

Acting President of the General Assembly
Opening statement at the commemorative meeting of the General
Assembly to observe the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe
28 April 2006

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, it is my honour to welcome all of you to this special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to observe the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

On 26 April 1986, the worst nuclear accident in history occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Since then, Chernobyl has become a symbol of a shattering human tragedy and devastating environmental damage.

Today we have gathered here to honour the memory of the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe. It is also an occasion to remember the heroism of the emergency workers who responded in the days following the disaster; the deprivation of more than 330,000 residents of the area who were evacuated from contaminated regions; and the suffering of millions of people living in affected areas, who over the past two decades have had to cope with the physical and psychological effects of the accident.

Alongside governments, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations, the United Nations and its funds, programmes and agencies have been involved in Chernobyl relief and recovery efforts from the very beginning. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, the assistance efforts of the United Nations family were naturally targeted to meet the wide-scale humanitarian needs. Over time the emphasis of these efforts has

shifted, and the United Nations family has since 2002 focused on promoting the social and economic development of the affected communities.

The legacy of the Chernobyl catastrophe remains strong. The effects of radioactive contamination are still being felt 20 years later in the affected region. There are ongoing international efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Here I would like to recognize the important contributions of the Chernobyl Forum, a collective effort by eight organizations within the United Nations system and the Governments of the most affected countries - Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine - to analyze the health, environment and socio-economic impact of the nuclear accident.

On this solemn occasion, as we observe the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe, we should also look forward and pay attention to the continuing needs of the affected region. In the last ten days, two major International Conferences on Chernobyl in Minsk and Kyiv have gathered representatives from governments, the United Nations system and other international actors to reflect on lessons learned and make proposals on future actions in response to the disaster.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

May today's event also serve to remind us of the need for international solidarity whenever or wherever international disasters occur. In today's world, the crucial challenges are borderless.