

Statement by Mr. Viktor V. Kryzhanivskyi
Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN
Opening of the Photo Exhibition “Chernobyl Seen by Children”
11 December 2007

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen!

It is my honour and privilege to open this exhibition together with our counterparts from three states, affected by the Chornobyl disaster. Our special thanks to UNICEF – for their tireless support and advocacy in the Chornobyl-related activities.

Today’s exhibition takes place at a special point in time. This morning the United Nations General Assembly has launched its High-Level Commemorative meeting on the Special session on children. Let me quote from the recently adopted UN resolution on Chornobyl, which has been adopted on 20 November 2007, and (beginning of quote) “expresses profound concern at the ongoing effects of the consequences of the accident on the lives and health of people, in particular children, in the affected region”.(end of quote)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than twenty-one years ago – on April 26, 1986 – unit 4 of the Chornobyl nuclear plant exploded and set on fire, releasing vast amount of radiation into the atmosphere. This was a disaster of global proportions. The world community unequivocally concluded that Chornobyl has been the major technological catastrophe in terms of scope and complexity that raised fundamental humanitarian, environmental, and health questions affecting all humankind.

The tragedy has taken toll on Ukrainian nation. For us the word ‘Chornobyl’ means nearly 3 million affected people, including 1.2 million children. It has also left deep scars on 200,000 people from 170 localities that had been evacuated in its aftermath. These high figures bear witness to the enormity of the catastrophe. But the global nature of the disaster can obviously not be measured solely by external signs such as the breadth of the area polluted and the number of people imprisoned by the invisible radioactive veil. It is still more important to

find out the genetic damage it has caused and, unfortunately, will continue to cause for generations to come. Up to now, we do not know yet the real extent of its impact.

Let me just come back to the figure I have mentioned – 1,2 million children are affected. This factor alone shows how big the toll paid by the affected countries in the aftermath of Chernobyl.

Many hard lessons have been learned from Chernobyl, including the need for transparent, timely, and credible information. Robert Louis Stevenson once said - “The cruelest lies are often told in silence”. Perhaps, the catastrophe represents one of the most salient examples of what we in the United Nations call “hidden or neglected” emergency. Reliable information about the accident and the resulting contamination was not available to affected people for about two years following the accident. Consequently, this has led to distrust and confusion about health effects.

Ukraine as coordinator in 2007 of the UN activities on Chernobyl continues to call upon all the interested parties to show further involvement in combating consequences of this tragedy. No one should be forgotten, but even most importantly – no affected child should be left behind. This is our responsibility, and our call to future generations.

I thank you for attention.