

Thursday, April 27, 2006
2:00 - 6:00 p.m.
Room HC - 5, The U.S. Capitol Building

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Congresswoman Kaptur, Congressman Weldon, Congressman Levin, Congressman Bartlett, other members of the Ukrainian Caucus, it is an honor for me to appear before you today. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Caucus on the Chernobyl Shelter project for the 20th anniversary of the disaster at Chernobyl.

As all of us know, Chernobyl was the worst commercial nuclear accident in history. The accident and resulting disaster began early on the morning of April 26, 1986, when steam explosions within Chernobyl unit number four decimated the reactor. Thirty people were killed in the blast or were exposed to lethal doses of radiation as they sought to control the ensuing fire. The reactor burned for ten days, releasing a large fraction of its radioactive contents to the environment, resulting in the contamination of 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 provided and continues to provide substantial assistance through bilateral and international programs directed at mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. We have worked most closely with Ukraine on issues associated with nuclear safety, both at the Chernobyl site and in Ukraine more broadly.

My testimony today will focus on our efforts to enhance nuclear safety, particularly in Ukraine, and to provide a path forward for providing an environmentally safe endstate for the deteriorating sarcophagus that entombs the remains of the destroyed reactor.

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 Chornobyl 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 are working toward 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 Chornobyl site itself.

New Safe Confinement for Chornobyl Unit 4

The Chornobyl Shelter Implementation Plan (SIP) represents a key element of the nuclear safety framework established under the 1995 MOU. By providing a path forward for stabilizing and deconstructing the deteriorating sarcophagus that currently covers the destroyed reactor, the SIP will provide an environmentally safe ending to one chapter of the Chornobyl tragedy.

Under the leadership of the G-7 and EC, and managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Chornobyl 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 site preparation, infrastructure projects, 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.

When completed, the Shelter will shield the sarcophagus and its contents from the degrading effects of wind and rain, contain to some degree radioactive dust released should the sarcophagus collapse unexpectedly, and provide a platform from which dismantling of the sarcophagus and eventual decommissioning of the reactor itself can be accomplished safely.

The U.S. also contributes to and participates in the Nuclear Safety Account (NSA) also administered by the EBRD. The NSA was established in 1993 as an outgrowth of a G-7 initiative to improve nuclear safety in central and eastern Europe. Approximately half of the Account's 320 million Euro total has been directed at Chernobyl projects that complement and support work on the Shelter. Of this, the U.S. has contributed 30 million Euro.

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. This new strategy represents a positive step forward

for ensuring effective and sustainable assistance continues to flow to those who need it most.

Closing

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. As a result, we look ahead to a safer nuclear energy future for Ukraine and the rest of the world.

On this solemn anniversary, we pay tribute to the lives lost and communities destroyed in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident. We especially salute the sacrifice and heroic actions of those who responded to the accident and saved the lives of others through their actions.

While this anniversary is clearly an occasion for mourning for what was lost, we also look ahead to a brighter future for the countries and people most affected by the accident. The United States continues to support efforts by the international community and the United Nations organizations to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of Chernobyl.

Thank you.

