
INTERNATIONAL CHERNOBYL CONFERENCE CONCLUDES IN VIENNA

VIENNA, 17 April (IAEA) -- An International Conference in Vienna has summed up the scientific understanding of the major social, health and environmental consequences attributed to the Chernobyl accident that occurred in Ukraine a decade ago.

More than 800 scientists and government officials in fields of nuclear energy, radiation safety and health care attended the meeting, which was jointly sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), European Commission (EC) and World Health Organization (WHO). Participants included high-level governmental representatives from the accident's three most heavily affected countries -- Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine -- and delegates from more than 70 other States and intergovernmental organizations.

"The Chernobyl reactor accident covers a dimension which goes far beyond the boundaries of nuclear safety and radiation protection", said Dr. Angela Merkel, Germany's Environment Minister and President of the Conference. "The actual effects of this disaster have social and economic aspects which are possibly far more significant than radiation exposure itself."

The Conference carefully reviewed the many scientific, medical, environmental, social and political issues involved in assessing Chernobyl's impact, in the context of major changes over the past decade in countries of the former Soviet Union. While the Conference (8-12 April) did not expect to reach scientific consensus on all issues involved, its Joint Secretariat did issue conclusions and recommendations that place the Chernobyl consequences into perspective and can serve as the factual basis for decisions about future work and collaboration.

Highlights of the Conference findings included those related to accident initial fatalities and injuries; incidence of thyroid cancer; and long-term radiation health effects. Conclusions were also reached on other health-related factors, environmental consequences and nuclear safety remedial measures.

The Conference featured a range of sessions at which experts reviewed the findings of work carried out to date, including the outcome of two major international conferences, one hosted in November 1995 by WHO and the other in

March 1996 under EC auspices in Minsk. Opening addresses were made by IAEA Director General Hans Blix; WHO Director Hiroshi Nakajima; H. Tent, Director General for Science, Research and Development of the EC; and M. Griffiths, Director of the United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs.

The technical symposium featured eight separate topical sessions on the range of social, health and environmental subjects. Topics included clinically observed health effects; thyroid effects; longer term health effects; other health-related effects, including psychological effects, stress and anxiety; consequences for the environment; the social, economic, institutional and political impact; nuclear safety remedial measures; and the consequences in perspective, a prognosis for the future. A panel discussion further explored the public's perception of the Chernobyl accident.

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