

**Statement at the UN General Assembly to Commemorate 30th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident**

**26 April 2016**

Good morning Secretary General, President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Ambassadors, Honoured Representatives of Member State countries of the United Nations.

30 years ago today… at exactly 01:23 on the morning of April 26th 1986 a chain of events in Reactor No 4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station in Ukraine, led to an explosion spewing deadly radioactive contamination into the night sky, where the blowing winds scattered it far and wide unfolding at terrifying speed and so triggering the world’s worst nuclear disaster.  A new word, “Chernobyl”, entered into the history of language, the history of world disasters and the history of the world with deadly and frightful force. The sun shone, the wind blew, rain fell down and so did the deadly radioactive poison with it.

My name is Adi Roche. I’m from the Republic of Ireland and today - on this day of worldwide remembrance and reflection on the tragedy that is Chernobyl, I have been given the privilege of addressing this special General Assembly of the United Nations thanks to the Mission of Belarus: I thank them for this opportunity.

I cannot speak with the authority of a scientist or doctor; I cannot prove my statements with laboratory or field test experiments; I have no medical or scientific academic qualifications to endorse my remarks. In humility I can only offer my truth, my witness, my evidence of the heart. I have visited and worked in the Chernobyl affected regions for 3 decades and I am haunted by the stories of people I met - women like Tanya from the demolished village of Lipa. I remember she talked about how she was forever ‘rooted like a tree’ to the earth of her ancestors, but now she was ‘withering away and dying’.  Looking at her little farmyard, shaking her head in disbelief she said: ‘We didn’t just lose our village, we lost life.  Chernobyl is like a big stone in my heart, always there, always heavy…the song of my village has come to an end.’

And there was Pavel, head of his family who remained in the village and when I asked him why he was still in this radioactive place, he knelt on the ground, picked up two fist fulls of earth, with tears running down his face, kissed it and said ‘this earth is sacred, the earth of my ancestors; this earth is my soul; take me from the earth and you take my soul.’

Like Pavel, and thousands like him, have tragically and forever lost their earth, their soul, a tragic and great loss of ‘place’, community, history…all lost forever.

 Chernobyl and now sadly Fukushima, is a very bleak and dark Forever! A sin against the beauty and wonder of our Earth ….a sin against ordinary decent people. There may be an impression that 30 YEARS ON Chernobyl is something which happened a very long time ago and no longer poses a threat to the world, but the reality of the situation is very, very different. Chernobyl is not something from the past; Chernobyl ‘IS, sadly, FOREVER’; the impact of that single shocking nuclear accident can never be undone; its radioactive footprint is embedded in our world forever and countless millions of people are still being affected by its deadly legacy. We may never know the full extent of that contamination, we may never be able to prove itas if it were a simple geometry proposition, but the tragedy that IS Chernobyl.. IS very, very real.

Three weeks ago, I returned to the highly contaminated “zone of alienation” that surrounds the Chernobyl plant on a ‘fact finding’ mission and whilst there, I was asked by some of the men who heroically fought for days/months to contain the spreading radioactive fire, who carried out evacuations of towns/villages, demolishing and burying thousands of those same towns/villages. They asked me to bring their stories and their voices to this great gathering today.

I wear this Chernobyl Service medal with great honour, deep respect and a deep sense of responsibility…given to me by a Liquidator Officer called Valerii Zaitsev, one of the 700,000 “Liquidators” – the soldiers and civilians;  the helicopter pilots, the firemen; the miners and the engineers, who were sent into the Chernobyl nuclear conflagration.

 For Valerii and his gallant comrades fighting the highly radioactive fire at Chernobyl was their “Ground Zero”.

Like The Brave Rescue Service heroes of New York’s 9-11 calamity they, the Chernobyl Liquidators, these noble and self-sacrificing men, ought to be rightly honoured and recognized today as The Heroes who saved Europe and indeed the world from even greater catastrophe! Many of the Chernobyl Liquidators feel that they have not been so honoured in fact, they feel that they have been dishonoured, neglected, abandoned and forgotten.

And so…..my First appeal to this great assembly today is that these heroic men; these First Responders of the Nuclear Accident Age –the Liquidators, be recognised and the world should see that their medical and social care needs are fully met. Honouring my pledge to Valerii and the thousands of other brave men, I respectfully place this request/proposal before the floor of this house.

