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OSCE MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DISASTER AT THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

26 April 2006 will mark the 20th Anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (NPP).

Commemorating this tragic day, we once again remember all the victims, including all emergency and recovery operation workers, of the twentieth century's major technological catastrophe, in terms both of scope and of consequences.

This disaster resulted in large-scale radioactive contamination of vast areas in Europe, most heavily affecting the territories of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The accident has had an adverse impact on the lives and health of millions of people, in particular children, and has imposed a massive burden on the economy and environment of the most affected States.

We appreciate the enormous efforts made by the national governments concerned to address the effects of the Chernobyl accident. These endeavours have been supplemented to a significant degree by the involvement of the international community, including organizations of the United Nations system, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), aimed at providing assistance to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. We also commend the contribution made by non-governmental organizations, private initiatives and individuals.

However, even today, the long-term consequences of the disaster, which include humanitarian, environmental, social, economic and health problems, continue to persist. Therefore, efforts need to continue to alleviate these consequences, focusing primarily on such vitally important issues as economic and environmental rehabilitation and sustainable development of the territories affected.

We are also aware that the Chernobyl NPP continues to pose a potential threat in the centre of Europe. In this regard, special attention should be focused on completing the Shelter Implementation Plan by constructing the main remaining component, the New Safe Confinement Arch. We appreciate the effort of the international community to increase financial commitments to the EBRD Chernobyl Shelter Fund to over USD 1 billion this year.

Environmental matters have always been a part of the OSCE's mandate, reflecting the Organization's comprehensive approach to security and co-operation. In the Helsinki Final Act we agreed to study, with a view to their solution, those environmental problems that, by their nature, are of a multilateral, bilateral, regional or subregional dimension; as well as to encourage the development of an interdisciplinary approach to environmental problems.

In this context, the OSCE will continue to contribute to international co-operation efforts to alleviate the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, including through participation in and support of relevant projects, and to provide appropriate assistance and expertise in consultation with the States concerned.

In commemorating this tragic event we believe that the Chernobyl disaster demonstrated how important it is for the international community to develop and apply commonly agreed policies and strategies to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the prevention of, and response to, technological accidents and their consequences for human beings and the environment. We also believe that, in order to effectively tackle such challenges, concerted efforts are needed between the States concerned, the relevant international organizations, financial institutions and other interested donors.