

## **Concluding Statement**

Burton G. Bennett, Chairman

I would like to bring this conference to a close with a few brief statements. First of all, I would like to thank those who participated in the presentations and discussions of the past two days. The assessments of the continuing environmental levels of radioactive contamination, the health consequences of radiation exposures received by workers, evacuated persons and by those who continue to live in contaminated areas and also the social and economic issues were very clearly presented. These sound, scientific evaluations form the basis for sensible, practical recommendations that could be adopted by governments to manage the public health problems that will be faced for still some time as a legacy of the accident.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the specialists who prepared the expert reports that formed the basis of the conclusions and the recommendations of the Chernobyl Forum. These reports incorporate the latest scientific findings on the consequences of the accident. A careful review of social and economic issues has also been prepared to serve as a basis for new national and international initiatives to help the recovery process. This material was constructed on the already solid foundation of numerous studies, international reviews and evaluations that have been conducted over the past 20 years. Together this knowledge forms a solid basis for our present observations and recommendations.

The Chernobyl accident was a disaster that required massive response. The former Soviet Union and the successor countries reacted with heroic efforts to limit the contamination of the environment and exposures of the public. The protective measures were extremely effective. We can truly say that except for the high exposures received by workers on the night of the accident and for many children who very unfortunately received high exposure to radioactive iodine released in the accident and who later incurred thyroid cancer, the accident was a low dose event.

The majority of workers who participated in the cleanup efforts, the many thousands of persons evacuated during the early days following the accident, and all those who continued to live in contaminated areas received radiation doses from Chernobyl-released radionuclides that were relatively low and unlikely to lead to widespread and serious health effects. The doses to these individuals are comparable to those caused by naturally occurring radionuclides that produce a background level of radiation to which everyone in the world is exposed. Some notable regions of high background radiation exist in several countries that are caused by higher concentrations of thorium or uranium radionuclides in the beach sands or in soil or water. The Chernobyl exposures are not unlike these naturally occurring areas that are not associated with discernable radiation health effects.

Many of the health effects in the population of the Chernobyl-affected regions are caused by other factors than radiation. That is not to belittle the possible consequence of radiation exposures, but it is to recognize the harm done by smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet, or inadequate health care or advice. It may make sense to address these other issues at the same time or even instead of the radiation threats to achieve the best progress in improving public health and well being in the Chernobyl countries. Let us resolve to see things in wide perspective and to accept proper priorities to improve public health in the region.

I would like to stress that our conclusions are more than just valid, objective, scientific statements. They are a consensus of all of the scientists, international organization staff and representative of governments who participated in the Chernobyl Forum and this conference. All of us agree on the basic underlying facts. We agree with the evaluations of the health and environmental effects. We accept the characterization of the social and economic problems engendered by the accident, and we acknowledge the critique of the response thus far to the existing issues by the governments and the public.

We are speaking with one voice on the various issues. Even in the complex situation that we have now and the uncertainties that we face going forward, we are starting out now with consensus views on the issues. We have reached agreement on the recommendations to guide our continuing efforts to ensure the well being of the populations of the affected areas and contribute to the economic recovery of the region.

These consensus views cannot be taken lightly now and then disregarded sooner or later when other statements would seem to be more expedient or would perhaps attract more attention. If we do not hold to these agreements, the disputes will reemerge. The problems will continue of ineffective government measures to deal with public health problems, and the public will continue to feel that their concerns are not being heard and dealt with. It will also be difficult for international organizations to work effectively with governments to initiate widely supported measures to improve public health and lead to economic stability and prosperity. We must speak with one voice now and with one voice as we go forward.

The stakes are high for disregarding our consensus views and the agreements we have just concluded. We would revert to continuing disputes and ill will, waste large sums of money and be unable to attract international assistance that is still required. But the prospects are high for going forward in a positive way, utilizing the consensus evaluations for dispelling unfounded views on the consequences of the accident, redirecting our limited resources in the most effective ways, and restoring the trust of the public that is so essential to resolve the problems that are still faced as residual features of the accident.

