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## **Press Release GA/9071**

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### **STATES AFFECTED BY CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT NEED REAL SUPPORT, TANGIBLE RESULTS SAYS GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT AT COMMEMORATIVE MEETING**

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Following is the text of the statement delivered today by the President of the General Assembly, Diogo Freitas do Amaral (Portugal), at the special commemorative meeting at Headquarters on the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident:

It is a distinct honour for me to address this solemn gathering on the day, designated by the General Assembly as International Day Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident. The fact that we are meeting today at United Nations Headquarters to commemorate this sombre anniversary is a clear indication of the international nature of the legacy of this accident, as well as of the importance that the United Nations continues to accord to this problem.

Before 26 April 1986, the word "Chernobyl" was recognizable only to a handful of nuclear energy experts as the location of a nuclear power station in the United Soviet Socialist Republic. After that fateful day, the very name "Chernobyl" became synonymous with disaster. Ten years after a nuclear reactor in the small town of Chernobyl in Ukraine exploded and burned, its long-term implications are still being examined. Just as the radioactive fallout from the explosion of Unit 4 spread across the Northern Hemisphere, so did the accident's psychological impact change completely the international community's perception of nuclear risk and of its potential consequences for human life.

Its most devastating effects are still acutely felt by hundreds of thousands of people in the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Whole communities were uprooted and forced to find new homes. Radioactive contamination, tremendous psychological stress, growing health problems and the ever-present fear of the unknown consequences that may yet manifest themselves, are tearing at the fabric of life in the affected States. The various international conferences and symposia conducted by the world scientific community in preparation for the tenth anniversary of Chernobyl have all confirmed these as being the most serious among the consequences of the accident. It is this continuing humanitarian plight that motivates the United Nations to bring to bear the expertise of its institutions to the task of mitigating the effects of this worst disaster in the

history of the nuclear industry. It is evident, however, that Chernobyl can not, and should not be regarded as the problem of just those countries that were most affected by it.

Mandated by successive resolutions of the General Assembly, the United Nations has made every effort to keep this issue high on the international agenda, stressing the need for concerted and focused international action. Through existing coordination mechanisms, particularly through the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, these resolutions specifically request the Secretary-General to continue his efforts aimed at encouraging the regular exchange of information, cooperation and coordination of multilateral and bilateral activities, while implementing programmes and specific projects of the United Nations system organizations. In view of its unique nature, the role that the United Nations itself can best play is a catalytic one. It can facilitate the involvement of the international community in mobilizing purposeful support to whichever organization or institution can most effectively respond to the priority needs. This, or any other approach, however, has no resonance, if it does not ultimately crystallize into real support that brings tangible results. Extensive research into the causes and consequences of the accident has been conducted and significant assistance rendered by a number of international, public and private organizations, individual Member States, to alleviate the situation. This is highly appreciated by the affected States, who never fail to acknowledge this.

There continues to be an acute need, however, for further assistance to the peoples and countries for whom Chernobyl represents a crushing burden in the midst of deep political and economic transformations. To ignore this continuing humanitarian tragedy would be to reduce these people and the areas most affected to mere objects of scientific research. The issue, in plain terms, is not whether any international assistance was rendered. It was. The issue is whether the assistance rendered was adequate, and whether the international community can step down and consider its task fulfilled. The answer to the last two questions has to be a clear "no".

In many ways, we have present in this meeting, representatives of all the major actors who can jointly achieve a far-reaching breakthrough in addressing the legacy we are left with in the affected States, greatly enhancing the role of the international community in this matter. This is, certainly, a consensus that needs to be urgently achieved and acted upon. On the tenth anniversary of the accident, this is all the more timely in view of the continuing grave humanitarian situation, and the complexity of this unprecedented problem, to say nothing of its larger implications, with regard to nuclear safety, nuclear waste management and the need to find the right balance between research and assistance. In the amalgam of the various emergencies occurring in the world almost on a daily basis, the problem of Chernobyl commands special attention in view of its unique and persistent character. The humanitarian, social and economic consequences of this accident continue to be a fact of life for the entire international community. Therefore, in any realistic forecast of the challenges facing the United Nations in the coming decades, the issues surrounding Chernobyl are problems of a lasting character.

The most appropriate way in which we could mark the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident would be to look to the future, to devise mechanisms and ways by which we, the international community, can fulfill our moral obligation not only to the peoples of the affected States, but also to our own peoples, in ridding humankind of the consequences of its own technological failings.

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