

The Legacy of Chernobyl: America's Continuing Response 20 Years Later
United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Tuesday, 25 April 2006

Stephen G. Rademaker
Acting Assistance Secretary of State for
International Security and Nonproliferation

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Co-Chairman, other members of the Commission, it is a pleasure for me to appear again before the Helsinki Commission. I appreciate your invitation to address the Commission on the 20th anniversary of the disaster at Chernobyl.

As all of us know, Chernobyl was the worst nuclear accident in history. It was triggered early on the morning of April 26, 1986, when the Chernobyl facility's number four reactor exploded. Thirty people were killed in the blast or exposed to lethal doses of radiation as they sought to control the ensuing fire. The reactor burned for ten days, releasing hundreds of times more radioactivity than Hiroshima and contaminating large areas in northern Ukraine, southern Belarus, and western Russia.

The United States recognizes the serious and continuing health, environmental, social and economic legacy of Chernobyl some two decades later. We at the State Department have worked with Ukraine and the broader international community to help deal with the consequences of the accident, and today I would like to describe some of those efforts. The United States has and continues to provide substantial assistance through bilateral and international programs directed at mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. My Bureau has worked most closely with Ukraine on issues associated with nuclear safety, both at the Chernobyl site and in Ukraine more broadly. My testimony will focus on these issues.

First, I would like to note the humanitarian assistance we are providing to the victims of the accident in both Belarus and Ukraine.

Humanitarian Assistance to Belarus

With respect to Belarus, since 1992 Department of State humanitarian programs have delivered and distributed \$235 million in humanitarian commodities donated by private donors and the Department of Defense. This assistance was provided to the most needy in Belarus and was made possible by \$13 million in Freedom Support Act (FSA) funding for 39 airlifts and 1,030 ground shipments. These commodities included medicine, medical supplies, medical equipment, food, and clothing. A significant amount of medical and other assistance directly benefited those affected by Chernobyl.

Humanitarian Assistance to Ukraine

With respect to Ukraine, since 1992 the Department of State's humanitarian programs have delivered \$582 million in humanitarian commodities, donated by private donors and

the Department of Defense. This assistance was made possible by \$43.5 million in FSA funding for 74 air and 5150 ground shipments. Approximately one-half was targeted to those affected by Chernobyl, particularly children.

The United States has also invested \$12 million in health programs targeting those affected by Chernobyl. These programs included physical and mental health screening and treatment for children, breast cancer awareness, and access to modern cancer treatment.

In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, the Department of State, in partnership with two U.S.-based NGOs, sponsored and funded a humanitarian medical airlift to Kiev, Ukraine, on April 20th, 2006.

Nuclear Safety after Chernobyl

In Ukraine, the United States has worked bilaterally and within broader international efforts to achieve substantial improvements in nuclear safety at Chernobyl and elsewhere. The cornerstone of these efforts is the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Group of Seven (G-7) countries and Ukraine in 1995. The fundamental objective of the agreement was to develop a path forward for the ultimate closure of the then-operating Chernobyl Unit 3 reactor, while also providing for assistance that would help Ukraine deal with the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and related nuclear safety issues. The MOU led to the permanent closure of the remaining operating Chernobyl reactor in December 2000. As a result of this step, Ukraine significantly improved nuclear safety for its own people and those of its neighbors. The MOU also set in motion a sustained program of intensive cooperation between Ukraine and western governments and financial institutions through loans and grants for nuclear safety improvements and power sector reforms.

In the context of the MOU, the United States has provided more than \$400 million to enhance the safety of nuclear power plants in Ukraine. Ukraine's nuclear plants are now better equipped with fire safety and diagnostic equipment and boast improved quality assurance programs and procedures. Ukraine's nuclear power plants now have in place modern emergency operating instructions to address problems as they arise. The United States also works closely with Ukraine to share experiences in the area of nuclear regulation to ensure that nuclear power does not compromise health and environmental standards.

The MOU mobilized approximately \$1 billion in loans to increase energy sector stability and reliability and \$1.6 billion in grants for nuclear safety, including \$1.3 billion for the Chernobyl site itself.

The Chernobyl Shelter Implementation Plan (SIP) represents a key element of the nuclear safety framework established under the 1995 MOU. By providing a path forward for transforming the deteriorating sarcophagus that currently covers the destroyed reactor,

the SIP will provide an environmentally safe ending to another chapter of the Chernobyl tragedy.

Under the leadership of the G-7 and EC, and managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Chernobyl Shelter Fund was established to fund the SIP. To date, more than \$1 billion has been pledged to the Fund by 29 countries and the European Commission. Significantly, last year Russia made its first contribution -- \$10 million--to the Fund.

The United States played a prominent role in establishing and supporting the Fund. The United States remains the largest single country donor with a total CSF pledge total of \$203 million.

Key elements of the SIP, including construction of auxiliary systems and preparatory works and stabilization of the sarcophagus, are complete or nearing completion. The SIP has entered its final and most important stage--construction of the Shelter itself. Review of bids for executing this complex task is in the final stages. Construction of the New Safe Confinement or Shelter is expected to be complete by 2009.

Addressing other Chernobyl Legacy Issues

The aftermath of Chernobyl continues to plague the region. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced following voluntary and forced evacuations. This large-scale displacement produced massive social disruption and economic hardship. Lingering fear and uncertainty associated with Chernobyl related health effects continue to factor heavily into the daily lives of the affected population.

The Chernobyl Forum was created to bring together eight UN organizations and the governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine to develop an agreed upon, scientific basis for implementing the UN's 10-year strategy for revamping and reenergizing efforts to mitigate the lingering consequences of the Chernobyl accident. The World Health Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency coordinated the two-pronged review of health effects and environmental consequences, respectively.

This review included participation of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), the authoritative UN body for review of the science on the environmental and human health effects of radiation.

In 2005, the Forum completed its review of the scientific understanding on the effects of Chernobyl. The Forum's conclusions reaffirmed scientific consensus on health and environmental effects and recommended that resources be targeted to those areas identified to be of greatest concern.

While debate continues over health effects and numbers, one important outcome of the process has been a clear consensus among the UN agencies and the three governments

that a path forward for recovery is needed and such a path should focus on mitigating the continuing social and economic consequences.

To this end, the United Nations has recently shifted responsibility for oversight of Chernobyl-related programs to the UN Development Programme with the aim of improving the targeting of Chernobyl-related assistance and emphasizing community-based recovery and development.

Conclusion

While this is clearly a day of mourning for what was lost, we must also look ahead. One positive outcome of the disaster has been to focus the world's attention on the issue of nuclear safety. For example, immediately following Chernobyl, the international community adopted two key instruments for ensuring cooperation in the event of a nuclear accident: the Convention on the Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and the Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency. In the past two decades, both national and international infrastructures for ensuring the safety of the nuclear power plants have improved tremendously.

On this solemn anniversary, we pay tribute to the lives lost and communities destroyed in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident. But we also look ahead to a safer nuclear energy future for Ukraine and the rest of the world.

Cleared by:

ISN	S. Rademaker	
ISN/NESS	W. Stern	(ok)
ISN/SPO	K. Peterson	(ok)
EUR/UMB	M. Micheli	(ok)
EUR/UMB	D. Hultman	(ok)
EUR/ACE	G. Frowick	rechecking humanitarian assistance numbers
DOE(Kiev)	R. Awan	(info)