
ON 'SOMBRE' ANNIVERSARY OF CHERNOBYL, IMPACT STILL NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL IN MESSAGE TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Following is the text of the message of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, delivered on his behalf yesterday in Vienna by the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Hans Blix, to the International Conference on "One Decade After Chernobyl: Summing Up the Consequences of the Accident", which is being held in Vienna from 8 to 12 April:

This is a sombre anniversary. On the tenth anniversary of the accident at Chernobyl, the extent of its impact on affected populations has only begun to be fully realized.

The consequences of the Chernobyl accident cannot be regarded as the problem of a few countries. Even today, its health, social, economic and environmental dimensions, both immediate and long-term, remain to be defined. The United Nations system, international organizations and Member States have responded to the need for help with compassion, energy and enthusiasm. Your presence in Vienna reflects this. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Commission and many others, have played a key role in providing assistance. Within the United Nations, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is bringing together all who are involved in addressing the Chernobyl issue in a necessary and valuable pooling of expertise and experience.

I welcome this international forum on Chernobyl in Vienna and hope that it can assist the affected States, as well as donor countries and organizations, to focus their relevant activities and assistance on the most pressing tasks, for much more needs to be done to help those still suffering.

This worst disaster in the history of nuclear power generation has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and severely affected the social fibre of the States that were most seriously affected by its consequences. Radioactive contamination and health risks, both physical and mental, continue to affect vast populations in these countries. More than 300 children have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. The fertility rate has declined dramatically, and the mortality rate has increased.

As I stated in my 1995 annual report on the work of the Organization, lack of funds has affected several programmes relevant to addressing and mitigating the consequences of the accident. However, generous financial support by some countries has allowed the full and rapid implementation of priority activities.

The joint efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the IAEA have rendered large areas of land safe for agricultural production. The programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to overcome the psychological effects of the accident, however, continues to depend upon assured funds. The same need is affecting the WHO International Programme on Health Effects of the Chernobyl Accident. Each of these programmes and activities represents the potential of the United Nations for serving the international community in cases of great need. Your Conference can do much to draw attention and support for this work.

The deliberations of your Conference can facilitate a common understanding of the causes and consequences of the Chernobyl accident and promote the consolidation of international understanding on an issue the ramifications of which, even 10 years later, still remain to be fully understood. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

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