

Opening Plenary Address
by the OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut
at the Conference
“Twenty Years After Chernobyl: Strategy for
Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions”

(Minsk, 19 April, 2006)

Mr. Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today in this important conference we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. We remember the victims and we give tribute to the heroic emergency and recovery workers. We realize as strongly as ever that these tragic events of 20 years ago changed thinking about the environment all over the world. Issues of nuclear safety, environmental security and environmental interdependence have come to the forefront of the international discussion and cooperation.

What happened in Chernobyl became one of the largest man-made disasters. It produced an unprecedented radioactive contamination, affected the lives and health of millions of people and created a massive burden for the economy and environment in the adjacent territories. With almost 25 % of its territory heavily affected by the fall-out from the explosion, Belarus was hit heavily. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary, the international community restates its full solidarity to your country, as well as to Ukraine and Russia and to all people who suffered and still suffer from the consequences. The high representation at this conference can be understood as a strong gesture that this solidarity is indeed present.

The governments concerned made tremendous efforts to address the effects of the Chernobyl accident. Since 1986, their endeavours have been supplemented to a

significant degree by the involvement of the international community, by International Organizations, States, non-governmental organizations, private initiatives and individuals. OSCE participating States stressed in their Ministerial Declaration on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant the undiminished need to alleviate the consequences of the disaster, as there are humanitarian, environmental, social, economic and health problems, focusing primarily on economic and environmental rehabilitation and sustainable development of the territories affected.

The extent of the Chernobyl disaster made national borders virtually irrelevant. Let me mention that the notion of indivisible security and interdependence among the States was one of the founding principles of the OSCE: In the view of modern threats we have to find common answers, as international security depends on many political, human, economic as well as environmental factors.

Shortly after Chernobyl, the participating States of the OSCE, at that time the CSCE, restated the urgent need for close cooperation to improve prevention, early warning, exchange of information and mutual assistance in cases of industrial accidents likely to cause transboundary damage to the environment. While commemorating Chernobyl, we should also recognize the great achievements we have made since then to make our continent safer.

The OSCE, an organization with 55 participating States where the Republic of Belarus is a full-fledged member, has made important contributions to build a Europe whole and free, and it remains committed to assist States in finding common answers to common threats and to prevent new dividing lines from emerging as well as to assist States in transforming their societies and economies. And it continues to attach the utmost importance to economic and environmental issues.

Our OSCE is in a favourable situation of being able to channel its assistance to Belarus through a representation on the ground, the OSCE Office in Minsk. The Office cooperates with the government and international partners under the CORE programme of rehabilitation of living conditions in areas of Belarus affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Here and in other areas there is still a lot of potential for cooperation. On this occasion I would like to thank the Belarusian government for the support for the OSCE presence in your country and to express the strong desire of the organization to continue close cooperation on this basis.

With the vivid and lasting memory of what happened in Chernobyl in 1986 and how massively it affected the surrounding regions we should look ahead and intensify efforts to allow for sustainable development of the territories affected and to give the inhabitants the chance to live a normal life. Let us make good use of the solidarity and many initiatives designed to help people. The OSCE is ready to facilitate this process and to enhance cooperation among its participating States to the benefit of the people of Chernobyl.