

Minutes
UN Inter-Agency Task Force Meeting on Chernobyl

9:00-10:30 am, 13 January 2006, New York, UNDP Headquarters

Agenda item 1: Welcome and Introductions:

The Chair, **Mr. Kemal Dervis** (UNDP Administrator and the new UN Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl), welcomed all present at the meeting as well as those who were participating via video link.

Mr. Dervis stated that this was the first meeting of the Task Force on Chernobyl to take place since UNDP took over the UN coordination role for Chernobyl issues. This is also the first major Chernobyl meeting for the new UN Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl since he joined UNDP as Administrator.

The time since the last Task Force meeting in March 2004 was extremely busy and fruitful for the Chernobyl team at UNDP, and there is a great potential for injecting new dynamism into the Chernobyl recovery. Mr. Dervis acknowledged that the fact that almost 20 years later we are still coping with the consequences of Chernobyl shows how complicated and psychologically challenging this has been for the local residents.

UNDP Administrator noted the wide participation in the meeting, with more than 50 people connected from seven different locations (New York, Kyiv, Minsk, Moscow, Geneva, Paris, and Vienna). Among the UN agencies, Mr. Dervis welcomed:

- The International Atomic Energy Agency
- The United Nations Scientific Committee on Atomic Radiation/UNSCEAR
- The World Health Organization
- UNICEF
- The World Bank
- UNEP
- The UN Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs/UN-OCHA
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and
- UNDP Country Offices in Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine

Mr. Dervis pointed out that a wider group of participants is taking part than in past meetings, including organizations outside the broad UN system, such as the European Bank for Recovery and Development (EBRD), joining from Kyiv, and the Nuclear Energy Agency of the OECD, joining from Paris.

He welcomed the Government participants, including the Ambassadors of the three countries most affected by the Chernobyl accident – Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. A welcome was also directed to representatives of countries that have long been involved in Chernobyl recovery efforts – the European Commission, Japan, Switzerland, the United States, and, for the first time, Croatia.

Mr. Dervis also congratulated the Permanent Representative of Ukraine, Mr. Valeriy Kuchinsky on his assumption of the UNDP Executive Board Presidency.

Mr. Dervis noted that the IATF meeting has three main purposes:

1. To provide a brief update on UN coordination on UN Chernobyl matters, including the handover of responsibility from UN-OCHA to UNDP;
2. To share information on Chernobyl-related activities; and
3. To discuss future plans, particularly those for the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl.

Agenda item 2. Update on handover of UN coordination functions.

Mr. Kalman Mizsei, Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, thanked the Ambassadors for continued support to the UN's work on Chernobyl issues as well as to the represented agencies. He reiterated that the Secretary General's decision to transfer coordination responsibility to UNDP from OCHA was part of a UN-wide shift to a forward-looking strategy on Chernobyl based on the 2002 study "The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident: A Strategy for recovery".

Mr. Mizsei expressed deep appreciation to Mr. Jan Egeland and Ms. Shoko Arakaki for OCHA's good work and leadership on Chernobyl matters before responsibility was transferred to UNDP. With this decision, Mr. Mizsei said, the Secretary-General wanted to signal an important shift in outlook on Chernobyl whereby now it is primarily a development challenge, and no longer an emergency, humanitarian issue.

Mr. Mizsei noted that Chernobyl was a huge tragedy that had many social and political implications, but we now need to emphasize hope and the future prospects of the affected population. The three affected countries are all experiencing strong economic growth, and their government budgets look much stronger than they were some 15 years ago. We therefore believe that 2006 should be a breakthrough year in our work on Chernobyl.

Special words of appreciation were expressed to the agencies involved in the work of UN Chernobyl Forum and particularly IAEA for their leadership in putting together main outcomes of this multi-agency effort.

Agenda Item 3: The 60th General Assembly Resolution on Chernobyl.

Mr. Mizsei noted that the General Assembly accepted the Secretary General's report on Chernobyl and adopted a new Resolution on Chernobyl in November 2005. He praised the resolution for its forward-looking character and its strong emphasis on development.

Mr. Andrei Dapkiunas, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN, welcomed the initiative to convene the IATF meeting. He emphasized that the new Resolution on Chernobyl differs from previous ones, and that it is ambitious and comprehensive.

Adopted by consensus, the resolution secured the support from some 70 co-sponsoring countries -- the largest number in the last 13 years. The Resolution provides an overview of the current situation and sets priorities for further activities of UN system and the international community. It emphasizes the new developmental approach and points to specific Chernobyl-related needs in the areas of environment, health and research.

