

**Remarks by Under-Secretary-General Kenzo Oshima,  
United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl,  
at the launch of the new web site [www.chernobyl.info](http://www.chernobyl.info)**

Tuesday, 25 June 2002, 10:00 a.m., Palais des Nations, Salle VII

Mr. Morris  
Ambassador Fust,  
Director-General Ordzhonikidze,  
Excellencies,  
Friends and Colleagues in Kiev and Minsk,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I knew for some time that my office at the United Nations was working with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation on a new Chernobyl website an idea inspired by Ambassador Fust and implemented by his colleagues at SDC. I was being briefed regularly on its progress. But it wasn't until my recent meeting with Ambassador Fust, last April in Geneva, that I realized that this was indeed going to be something special. Ambassador Fust spoke with such enthusiasm and passion about this project that I could hardly wait to see it come to life. It so happened that the meeting I am referring to took place on 26 April which is the day marking the sixteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We set the date for this launch then and we agreed that we will both be here for this event. I am very pleased that we have done so and I welcome everyone to this launch. I think it is especially symbolic that this launch is taking place in the same year when the Swiss people voted to join the United Nations. I think also, it is all the more fitting, since Switzerland has traditionally been one of the staunchest supporters of humanitarian causes.

Why is impartial and reliable public information on the consequences of Chernobyl important? There are many reasons for this. Radioactive contamination of large territories and the effect this has on humans, on plant and animal life, is not an exact science. Humankind has had, in historic terms, only a short period of time after the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to research into and accumulate and exchange information on the serious impact of radiation exposure. The aftermath of Chernobyl is even shorter. There is of course a body of scientific knowledge and accumulated data on the subject. But we do not fully know what we may face yet in terms of the risks and dangers involved in radiation exposure, as Ambassador Fust so eloquently expressed.

Also, it is no secret, that as a result of the response to the Chernobyl accident by the authorities at the time, the most affected successor states of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine were left with a legacy of skepticism as to the facts, in particular a loss of confidence on the part of their own populations. This, I understand, is felt to this day and has been a complicating factor in international efforts to mobilize assistance to the victims of this disaster.

Quality information on the consequences of such a major accident as Chernobyl, that is reliable and freely available, is important not only for the peoples and communities affected but also for the international community if we are to turn Chernobyl from increasingly a 'forgotten tragedy' into a well-understood and broadly supported example of international cooperation.

I visited myself Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, in early April this year and I had an opportunity to visit affected areas in Belarus and Ukraine. I was struck by the intensity of the impact, the lingering suffering, fear and insecurity with which people still live. Local officials and ordinary citizens all speak of the shadow the Chernobyl accident casts on their daily lives. Walking through the village square in Vetka, Belarus, for example, where radiation measures between 5 and 50 times above normal background levels, depending on which patch one happens to be standing on, I could not help but wonder what life must be like for those who make this place their home: elders worrying about their grandchildren's prospects of finding jobs, or parents unsure whether to take the chance of bearing children. The slight dryness in the throat

and headache that began to develop were not a cause for concern, I was told. They were 'normal' symptoms of the body reacting to higher levels of radiation. (Truly, seeing is believing).

But we must not just continue helping. We must ensure that we help people to help themselves, to regain a normalcy in their lives and leave the legacy of Chernobyl behind them, as much as possible. This new information platform sponsored and created by the generosity and compassion of the Swiss Government will be a powerful tool for the United Nations in its new strategy aimed at recovery and sustainable development in Chernobyl-affected areas - a strategy which puts the human being in the focus of our efforts.

Over the course of sixteen years, the nature of the Chernobyl problem has evolved. Recognizing this, a change of direction was considered necessary and a new process was initiated, whereby the role played by UNDP, UNICEF and other developmental agencies, would be more prominent. The three Governments in the region support this change of direction and new emphasis on development, not forgetting the basic humanitarian nature of the problem as far as the affected people are concerned.

Two concrete actions were undertaken in this context in recent months: the Secretary-General appointed a Deputy UN Coordinator for Chernobyl in the person of UNDP's Regional Director for Europe and the CIS, my good friend and colleague Mr. Kalman Mizsei. The second action was a study commissioned by UNDP and UNICEF with the support of OCHA and WHO, to revisit the issue of Chernobyl from the new, developmental angle, to obtain a clear picture of the current situation and to make concrete recommendations.

The resulting report entitled: "The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident: A Strategy for Recovery", was launched in New York by the Administrator of UNDP Mark Malloch Brown, the Executive Director of UNICEF Carol Bellamy and myself in February 2002. It makes recommendations, aimed at recovery and sustainable development as well as maintains that special, targeted attention be accorded to the health needs of the victims of thyroid cancer and other direct victims of the accident. This strategy encompasses health, economic, social and environmental initiatives as well as a continuation of research into the disaster. Its objective is to make sure that resources are directed to those most in need while encouraging and enabling the majority of the populations to progress to a state of self-sufficiency.

An important element of this new strategy is the filling of gaps in our knowledge of this catastrophe and its aftermath. In this connection, the International Chernobyl Research Network (ICRN) is envisaged as a collaborative mechanism between leading international research institutions and national research institutions in the three most affected States. This is its most important value-added, that of bringing the national institutions into the mainstream of scientific research. Preparatory steps are being led by the IAEA, WHO, FAO and the effort is open to all. When the project concept is more fully developed we will be submitting it to the consideration of interested donors.

The knowledge and experience of Chernobyl may also acquire added importance in the future, should the world be unfortunate enough to face another similar situation of radioactive contamination, whether by accident or through other ways.

The launching of a platform for the exchange of solid, reliable information in these circumstances is an enormous boost to the efforts of the United Nations and of the entire international community. Inevitably, it will also help to rekindle the waning donor interest towards the human dimension of the Chernobyl problem.

The successful implementation of our strategy will require the attainment of a consensus among all the principal actors involved in the Chernobyl issue. This consensus can only be based on

renewed United Nations' efforts supported by interested donors to assist the populations affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The information platform we launch today will be the most important clearinghouse of information, which we all hope will lead to more vigorous action. And the example set by Switzerland to direct our attention to the plight of those people and communities long gone from prime time newscasts, and of generosity and reengagement, is an excellent one for everyone to follow.

Thank you again for your support, for your vision and for your heart.

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