

**SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS THOSE ALREADY SUFFERING FROM
CHERNOBYL DISASTER MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN**

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Following is the text of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message to the gala dinner of "Chabad's Children of Chernobyl", which will be held on 12 June:

More than fourteen years after the accident which made Chernobyl a symbol of fear throughout the world, the catastrophe is far from over for the inhabitants of the region. In Belarus, in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation, it continues to have a devastating effect not only on the health of the people, but on every aspect of society. The environmental, medical, psychological and economic consequences all exacerbate each other.

But, by the same token, anything done to help in one area can have a knock-on effect elsewhere, by making the traumatized communities feel they are not alone, and so encouraging them to greater efforts of their own.

We should therefore be profoundly grateful to organizations such as "Chabad's Children of Chernobyl", which -- in addition to saving many children from disease directly -- provides training for local doctors and is now setting up a breast cancer screening clinic in the region. This not only benefits the health of the patients who are treated, but also helps to build public confidence in health care generally, and so does something to combat the panic that people feel when they are surrounded, all their lives, by an invisible danger.

Last year, working with the three affected countries, the United Nations identified nine projects which should be given the highest priority. If implemented promptly these projects, together with the work of groups like yours, could help to break the cycle of despair, and set the region and its people on the road back to health and prosperity.

It is good that the international community has pledged large sums for maintaining safety at the reactor site, which we all hope will avert further disasters. But we must not forget those who are already suffering as a result of the disaster which occurred fourteen years ago. Much smaller amounts of money could make a real difference to their lives. Yet so far these amounts have not materialized.

Please join me in encouraging Governments, and other non-profit organizations like yours, to follow your example. Millions of people are still suffering from this tragedy. It is time the world made a serious effort to restore their health and their hope.

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