

TETYANA MURZA

My name is Tetyana Murza, I am coming from town of Rivne in Ukraine, and represent environmental non-profit group Ecoclub. The city I am from, Rivne, is located in the middle of triangle of 3 nuclear power plants – Rivne (70km), Khmelnytsky (30km) and Chornobyl (260km). I came to the environmental movement because of the new project that started in my area - construction of two new nuclear units: on Rivne and Khmelnytsky NPP (K2R4). In 1997/98 the debate on K2R4 intensified. Being geographically located in the center of the debate, Ecoclub became one of the active opposition players, together with a number of international and local groups.

Ukraine is the site of the worst industrial accident in the world. Well known by probably most of the world's population, this accident surrounds everyday Ukraine's social and economic life, influences and shapes its relation with other countries, and at the same time is not a lesson learned by Ukraine itself for the future.

On April 23-25th, 2006, along with many groups across Europe and USA, Ecoclub co-sponsored a major conference in Kyiv to mark the 20th anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster. The conference took a new look at the real consequences of the Chornobyl accident, at the reality of nuclear power's continuing drawbacks, and at steps Ukraine can take—and every country can take—to achieve a sustainable, safe and clean energy future: the goal I know we all share.

Twenty years after the catastrophe, the truth about its dimensions, and specifically about the health consequences it has been causing, has still not been fully recognized. A key part of the nuclear industry's program is to downplay the consequences of Chornobyl. For example, last September, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and World Health Organization (WHO) released a report on Chornobyl's consequences, which concluded that while the accident had resulted in hundreds of billions of dollars in damages and permanent interdiction of large areas of land, “only” about 4,000 cancer fatalities were expected.

To counter shameful IAEA report, for the conference a new report was prepared – “The Other Report on Chornobyl” (TORCH) by British scientists Dr. Ian Fairlie and Dr. David Sumner. While the full overall health impact of the Chornobyl disaster may never be known, as TORCH indicates, at a minimum some 30,000-60,000 fatal cancers can be expected worldwide. More than 6,000 thyroid cancer cases have been diagnosed so far in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, and more are anticipated. Recent scientific studies are revealing increased incidences of solid cancers, including breast cancer, as well as cardiovascular and ophthalmic effects. These effects have long latency periods of more than 20 years. The general state of health is in decline and contaminated territories show low birth rates, relatively high rates of prenatal losses and infant mortality.

Several other new studies have been released in the past few weeks, which countered the IAEA's report as well. A report prepared for Greenpeace and endorsed by more than 50 scientists from the affected countries projects 93,000 deaths, and perhaps as many as 200,000. Other studies project even higher casualties.

And these reports were big news across Europe. Finally, even the World Health Organization (which by a 1950s-era agreement is forced to accept IAEA statistics on nuclear-related health effects) could no longer accept the IAEA's numbers, and on April 20 released a document projecting a still-very-conservative 29,000 deaths (although you had to read the fine print to find that number).

In short, the IAEA has been largely discredited; its September report found to be self-serving. The real consequences, and thus lessons of Chernobyl, are much greater and more profound than the IAEA and nuclear industries of the world want to admit.

The economic consequences of the accident also defy imagination. There is widespread acknowledgement that the economic damage caused by the Chernobyl accident runs to the hundreds of billions of dollars, a cost still being borne primarily by Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and which 20 years later still negatively affects these economies.

The conference called on the United Nations to find measures to find ways to improve the health situation and social situation of people affected by the Chernobyl situation in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia and people from other countries working as "liquidators" for the clean-up of the Chernobyl site after the disaster.

You would think that after having to cope with so severe consequences of the Chernobyl accident, at least Ukraine would learn the lesson. But no, "Ukraine has no other choice but to develop nuclear energy" said Ukraine's Prime Minister Mr. Yekhanurov.

At the end of March of this year the Ukrainian government announced a new overreaching strategy for the country in order to provide energy independence from Russia and fully provide country with energy: relicensing of 15 old (in 2010 – 2020), currently working nuclear units and construction of 22 new nuclear units by 2030. The first two at KhNPP are already planned to be finished by 2014!!!

According to this strategy we are to increase production of energy in Ukraine twice by 2030. If we have enough now, why do we need twice as much in 2030! Why instead we are not trying to diversify sources of our energy supply? New strategy is based on exactly the same energy sources of energy in 2030 as today: gas, coal and lots of NUCLEAR! Why are we not seeking an increase in the share of renewables?

Leaders of Ukraine are hoping for export of electricity. One of the recent quotes of our Prime Minister, Mr. Yekhanurov: "Increases in exports of electricity to European countries should become the undivided part of Ukraine's integration to the European Union." He went on to say that only when the EU countries feel that we are part of them, will they let us into the Union with them.

And what are we to do with all the nuclear waste from our 37 (by 2030) nuclear power units, that nobody in the world has a decision for yet? Well, our President has a great idea of central storage of those in Chernobyl area for all Ukrainian waste, but possibly even

for foreign waste with time. “Exclusion zone will not be suitable for living for hundred years” he says, “that is why we have to think well before taking political decisions.” For quite some time I did not see such great and intense opposing reaction from public and media on any environmental question! The President had to back up very, very quickly and to explain within several days and many times in public that he was actually misunderstood, and he did not mean to say we would accept foreign nuclear waste, and of course such a plan could never exist without agreement from Ukrainian citizens. I wish we were able to raise as big a public opposition to plans for new nuclear units as well.

Will Ukraine be able to bring such plans to life? I doubt it, it is way too ambitious to plan so many new nuclear units by 2030 even for well-developed countries. But it appears the government of Ukraine will remain strongly pro-nuclear, fighting for every possible nuclear unit in Ukraine. Their approach seems to be: why care about citizens, who are living and will continue to live on top of the bomb, because bombs never blow twice in the same place: we already had Chernobyl, another one cannot happen in Ukraine! Such are Ukrainian energy policies, and while our country remains so “pro-nuclear”, we will remain fighting such plans.

When organizing the conference we aimed to activate anti-nuclear movement around the world. We believe we managed it, and spread the inspiration to participants. We also want to ask you here to join our fight around the globe and prevent expansion of nuclear power in the Mediterranean countries, and support the worldwide anti-nuclear movement.