

**SECRETARY-GENERAL, WELCOMING IMMINENT CLOSURE OF
CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS, CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL
ASSISTANCE TO MITIGATE DISASTER'S LONG-TERM IMPACT**

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The following statement was issued today by the Spokesman for Secretary- General Kofi Annan:

The Secretary-General welcomes the decision by the Government of Ukraine to close the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on 15 December, as an important step towards achieving global nuclear safety. He thanks all parties that have worked towards the decommissioning of the plant, and hopes that continued support will be provided to help Ukraine alleviate the economic and social problems stemming from the plant closure.

Over the past 14 years, the lives of thousands of people in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation have been affected by the explosion of the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl. The Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the long- term impact of the accident, and urges Member States to provide much-needed funding for the rehabilitation projects in the United Nations Appeal for Chernobyl.

On this historic occasion, the Secretary-General appeals to all governments to give nuclear safety the highest priority so as to prevent any recurrence of this disaster.

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