 1997, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs led an inter-agency assessment mission which defined, in cooperation with authorities of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the Inter-Agency Programme of International Assistance to Areas Affected by the Chernobyl Disaster. Donor support for the Programme, which included 60 projects, was extremely weak. Of the US$ 90 million required, only $1.5 million was pledged. The common message from the donor community was that the Programme needed to be prioritized.

12. To address this requirement, the Coordinator carried out a mission to Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine in October 1998 in order to obtain first-hand information on the situation, review ongoing projects and revise, as necessary, the strategy for cooperation. During the mission, he held in-depth discussions with members of the three Governments, parliamentarians and other senior officials directly involved in Chernobyl-related activities. In collaboration with resident coordinators, local aid teams and the affected Governments, three high priority projects were selected per country, using the following criteria: acuteness of the problems; prospects for donor funding; and strong support from the national authorities. The nine priority projects, totalling $9.51 million, are the basis for the 1999 United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl, which was circulated to the donor missions and embassies in Geneva, New York, Minsk, Moscow and Kiev in May 1999. Thus far, donors have not made any pledges to the revised appeal.

13. In order better to coordinate the work of United Nations field offices, national authorities and donor representatives, the Chernobyl Coordinator has promoted the establishment of United Nations country team core groups on Chernobyl which include the resident coordinator offices in Kiev, Minsk and Moscow. The offices facilitate coordination with the national authorities, institutions and the local donor community on activities related to Chernobyl. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat supported this work with an office in Kiev which coordinates activities related to the community development centres in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The office of the World Health Organization's International Thyroid Project in Minsk is also involved in this field coordination effort.

14. Together with the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl, which consists of the ministers responsible for Chernobyl-related affairs and the Chernobyl Coordinator, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl is one of the principal international coordination mechanisms. The Task Force includes the United Nations agencies involved in Chernobyl-related assistance as well as other major international organizations working in this field. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has followed up on the decisions and recommendations of the Task Force, evaluating proposals for aid projects, coordinating agency contributions and actions, producing and disseminating updated information on Chernobyl-related activities. The Office is also administering the Chernobyl Trust Fund and mobilizing resources for cooperative endeavours. The Quadripartite Committee, the Inter-Agency Task Force and the country team core groups have proved instrumental in enhancing effective coordination and ensured the identification of gaps and the promotion of complementarity between projects.

15. At present, the Chernobyl Trust Fund, administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, has a balance of $170,000, more than half of which is a loan. Most of these funds are already obligated to cover the most urgent needs, including support to rehabilitation centres. Decisions concerning the use of the Fund resources are made in close consultation with the members of the Quadripartite Committee, the donors and the United Nations resident

coordinators based in the affected countries. In 1998-1999, a little less than $677,000 was channelled through the Trust Fund to support various programmes, including the creation of a socio-psychological rehabilitation centre in Belarus, the training of staff at rehabilitation centres in the three countries, ultrasound screening of population in four regions of the Russian Federation, a feasibility study for the construction of the Chernobyl protection dyke in Ukraine, and a project of economic rehabilitation in Belarus. Immediate support is required from the donor community to replenish the Fund if the immediate high priority needs identified in the revised appeal of 1999 are to be met.

16. A more targeted fund-raising programme with donor Governments and non-traditional sources of funding was initiated, along with an awareness and advocacy campaign involving media, non-governmental organizations and research institutions. Contacts between the Chernobyl Coordinator and foundations, nuclear and electricity companies, private donors and non-governmental organizations have led to the mobilization of additional resources ($131,000) for international cooperation on Chernobyl. However, the lack of resources has imposed some limitation to the programme's capacities to undertake a broad awareness-raising campaign. During the reporting period, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl sponsored several international conferences. In 1999, a page dedicated to Chernobyl was established on the Web site of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, and an information booklet on the subject is being prepared.

IV. Programmes to address the consequences of the disaster

17. This section outlines ongoing programmes and projects to address immediate problems in the key sectors of health, socio-psychological and environmental rehabilitation, economic recovery, nuclear safety and employment. Several programmes and projects received limited financial support from the Chernobyl Trust Fund. The voluntary contributions to the Fund, amounting to $600,000 during 1998-1999, did not allow even the most critical needs to be addressed. Consequently, many of the programmes and projects are under-funded and lack the resources to cope with the residual consequences of the accident. United Nations funds, programmes and agencies raised extrabudgetary resources to implement the projects described below.

