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## **Press Release GA/SM/37**

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### **ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT CALLS FOR UNITED NATIONS CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT IN TACKLING CONSEQUENCES OF CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT**

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Following is the text of the message of the President of the General Assembly, Hennadiy Udovenko (Ukraine), on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster:

April 26, 1998, marks 12 years since a reactor exploded at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine, but the repercussions of that catastrophe are still being felt. The accident, which proved to be the worst technological disaster in the history of mankind, had a devastating effect on the social and economic life of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Its impact, however transcended the borders of those three countries and became the symbol of a global disaster and the cause of common concern for the entire international community.

Despite the passage of years and the efforts exerted to remedy its effects, Chernobyl remains a major humanitarian tragedy of a unique nature, for all its similarities with other disasters. Unlike refugees in other emergencies, many people displaced by Chernobyl may never be able to return to their homes that will remain dangerously contaminated by radio nuclides for decades to come. As years go by, threats to human health persist. According to the most recent figures released by the Ukrainian Health Ministry, more than 12,500 recovery workers who took part in clearing up after the accident have since died.

All of this is a sad reminder that Chernobyl's ramifications are yet to be fully understood while the scope of its effects will continue to grow into the new millennium. It is therefore all the more important that the United Nations, its programmes, funds and agencies continue to be actively involved in tackling the diverse and far-reaching consequences of the accident. Much has already been done. Through a series of international conferences held over the past two years, a wide range of health, environmental and nuclear safety issues have been raised and analysed, resulting in a number of important proposals and recommendations for future action. Many specific projects have been launched by United Nations agencies, as well as regional and other organizations. An inter-agency programme was put together, constituting an appeal to the international community for continued assistance to the Chernobyl-affected populations

of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine for the second decade after the Chernobyl catastrophe.

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These far-reaching plans, however, cannot be translated into positive action unless there is a prompt and generous response from the international community. Many of the envisaged projects call for a relatively modest level of funding, but their impact could be tremendous as they help to bring quick and tangible relief to those afflicted by the Chernobyl disaster. Some of the projects are also intended to help reduce the grave risks posed to future generations of the region, but without proper resources they have little chance of success. This was once again emphasized by the General Assembly which at its current session invited donor States, multilateral financial institutions and other concerned parties, including non-governmental organizations, to continue to provide support to the ongoing efforts by Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The fallout from the Chernobyl accident reached far beyond the borders of the most seriously afflicted areas. And as we mark today another anniversary of that tragedy we should not be asking for whom the bell was tolling and instead do our best to make sure that its warning sounds do not go unheard.

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