

Statement
by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine
to the United Nations
H.E. Ambassador Valeriy Kuchynsky
at the special event
commemorating the 18th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster

New York, 27 April 2003
18:00 pm, GA Hall

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Today we mark the 18th anniversary of the explosion of the fourth reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

It was not only the world's worst nuclear catastrophe, but a test for the international community of its ability to respond to technological, humanitarian and ecological disaster of that scope. It is the tragedy, which we cannot simply erase from our memory, like we cannot erase Hiroshima and September the 11.

For my country, Chernobyl is not only the pain of the past, but the problem of the present and the challenge for the future.

Tremendous efforts and resources have been put to mitigate the consequences of that disaster. We are grateful to many states, organizations, individuals, who gave us a helping hand.

Unfortunately, with the passage of time – particularly since the closing of the Chernobyl station in 2000 – the problem of Chernobyl is gradually losing its momentum and is becoming, for some, yet another boring issue on the United Nations agenda.

True, eighteen years is a long time. Children born on those tragic days have grown up and a new generation came into existence. But thousands of kids across Ukraine spend their time in hospitals, rather than on playgrounds, suffering from various birth defects and cancer related illnesses. And that might only be the beginning. Today there is a deep concern among the scientists about the long-term genetic damage to future generations.

For Ukraine, Chernobyl means 160,000 people from 170 towns and villages, who had to leave their homes and be relocated outside the areas of radioactive contamination. It still means the abandoned settlements, forests and fields, an area of more than 4,000 square kilometers that is empty and lifeless.

For the past decade Ukraine had to bear practically alone the financial burdens of alleviating and mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which amounted to 5-7 percent of the state budget. Since 1991 the mitigation costs have exceeded 6.5 billion US dollars.

Despite numerous pledges and commitments, much of the Chernobyl relief and recovery assistance has remained unfulfilled. We call upon the international community to reconsider its response to the Chernobyl accident and to focus on the practical support and,

what is more important, on specific results. We want to see more active engagement of the United Nations, its specialized agencies, development partners and donors. We place great hopes on the new UN Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chomobyl.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What the victims of Chornobyl need, is a concrete help, not a rhetoric or exciting projects on paper.

I think that the documentary film we are going to see tonight will speak to these people, especially children, much better and more effectively than hundreds of officials. We are very grateful to Ms. De Leo and her team for the great work done in reflecting on today's consequences of the Chornobyl accident.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that today event in the General Assembly Hall will become much more than just the screening of the Oscar-winning production. We believe that all of you, even those who have come just to take a look, will join in responding to Chornobyl tragedy.

I thank you.