

23 April 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
on the Theme “Chernobyl Update and Youth Action”**

Excellencies,

Allow me first to express my sincere tribute to the victims and the bereaved families who suffered from this unspeakable tragedy that took place on 26 April twenty-two years ago.

I congratulate the World Information Transfer, co-sponsoring governments of Ukraine, Peru and Georgia as well as the supporters from the Permanent Missions of the Philippines and Thailand for convening this important annual event. I regret that I am unable to attend in person due to prior engagements that take me away from Headquarters.

Over two decades have past since Chernobyl, and we are still dealing with the effects of this unique man-made disaster. It is a stark reminder of how vulnerable we are, how much we are dependent on each other and how much effort it takes from us all to address its afterlife. It is also a sad learning experience for us all on the type of burden disasters – natural or man-made -- may place on succeeding generations, such as the challenges we are facing today with climate change.

Young people born in the aftermath of the disaster are still suffering from its health and traumatic consequences as well as its broader social and economic after-effects. In this context, I welcome that the conference addresses the specific longer-term traumatic effects, such as stress related symptoms.

I am also heartened to see that the focus of this conference is on youth action. The Chernobyl disaster as a generational defining catastrophe shows that dealing with its full effects involves commitment and dedication from all sectors of society, in particular the young generation. Their enthusiasm to build their own future is a unique resource and driving force which must be taken full advantage of. I am encouraged to see that several speakers will showcase action taken by young people and hope that this will serve as inspiration for further activities to deal with the challenges still ahead.

Excellencies,

The United Nations General Assembly has been actively engaged in the “strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of the efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequence of the Chernobyl disaster”, to use the exact title of the agenda item concerning this matter.

In follow-up to the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly held two years ago, we saw a lively Assembly discussion in November last year, culminating in the unanimous adoption of resolution 62/9 introduced by Ambassador Yuriy Sergeyev, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine. The resolution, among other things, proclaims 2006-2016 “the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions”, to focus United Nations and national-level activities on helping Chernobyl-disaster affected communities return to normal life as far as possible within that time frame.

Excellencies,

In addressing this unprecedented global challenge, the international community has been working in close cooperation and unison with the affected region and donors, governments and civil society, humanitarian and development experts. As the most universally representative body, the General Assembly will continue to do its part to support women and men in the affected areas as they strive for long-term economic and social development with new opportunities, community self-sufficiency and a return to normalcy.

In closing, I wish you a successful and fruitful meeting in the next two days.

Thank you.