Health

18. Programmes to study and mitigate the health consequences of the accident continued. However, programmes to help alleviate the health problems of the population have not kept pace. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO are the United Nations organizations primarily involved in assisting the Governments in documenting and mitigating health consequences.

19. UNICEF has striven for the alleviation of iodine deficiency disorders, improvement of the water supply and sanitation monitoring, and psychological rehabilitation. Significant resources are devoted to support the Children of Chernobyl Project which attempts to develop a sustainable system of health rehabilitation for higher risk groups of children who were exposed to radiation. UNICEF funds earmarked for Chernobyl-related projects in 1998-1999 amounted to $300,000.

20. WHO pursued medical and epidemiological monitoring of the affected population in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Particular attention has been paid to the risk of leukemia, lymphoma and thyroid cancer, especially among the Chernobyl "liquidators", the emergency and rescue personnel who were subjected to radiation exposure while responding to the disaster. WHO funds earmarked for its Chernobyl programmes in 1998-1999 amounted to $500,000. Key projects such as the establishment of an international database for risk assessment of low doses of ionizing radiation are behind schedule and in danger of abandonment, due to lack of resources.

Socio-psychological rehabilitation

21. Since UNESCO will be phasing out its assistance by the end of 1999, it is crucial to work towards the sustainability of the 10 community rehabilitation centres established in the three affected countries. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has increased its efforts to mobilize additional resources for their continuation. The UNESCO funds earmarked for the centres in 1998-1999 were less than $90,000.

Socio-economic rehabilitation and employment

22. With time, it becomes more difficult to associate population displacement and economic and social disruption directly with the 1986 accident. Nonetheless, without social and economic recovery the consequences will persist even longer.

23. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has carried out several projects providing vocational training to the persons left unemployed and displaced as a consequence of the Chernobyl accident. Employment training programmes have been established in the Gomel and Mozyr regions of Belarus and in the city of Slavutich in Ukraine. The ILO funds earmarked for this project in 1999 total $100,000.

24. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has begun a pilot project in Belarus to produce bio-lubricants from the rapeseed grown on contaminated land. Over 1.4 million hectares of prime agricultural land in Belarus is still contaminated. Belarus imports almost all of the lubricant and fuel oils needed for energy, electricity and transport. Preliminary studies have shown that oil produced by several varieties of rapeseed and linseed is devoid of contamination and thus suitable for use in the aforementioned industries. The project has significant economic potential but requires additional support if it is to develop beyond the pilot stage.

25. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has been actively involved in follow-up environmental projects defined in the Inter-Agency Programme. Of particular importance is the regional project for the integrated management of radiation-contaminated forests in the three affected countries where the lack of radiation standards for wood products still hampers the recovery of that vital export sector of the economy.

26. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) proposed a strategy for producing non-contaminated baby food in the region. The project has been submitted to the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships. The possibility of financial investments and joint ventures involving other industries in the affected countries is also being examined.

Environmental protection and nuclear safety

27. Most of the major projects directly involving the safety of the Chernobyl site are being conducted under the auspices of the G-7 Shelter Improvement Programme. However, United Nations agencies are actively involved in mitigating radiation effects and preventing any similar accident.

28. The UNDP Office in Moscow has funded and coordinated a project on water quality evaluation and availability in areas affected by the accident, with a budget of $280,000. It will evaluate the radio-ecological status of the national water systems and propose changes, in order to ensure a safe water supply in the highly contaminated Bryansk region. The office has prepared a proposal for the decontamination of the Russian forests.

29. IAEA has given high priority to mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl accident in the three most affected countries. Its programme addressed the management of radioactive waste; upgrading radiation therapy facilities; harmonization of radiation measurement procedures; management and inspection capacity in the nuclear power plants; reduction of radionuclides in the human food environment; radiation protection; nuclear accident preparedness; and environmental rehabilitation of affected territories.

Programme and project support

30. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, regularly deployed missions to the region, which contributed to the preparation of the programmes proposed for funding. In addition to evaluating the programmes and monitoring progress, the teams strove to promote synergy among existing programmes. UNDP, through its offices in Kiev, Minsk and Moscow, provided the monitoring, procurement and back-stopping support to all programmes funded from the Chernobyl Trust Fund and enhanced the work of the local Chernobyl core groups.

31. In addition to organizations of the United Nations system, the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl includes international, regional, and non-governmental organizations actively working on Chernobyl matters. Those organizations have focused mainly on issues of nuclear safety and on social and health-related assistance.