Secondly, I respectfully propose that this day the 26th of April be pledged and designated as an official United Nations ‘Chernobyl Day’ a day that would always be honoured and commemorated and be a day for renewal and recommitment to discover new means, new initiatives to alleviate further the suffering of the people and lands, affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Thirdly, to prevent Chernobyl becoming the NEXT Chernobyl. I respectfully ask that the United Nations urgently use their power and influence to propel forward the completion of the new Sarcophagus, the vital Safety Shield over the exploded No 4 Reactor, that is crucial for the protection of the world in the provision of containment from the deadly, highly radioactive materials still lurking in Reactor No 4, and move swiftly to the next ‘phase’ of DISMANTLING and safely removing and storing hundreds of tons of radioactive material…a project never done before and requiring new thinking and new expertise.

Fourthly, that provision be made to fund access to ‘clean food’ and adequate food monitoring, milk/dairy products, meat, firewood, timber in order to protect the citizens.

Fifthly, that monitoring and radiation check-ups of people be reinstated throughout the stricken regions, along with the provision of the most up-to-date medical and scanning equipment ensuring extensive ongoing monitoring, particularly for children and pregnant mothers living in the contaminated zones.

And sixthly, that the ‘contaminated zones’, highly radioactive land be kept free of cultivation and re-population.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of you are either mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunties, uncles, today I ask you to remember and honour the children, the innocent victims of Chernobyl. So much is already lost and compromised, surely we owe it to them to do all we can, to safeguard their health and happiness, their right to a safe and secure future.

Children are every nation’s greatest treasure they are usually voiceless, anonymous, and sometimes far too disposable.

I represent them also here today, I am a voice amongst other voices, other voices who speak up and out for the protection and value of all children for their health and wellbeing, their security, their right to a better, safer world. Let those voices be heard today in this great assembly!

While this disaster is a mere 30 years old, the consequences last to infinity. Other disasters are vying for the world’s attention but Chernobyl has been sadly relegated to history. Probably because the images from the tragedy are different to the deeply disturbing images of war and famine, and other such disasters where we see the immediate effects of bombs/bullets/starvation etc. However, the ‘war’ that has been waged by Chernobyl is a silent, invisible but deadly one. No smell, no sight, nothing to forewarn you of danger, no ‘safe haven’, no escape. Yet it beats in the hearts of every innocent men women and child, in all living things, from human beings to animals, flora and fauna. It beats in their rivers, towns, streams and forests. The deadly radiation, clicking endlessly, ferociously in Geiger counters, into the silent numbness that is and sadly always will be Chernobyl.

Former General Secretary Kofi Annan, speaks about: ‘While Chernobyl is a word we would all much prefer to wipe out from our memories as it recalls an event which opened a Pandora’s box of invisible enemies’ – enemies that will stalk the land for the rest of time. Sobering words that act as a stark reminder of our need to be vigilant in the protection of our environment.

The great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas urged us not to: ‘go gentle into that good night’…but to ‘Rage, rage against the dying of the light’….

Today on this 30th Anniversary of one of the blackest days in human history and human tragedy, let us also rage against that dying light, that dimming light of ‘not enough done’…of neglect, of forgetfulness, of abandonment, indifference, and the distraction of other disasters…

Let us rage against that dimming light, today on this 30th Anniversary let us ‘rage’ and renew and rekindle our commitment to the innocent victims of Chernobyl, those countless ordinary men and women, those innocent children, their lives, their hopes, their homes their security their safety, and say to them once more, you are not forgotten, you are not irrelevant, you are not peripheral, we love you, we will do our utmost to care for and protect you, we are your brothers and your sisters, your pain and suffering is ours.

Dear Ambassadors, you who represent, not just your Presidents, your Prime Ministers, you are your governments, but also, you represent the ordinary folk, the day to day regular people, the common man, woman, child, of this world….please listen…and please act… and let us rededicate our efforts today to further alleviate the plight of the innocent victims and survivors of Chernobyl…offering that most precious and enabling gift of …..HOPE..and so, gathered here we re-light the beacon of hope in the ‘heart of hope’, the UN, and let its light flash around this world..but especially let it fly to the dear people and land of Belarus, Ukraine, Russia…to say to them…look! the flame is not quenched, the beacon is still alight…gather near and gather strength from its light and warmth…you are not forgotten…you are not alone…you are among friends and neighbours who care and who want to share in your plight and despair. Not with just fine words but with positive and life changing initiatives of action..for there is always HOPE!

Thank you!