Ambassador Dapkiunas emphasized the significance of the handover of Chernobyl coordination from OCHA to UNDP. He encouraged the Administrator to use his authority not only as the UNDP head but also his capacity as UN Development Group chairman to support Chernobyl coordination and resource mobilization. He suggested reviving of UN coordination mechanisms and called for direct exchange and dialogue with the heads of the emergency agencies for the three countries most affected by Chernobyl through the Quadripartite Coordination Committee. Ambassador Dapkiunas suggested that a meeting of this group might take place in April 2006.

Ambassador Dapkiunas noted that the Resolution called for the Administrator to organize, in coordination with the three governments, a further study on the health, environmental and socio-economic consequences of Chernobyl disaster.

The Ambassador also drew attention to important commemorative events planned for the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl. In particular, an international conference “20 years after Chernobyl: Strategy for Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions” will take place on 19-21 April in Minsk. The goal of the conference will be to ensure an open and authoritative exchange of ideas and enhance the problem-solving capacity of the community of Chernobyl international partners.

Agenda Item 4: 20th anniversary commemorations:

Mr. Kalman Mizsei recognized the importance of the upcoming commemorations of 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident and sending the right messages to all the stakeholders . He underscored the importance of using the occasion to showcase forward-looking solutions to problems faced by Chernobyl-affected communities, rather than dwelling on the suffering of the past.

Mr. Valeriy Kuchinsky, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN, stressed the importance of the IATF meeting as a manifestation of the UN’s strong commitment to Chernobyl and implementing the tasks of the new GA Resolution. Ambassador Kuchinsky expressed his appreciation to the UNDP Administrator, his staff at HQ and that in the field for their active stance on Chernobyl issues.

Mr. Kuchinsky welcomed the findings of UN Chernobyl Forum. He also noted that its conclusions, particularly with regard to the health effects of the accident, had triggered a wave of criticism in Ukraine, especially from NGOs. Their reservations have been reflected in comments to be accommodated in the final version of the Forum’s report. He noted that Ukraine, in partnership with interested member states, NGOs, and the

scientific community, will convene the 15th International Conference on the health effects of Chernobyl at UN Headquarters on 19-20 April, 2006.

Ambassador Kuchinsky welcomed adoption of the new Chernobyl Resolution, supported by 70 co-sponsors. The active engagement of all the stakeholders in its implementation is necessary, he said. In particular, a community-based approach as a basis for local recovery efforts and bringing to completion the building of the Shelter and providing for the environmentally sound collection and storage of nuclear waste are particularly important for Ukraine.

Ambassador Kuchinsky supported the idea of organizing a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly in observance of the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl and emphasized the need to put the meetings of the Chernobyl IATF on a regular footing.

Mr. Andrey Denisov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, expressed appreciation that the IATF meeting had been organized. He noted that the new Chernobyl Resolution 60/14 requested the UN Secretary-General to convene a special commemorative meeting of the GA in April 2006. This landmark event will be an opportunity to draw international attention to the needs of the most affected population and emphasize the transition from relief to development. Outreach to the delegations should be made, the session should be chaired by the President of the GA, and conference services should include interpretation into six UN's official languages. The UNDP Administrator is expected to deliver a statement on behalf of the UN system along with representatives of the three most affected countries, major donors and NGOs. The Ambassador stressed the importance of ensuring a solid outcome for the event.

Ambassador Denisov noted that the Chernobyl accident can contribute to the global knowledge bank on modalities for cooperation in the field of prevention and relief of technological disasters. In his capacity of coordinator of Chernobyl-related activities for the missions of the three most affected countries in 2006, Ambassador Denisov reiterated his strong commitment to the preparatory process for the commemorative events.

Agenda Item 5: Chernobyl Forum: impact, update and follow-up.

Mr. Kalman Mizsei expressed deep appreciation to IAEA for initiating the UN Chernobyl Forum, and for the efforts of the scientists assembled by IAEA and WHO in reviewing all the scientific evidence available on the impact of the Chernobyl accident on human health and the environment. UNDP was a relative latecomer to the undertaking, providing its own expert analysis on the socio-economic impact of Chernobyl.

National budgets were very severely affected by dealing with the consequences of Chernobyl accident and substantial funds were spent on Chernobyl in all three affected countries, Mr. Mizsei noted. UN and donor resources are certainly dimensionally smaller compared to national outlays. But our funds, provided with good advice, good scientific knowledge and information, can be of value to the governments and to the affected people.

Mr. Mizsei noted that Chernobyl Forum findings are a major breakthrough in the Chernobyl recovery effort and offer a good opportunity to base actions on facts and scientific evidence. He welcomed the reassuring message that the findings contain about the impact of low-dose radiation and the UN-wide consensus that the Forum helped to forge.

