

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. SEMUKHA (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that 11 December 1991 would mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57 (I) establishing the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. The achievements of UNICEF since that time had been crowned by the 1990 World Summit for Children, which had significantly enhanced the authority of UNICEF in international affairs. At the Summit, the Heads of State of more than 70 countries, including his own, had demonstrated political support for the programme goals of UNICEF for the 1990s and had decided to implement a concrete Plan of Action to address the needs of children as a matter of priority. Another major event in 1990 had been the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Byelorussian SSR had been one of the first countries to ratify.
2. The role of UNICEF was to cooperate with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other international agencies to define the needs of children and to support individual countries in planning and implementing appropriate measures to address those needs. Its activities should defend the interests of all children, in accordance with the principle of universality proclaimed in the Convention.
3. It was particularly important that the commitment to enhancing the physical and spiritual well-being of children, as set forth in the Declaration, should be viewed as the common task of all peoples. That provision of the Declaration was a message of hope and universal solidarity that took on special significance for the children and mothers who had suffered from the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The growth of international solidarity in support of those victims had culminated in the sponsorship by more than 120 Member States of General Assembly resolution 45/190 on international cooperation to address and mitigate the consequences of the accident. In addition, the interim report of the Secretary-General on the matter had indicated that the situation required concerted action by the entire international community.
4. In 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR had declared the territory of the Republic a national ecological disaster area. The scale and consequences of the disaster were becoming clearer as the years passed. Physicians and scientists had reaffirmed the continuing danger posed by radioactive contamination. Studies had shown that half of all children from the contaminated zone who had been examined were ill, with changes in their immune system, blood or thyroid gland. Levels of radioactive caesium in children were 2 to 10 times permissible levels, and the milk of nursing mothers had been found to contain caesium. There was also an increased incidence of anaemia, leukaemia and malignant tumours. In Byelorussia alone, the health and lives of 800,000 children were at risk, and UNICEF could not afford to ignore them. Emergency assistance was needed in the form of medical examinations, treatment and relocation outside the contaminated zone. His delegation would present a draft resolution to that effect to the Programme Committee, and he hoped for the continued understanding, sympathy and support of the Executive Board.