In the past, we have experienced a disparity in the views of the scientists, who evaluated the health and environmental issues, and the views of the politicians who felt that different conclusions would be more likely to win international sympathy and humanitarian aid. We know so well that it does not work for us to go our separate ways. We must speak with one voice if we are to overcome the problems that we still face. Let us resolve to help each other to bring clarity to all aspects of the issues related to the Chernobyl accident and to bring efficiency and success to our efforts to deal with the continuing problems.

We will certainly be challenged as we go forward. Nobody said it would be easy to transform the recommendations of the Chernobyl Forum into practical measures that can be enacted by governments to contribute to a better future of their countries. The contamination will not go away, even if we understand the transfers of radionuclides in the environment and realize the countermeasures that are most effective for dealing with this. The stress and worry of the public about radiation effects will only slowly dissipate, even with good information and clear presentation of the real risks and dangers. The economy will not response quickly to new initiatives, even if these seem in the long term to be most sensible and effective for fostering economic development.

We must understand these difficulties, but we must face realistically and resolutely the challenges before us. We must be patient with the long recovery, but let us be steadfast in our resolve to deal with the issues in a sincere and truthful way, so that the efforts of government, international organizations, and the public will be united and coordinated, and all will be satisfied that we are doing our utmost to recover from the serious consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

On behalf of organizers and sponsors of this conference, I would all like to express our gratitude for the many specialists from many countries, who compiled the expert reports that form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations of the Chernobyl Forum. The expert reports were prepared in a remarkably short timeframe. Obviously those involved made considerable effort to complete their work in a timely fashion. They addressed the most important issues related to the accident and the recovery process, and they produced the most complete and useful compilation of information and results available at present. Their clarity and objective presentation have enabled not only scientists but also government representatives and politicians to accept the conclusions. The Chernobyl Forum will be judged successful in large part from the good work of the expert groups.

The Chernobyl Forum will also be judged successful from the participation all along of government representative of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. Their good will and understanding have ensured that there will be wide acceptance of the Forum's recommendations and effective measures will be taken with the encouragement of international organizations. We all have great expectations for progress and continued alleviation of the consequences of the accident, for the economic development of the whole region, and for the improvement in public health that we all aspire and strive for.

Finally I would like to thank the International Atomic Energy Agency for organizing the Chernobyl Forum. In that regard, I should thank Mr. ElBaradei personally for the original initiative that he proposed to bring agreement from disputes, to bring concerted and coordinated efforts to measures still needed to improve public health and to bring consensus as the basis for future actions.

I thank the many other international organizations that have joined with IAEA in sponsoring the Chernobyl Forum. The World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme made substantial, direct contributions to the work of the Forum and the presentations at this conference. I thank all those who have participated in and contributed to the success of the Chernobyl Forum.

Especially for the persons directly affected by the accident, I wish that our work of preparing informative materials and of presenting the findings at this international conference will be translated into effective actions that will benefit them directly and improve their health and well being and their prospects for productive and fulfilling lives. They are the ones who deserve and expect the fruits of our efforts and the good that may come from our effective actions.

I now declare closed the activities of the Chernobyl Forum. After having looked back, let us now go forward together and join in our efforts to transform discussions into actions. Let us cooperate to make concerted efforts to inform the public of the measures still needed to avoid further radiation exposures from radionuclides released by the accident, to formulate reasonable and fair measures to compensate for injuries and disruptions of lives, and utilize our limited resources most effectively for the common good. Let us turn the Chernobyl

accident from a disaster unfolding into a public health issue diminishing and an economic potential expanding. The crisis that befell the region needs now solutions that will erase the damage and disruption and bring forth better prospects for the health and prosperity of all those involved. Let our problems be solved, and let our hopes and aspirations become reality.

Thank you for your participation in this conference and you efforts hitherto to make our work successful. I will thank you in advance for your continuing willingness to contribute to a better future for the Chernobyl region.