Mr. Mikhail Balonov, Unit Head, Radioactive Discharges Unit, IAEA, provided an update on Chernobyl Forum activities. He noted that in early 2005 the expert groups completed their technical reports, coming to a consensus in all subjects and discussions. At their final meeting in April 2005, the eight UN organizations and the three governments of the Chernobyl Forum scrutinized and approved the reports with amendments as a consensus within the United Nations system. The main findings of the reports were presented at the Chernobyl Forum conference in Vienna in September 2005.

The next step will be to finalize the texts and prepare them for publication (the environmental report is already with the publishers; the digest is still circulating, with final comments from Belarus and Ukraine still expected). The goal is to publish and distribute the publication before the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl. Member organizations, the mass media, conferences, etc. will be utilized for dissemination; afterwards the responsibility for information dissemination will be passed to the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN).

Agenda Item 6: ICRIN Progress Report

Mr. Mizsei noted that ICRIN arose from the same idea and inspiration as did the Chernobyl Forum, responding to the many myths that surround the impact of the radiation released during the nuclear accident in 1986. Affected communities needed access to better and more practical information to lead healthy and productive lives.

Ms. Louisa Vinton, Senior Programme Manager, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, gave a progress report on ICRIN. She observed that ICRIN is an ideal way to popularize the scientific information yielded by the UN Chernobyl Forum.

Ms. Vinton provided a progress report on ICRIN activities efforts since the last IATF meeting, where a lot of attention was given to ICRIN. UNDP inherited ICRIN from OCHA when it was still in an early planning phase; OCHA and SDC provided seed funding for the initial development phase. While the proposed ICRIN structure was ambitious, available resources were very limited. The OCHA 2004 funding appeal mentioned in the last IATF minutes did not yield results. Therefore UNDP faced ambitious aims and an elaborate structure with very limited funds to work with.

OCHA had already begun discussions on ICRIN with the Human Security Trust Fund (HSTF) financed by Japan. Upon assuming the UN coordination role, UNDP had undertaken further discussions with the HSTF. These negotiations underscored the need to rethink the ICRIN project, for the following reasons:

- Based on donor feedback, the focus needed to be more on people and communities, and less on formal structures.
- With the work of UN Chernobyl Forum progressing, there was an overlap between the research aspirations of ICRIN and Chernobyl Forum's ambition to find a scientific consensus on the key issues about Chernobyl. Also, work on Chernobyl Forum was making it clear that the propagation of healthy lifestyles was at least as important as providing information on living safely with low-dose radiation.
- Field work already under way (such UNDP/Ukraine Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme) that was providing innovative means of information dissemination through communities needed to be taken into consideration.

These considerations had led UNDP to redesign the ICRIN approach, Ms. Vinton said, and to shift the emphasis to information dissemination rather than research, to make use of existing community structures that are already involved in UNDP projects, and to take advantage of the available Chernobyl Forum repository of scientific information. Recent discussions with the Human Security Trust Fund had had been positive, and UNDP felt it likely that the project would gain US\$2 million in funding this year.

The ICRIN project offers an opportunity to involve many different UN agencies. UNDP will be discussing proposal directly with other agencies. Funding for UNICEF's "Facts for Life" publication, which was discussed at last IATF meeting but never disbursed, is now included in budget proposal to HSTF.

Ms. Vinton also noted that the first phase of ICRIN -- information needs assessments -- had already been completed by UNDP Country Offices in three countries. Excellent studies had been published on information needs of the affected population, she said. These studies would provide a good starting point for information dissemination.

Agenda Item 7: Other business (updates from UNDP COs and agencies)

Mr. Jeremy Hartley, UNICEF Representative in Ukraine, emphasized that the relevance of "Facts for Life" is still strong today. The idea is reflected in the final Report of UN Chernobyl Forum indicating that the target audience continues to have a need for reliable information. UNICEF has proved globally that "Facts for Life" publications are an extremely effective way of getting across the key messages. To produce its special edition for Chernobyl will be a considerable contribution to address the current information needs of all three countries most affected by Chernobyl.

Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus, noted that UN team in Belarus is involved in preparations for events commemorating the Chernobyl catastrophe. UNDP is co-chairing an organizational committee of the international conference for which the programme is quite well developed and includes a field trip to the Chernobyl-affected Gomel region. UNICEF and

UNDP are making financial contributions to the event as well as substantively involved in its preparations. The CORE initiative will be part of the project fair. The above programme's membership now grew to 30 after UNICEF and UNFPA signed up this year. TACIS is providing up to 50% of donor funding to CORE projects (or CORE-approved projects).

