

Chernobyl Seen by Children
Remarks by Kul C. Gautam
Deputy Executive director UNICEF

At the Opening of a Photo Exhibition
United Nations, 11 December 2007

Excellencies,
Dear friends,

On behalf of UNICEF, I want to thank the children of the Chernobyl area in Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine for bringing to the world's attention these vivid pictures of the lives of people affected by the worst nuclear accident in human history.

Of all the victims and survivors of Chernobyl, our hearts go out to the most vulnerable – the children of the region who have paid the highest price.

Today, 2 decades after the accident, the worst of the humanitarian crisis has passed, but the continuing problems of health and well-being of children in the affected areas are still a matter of serious concern to us.

There are over 4,000 cases of thyroid cancer affecting children of the “Chernobyl generation”. The nature of that ill-health is vividly captured in these stunning photographs.

But cancer is only the tip of the iceberg. Widespread iodine deficiency in the vicinity of Chernobyl and other parts of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine is endangering the health, brain development and productivity of millions of people.

Along with other UN agencies, UNICEF is working with the governments of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine to ensure universal iodization of *all* the salt for human and animal consumption, which is the simplest and most affordable solution to this problem.

At the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children in 2002 world leaders made a solemn commitment to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders by 2005. This exhibition prepared by the children of Chernobyl reminds us that this commitment is now overdue.

This unfulfilled promise is a subject of review again at the on-going high level commemorative meeting of the General Assembly's Special Session on Children+5.

Tomorrow at 1pm there will be a side event downstairs in Conference Room B, precisely devoted to the subject of elimination of IDD from the world.

I would urge the delegates of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine to attend that session, and together with other member states develop an urgent, time-bound action plan for universal iodization of salt.

That would be a fitting response to this exhibition, and a meaningful way for us all to really honour the children of Chernobyl.

Excellencies, dear friends,

UNICEF remains ready to support your efforts for this noble cause.

Thank you.