



MESSAGE

BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

TO

**The International Conference
'20 Years After Chernobyl: Strategy for Recovery and
Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions'
in Minsk, Republic of Belarus
19-21 April 2006**

On 26 April 2006, the international community will mark the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, which caused great suffering and serious damage in the affected areas of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation. As other countries in the region were also stricken by the increased level of radiation, the Chernobyl catastrophe became a major international disaster, in need of a large-scale international response.

As the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, I witnessed the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster during my visit to Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation in 1993. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, the assistance efforts of the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies and other international actors were naturally targeted to meet the wide-scale humanitarian needs. Since 2002, reflecting the changing needs on the ground, the United Nations has shifted its strategy from a humanitarian approach to an emphasis on sustainable development.

The theme of the International Conference in Minsk – '20 Years After Chernobyl: Strategy for Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions' – is well in line with this shift in focus from short-term relief to long-term solutions to the socio-economic, health and environmental impact of the Chernobyl catastrophe. I wish to convey to the Republic of Belarus and to UNDP, as Co-Chairs of the Conference, as well as to all participants of the Conference representing Member States, the UN system and other international actors, my best wishes for a successful and productive meeting.

More than a symbolic occasion, the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe will be an important opportunity to assess the international community's efforts to meet to the continued needs of those most affected by the accident. Apart from this International Conference in Minsk and other major events planned in the affected region, the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe will also be observed at the United Nations Headquarters. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/14, a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly will take place on 28 April in New York.

These solemn events remind us of a shattering tragedy leaving deep human scars and far-reaching socio-economic, health and environmental damage. Further, they remind us of the importance of not letting technology run out of control – society must be the master of technology, not the other way around. Lastly, they serve to remind us of the need for international solidarity when international disasters afflict us, wherever they occur. In today's world the crucial challenges are borderless.