Ms. Sultanoglu noted that most recently an agreement has been negotiated between the World Bank and the Government of Belarus for a US\$50 million loan over the next 5 years for a project aimed at a) developing in the rural areas affected by Chernobyl a gas distribution network that would allow the replacement of household use of contaminated wood for heating and cooking with a safe fuel alternative and b) improving the energy efficiency of the social infrastructure in local communities. The project, which is fully in line with the strategic recommendations of the Chernobyl Forum, is expected to be presented to the Bank's Board of Directors before long.

Healthy lifestyle education in Chernobyl-affected regions, continuation of the WHO telemedicine project and assessment of public health care expenditures incurred by Belarus are currently on-going initiatives in Belarus. UNDP has submitted a US\$1.4 million proposal to the HSTF and is currently waiting for feedback. UNDP DPI has requested sponsorship for commemorative events, including cultural events and photo exhibitions.

Mr. Francis O'Donnell, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Ukraine, noted that UNDP in Ukraine has been applying an area-based development (ABD) approach for Chernobyl programming, and that this has expanded significantly. Ukraine's experience has shown how well the community-based modality can work. UNDP's current plan is to pull together other area-based development programs in Ukraine and have a broad-based approach.

Mr. O'Donnell reported that in 2005 some 200 Community Organizations were formed in 169 villages of 16 rayons in the four oblasts most affected by Chernobyl in Ukraine. Expansion took place in establishing Public-Private partnerships. And a sub-regional conference was organized in November 2005 in Chernihiv with the involvement of actors in private sector, local governments and Community Organizations from Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine with a focus on local economic opportunities and cooperation. The challenge for the future is in helping the government of Ukraine revise the legal framework to address the new Chernobyl strategy and moving the agenda from a history of dependency to self-reliance, prosperity and optimism.

Ms. Elena Armand, Environment Coordinator, UNDP Russia Country Office, presented a progress report on the Chernobyl local economic development project. A microcredit facility is to be launched in a few months and is expected to serve as a growth point for recovery of Chernobyl-affected Bryansk oblast of Russia. The initiative will be operational in the three most affected villages.

Ms. Armand noted a continuing dialogue with the Russian government on commemorative plans for the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl. On a practical level, a small grants programme for single-parent families or creation of information centres will be initiated.

Mr. Ted Lazo, Deputy Head for Radiation Protection, Division of Radiation Protection and Radioactive Waste Management, Nuclear Energy Agency, OECD, emphasized that his organization's focus is not so much on field activities in the countries, but rather to help NEA member governments (28 in Europe, North America, and Asia) to better incorporate stakeholder participation in radiation protection decision making, and to bring science to the forefront. Two reports on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident have already been published. Currently another report is being produced, to be published in March-April, focusing on how radiation protection experts can better address stakeholder concerns. Consequently, we can be best prepared to bring expertise to bear if large-scale contamination accidents happen again in the future.

Mr. John Brittain, Communications Officer, UNICEF Moscow, spoke on behalf of UNICEF offices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, which are working on a joint initiative to present the effects of Chernobyl through children's eyes. Some 12 children from the three countries will be joining together in Minsk where a photograph-taking exercise will take place. The pictures will become part of an exhibition giving children's particular perspective on the Chernobyl accident and they will be circulated to different capitals. A similar format was used by UNICEF after the tragedy in Beslan and in Chechnya.

Mr. Branislav Jekic, UNICEF Assistant Representative in Belarus, brought attention to the importance of putting the spotlight on the topic of salt iodization during the anniversary of Chernobyl commemorations. This has proved a very effective tool around the world in protecting children and adults and supporting their physical and emotional development. Mr. Jekic noted progress in legislation development on salt iodization which is currently considered by the Belarus Parliament. Some substantive progress on this front is expected before the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl in April 2006.

Mr. Balthasar Lindauer, Deputy Director, Nuclear Safety Department, EBRD, noted the importance of coordination in Chernobyl efforts, especially considering that public attention will be drawn to this subject during the Chernobyl anniversary. The EBRD administers the Shelter Fund and deals with the technical challenges of Chernobyl. Ongoing assistance focuses on helping to transform the site into an environmentally safe state (through infrastructure projects, stabilization of sarcophagus, etc.). The tender process for the new safe confinement should be completed before April 2006; this will provide a good opportunity to show the general public that the technical challenges of Chernobyl can be managed. Mr. Lindauer related the meeting between Mr. Hans Blix, Chairman of the CSF Donor Assembly, and President Yushchenko, who agreed to hold a ceremony in late April to mark the start of this joint initiative.

Mr. Kalman Mizsei concluded the meeting by thanking the Ambassadors and the UNDP Administrator for their active role and commitment to the international effort on Chernobyl, which gives a boost and new energy to the UN agencies.