

Statement on behalf of the European Union by

**H.E. Ambassador Richard Ryan
Permanent Representative of the Ireland to the United Nations**

**To the Special Event commemorating the 18th anniversary
of the Chernobyl accident
27 April 2004**

I am pleased, on behalf of the European Union, to join Under Secretary General Jan Egeland, UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown, their Excellencies the Heads of Mission of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine and our distinguished guests and friends here this evening to commemorate the 18th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

While most remember well the immediate aftermath of the explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, eighteen years later many are not aware of the legacy it has left on the people, and especially the children, of the affected region. For there is indeed a terrible legacy of ill health, including cancer and birth defects, as well as serious environmental, economic and social problems. In addition to the three Governments in the affected region, it is thanks to the work and advocacy of a number of individuals and agencies that we are not allowed forget the consequences of the tragedy.

In Ireland we are proud of the work of the Chernobyl Children's Project and of its founder and Executive Director Adi Roche. The staff and volunteers of the Project have worked tirelessly to address the needs of children affected by the accident. We will learn more about this work in the documentary "Chernobyl Heart" shortly. I congratulate HBO and director and producer Maryann De Leo for bringing this difficult but important subject to film, a powerful medium for highlighting the devastating impact of the disaster.

We cannot and do not ignore the suffering and needs of those affected. Donors are funding initiatives which address the long-term consequences of the accident with a view to achieving the sustainable development of the contaminated areas. The EU has actively assisted the authorities in the region and has been a major contributor to projects in the area. The EU contribution runs to hundreds of millions of euro, covering research, assessment and mitigation of the environmental contamination, evaluation of health effects and their treatment, social programmes and nuclear safety. The European Commission, through the Tacis Programmes, has also provided support to the affected populations and territories. This support will continue in the future, including aid to Belarus, which bears the burden of the human consequences of the disaster, to deal with health related and other consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

I commend Under Secretary General Egeland and OCHA for your leadership and assure UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown of our support for the work of the UNDP as new UN coordinator on Chernobyl.

Chernobyl has cast a long shadow over new generations and the daily lives of people in the affected area. We owe it to them to refocus attention on their plight. The EU remains committed and will continue to work with all concerned to ensure the success of efforts to restore the site, improve the environmental situation and alleviate the legacy of social and medical consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

Thank you.