32. The Chernobyl Unit #4 shelter, also known as the Sarcophagus, has deteriorated significantly since its construction in 1986 and now poses a threat of radioactive leakage and possible collapse. A shelter implementation plan, developed by international experts in 1997, is intended to improve the safety level of the shelter. The plan was endorsed by Ukraine, the Group of Seven, and the European Union. At the end of 1997, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) began to administer the newly established Chernobyl Shelter Fund.

The shelter implementation plan is estimated to cost around $ 760 million and its implementation is expected to take nine years. Thus far, about half of the required funds have been promised, including an in-kind contribution of $50 million by Ukraine. In its additional role as administrator of the Nuclear Safety Account, EBRD has been cooperating with Chernobyl nuclear power plants to improve the safety of Unit #3. The total cost of the Nuclear Safety Account projects is about $120 million.

33. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) continues its long-standing commitment to the disaster victims by administering its Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP). The programme has evolved significantly. Its services now include screening of food supplies and the environment through radiometric testing, distributing measuring equipment (dosimeters), procuring and transporting mobile diagnostic laboratories, monitoring background radiation, providing medical examinations to people in remote areas, and distributing health information. It focuses on children and adults who were children at the time of the accident. These groups are the most susceptible to thyroid gland pathologies. The Federation requires continuous funding to maintain the current rate of screening of 60,000 to 90,000 persons per year and thereby ensure that all of the persons 18 or under at the time of the disaster are screened by the year 2006. The IFRC yearly appeal is for $1.5 million.

34. Since 1997, a psycho-social support programme has been part of the CHARP in Belarus. It assists the population in contaminated territories to overcome radiation-related stress by providing reliable and easily understandable information. The programme is implemented by the Visiting Nurses Service and the Belarus Red Cross.

35. The Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has set up a working group on the social aspects of the accident's aftermath. Belarussian and Ukrainian experts have participated in NEA exercises on emergency preparedness for nuclear accidents. Furthermore, experts from Ukraine have been invited to participate in NEA activities and exchange information on nuclear safety, regulatory capability, waste management and decision-making.

36. The European Commission (EC) remains very active in the fields of nuclear emergency preparedness, nuclear safety and radiation protection in countries most affected by Chernobyl. Specific EC programmes include the development of analytical equipment and systems for affected areas; emergency preparedness; and guidance on long-term public health protection measures. In addition, the EC contributed to the EBRD-administered shelter fund to support the transformation of the existing shelter into a safe and environmentally stable form of protection. Further two pilot projects have been commissioned to mitigate the social and economic consequences of plant closure on the city of Slavutich, where most of the Chernobyl workers live.

V. Concluding observations and future directions

37. The United Nations programmes aimed at addressing the "human" consequences of the Chernobyl disaster have been chronically under-funded for many reasons. While much is known about the effects of radiation exposure on individual human beings and their environment, the persistent problems caused by psychological trauma and the socio-economic impact of countermeasures such as relocation, restriction on agricultural practices or anxiety due to the feeling of living in a soiled habitat have not been fully appreciated. The Chernobyl accident is hard to classify since it is neither a traditional emergency nor a developmental issue. Subsequently, budgetary constraints are faced by some donor States as Chernobyl falls into a budgetary gap. Among the factors that might also have contributed to a certain donor fatigue vis-à-vis Chernobyl is the question of whether health, environmental, social and economic hardship are the sole results of Chernobyl. Finally the many natural disasters and complex emergencies which have occurred over the past two years have made it difficult for Chernobyl to remain in the limelight and be perceived as a priority by the donor community.

38. The radiological conditions in the area surrounding Chernobyl have largely improved, and this is attributable to the international commitment to improved nuclear safety at Chernobyl which allowed for the construction and now the reinforcement of the shelter over the affected unit of the nuclear plant. However, the human consequences of the accident are still very acute in certain groups of the affected population. The Group of Seven expects to complete the Chernobyl site rehabilitation in 2007. A contribution from donor countries comprising less than 5 per cent of the amount pledged for the shelter consolidation would enable us to address outstanding needs and

encourage local planning for the future of the most affected region.

39. Member States, multilateral institutions and private donors are urged once again to support the highly prioritized projects presented in the 1999 United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl by contributing to the Chernobyl Trust Fund. These resources requested are the minimum required to mitigate serious human consequences of the Chernobyl disaster and to show solidarity with the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine which continue to carry the burden of the catastrophe.