

**PROGRAMME TO ASSIST AREAS AFFECTED BY CHERNOBYL DISASTER  
TO BE LAUNCHED TOMORROW AT SPECIAL MEETING**

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NEW YORK, 24 November (Department of Humanitarian Affairs) -- An international assistance programme for areas affected by the 1986 Chernobyl disaster will be launched tomorrow, 25 November, at a meeting convened by Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl.

The programme, with more than 50 projects covering such areas as the health sector, social-psychological and economic rehabilitation, and the environment, is based on the findings of an inter-agency needs assessment mission to Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine, undertaken in May.

The Special International Meeting on Chernobyl, to be held in the Economic and Social Council Chamber from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., will call for support for those projects. It will also inform the donor community of the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system and by national and other international organizations and institutions to eliminate or mitigate the consequences of the nuclear-power plant explosion that took place in April 1986.

More than a decade after the accident at Chernobyl, there continue to be increased incidences of thyroid and other cancers reported among the affected populations, as well as higher morbidity rates among recovery workers. In addition, the 1.9 million people living in the affected areas are experiencing economic hardship, and problems in the areas of food production, agricultural and forestry management, as well as other important areas such as environmental and nuclear safety.

In his report on the strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster (document A/52/537), the Secretary-General expressed deep concern over the ongoing effects of the disaster on the lives and health of people, particularly children, and pointed out the need for further substantial assistance. He also presented recommendations for future actions to improve both the immediate and long-term living conditions of those affected.

The projects in the programme address the following areas:

-- The health sector: strengthening of health-monitoring activities, including a project for continued medical treatment of recovery workers, the "liquidators";

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-- Social-psychological rehabilitation: strengthening of existing rehabilitation centres and creation of new ones;

-- Environmental issues, such as radiation protection, decontamination measures, agricultural and forestry activities;

-- Economic rehabilitation of the affected areas, as there is a need to create commercial and investment possibilities in view of the redeployment of economic activities away from the affected areas; and

-- A new information strategy, in order to create confidence and to communicate better with the population regarding the consequences of the accident.

It is hoped that donors attending the conference will provide generous financial support to the proposed projects.

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