

30 May 2006

The Secretary-General

**Message on the 50th Anniversary of the UN Scientific  
Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation**

Vienna, 30 May 2006

*Delivered by Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Director-General,  
United Nations Office at Vienna*

VIENNA, 30 May (UN Information Service) -- For the past 50 years, the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation has fulfilled effectively and without fanfare the important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

The commemoration of this anniversary brings with it a potent reminder of the importance of that work, since it corresponds with the 20th anniversary of the tragic accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. That accident, the most severe in the history of nuclear power, released radioactive material that spread over large areas of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Not only did it cause contamination across these countries, it caused fear around the world. It also brought home a key point: radiation is silent; we cannot see, smell or touch it.

Most people's impression of radiation is shaped by their concern about nuclear weapons, augmented by fear of cancer and hereditary damage. In order to gauge radiation levels and protect people, we need dependable scientific information, honestly assessed by the finest expertise. It is precisely in this respect that UNSCEAR has proved its worth.

For half a century, UNSCEAR has been the trusted world authority on ionizing radiation. From assessing the significance of fall-out from nuclear-weapon tests in the 1950s, to studying the effects of radiation on the human genome today, UNSCEAR has always taken an independent and objective approach to its work. On questions that are often highly emotional and political, UNSCEAR's reports are impartial, dispassionate and scientific, and have prompted significant worldwide reductions in radiation exposure.

We live in a nuclear world, with important nuclear applications in science, medicine and the power industry, but also, regrettably, with the threat of nuclear and radiological weapons. To make sensible decisions on these issues, we have to understand the effects of atomic radiation. UNSCEAR's work will also be essential in meeting the environmental challenges associated with nuclear power.

Therefore, it gives me pleasure to send my greetings to this ceremony honouring UNSCEAR, and to congratulate the many scientists and governments who have supported the Committee and its work. You are all playing an important role in making the world a safer, healthier and more peaceful place for all its inhabitants.

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