Chernobyl. 40 years since the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster.

April 26, 2026, marks the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The explosions that destroyed the reactor vessel at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and the subsequent fire that lasted 10 days resulted in an unprecedented release of radioactive materials into the environment. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) described the event as "the greatest nuclear disaster in human history."

The accident was accompanied by fires and releases of radioactive substances, including iodine-131 (half-life 8 days), cesium-134 (half-life 2 years), cesium-137 (half-life 30 years), strontium-90 (half-life 28-29 years).

The radioactive cloud passed over the USSR, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe, affecting more than 20 countries. Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine were the most severely affected. Contamination of Belarus's territory amounted to 23% of its total area, Ukraine's – 7%, and Russia's – 1.5% of its European territory. Approximately 35% of the Chernobyl fallout of cesium-137, the main radionuclide responsible for the current population's radiation dose, fell on the territory of the Republic of Belarus. For this reason, the Supreme Council of Belarus declared our republic an ecological disaster zone in July 1990 .

3,678 settlements, home to approximately 2.5 million people, were within the radionuclide contamination zone; 479 settlements ceased to exist. A total of 137,700 people were resettled from the Chernobyl-affected areas, 75% of whom were residents of the Gomel region. Along with the evacuation and organized resettlement, approximately 330,000 people voluntarily left the contaminated areas.

In the territories of Belarus where the Chernobyl accident made it impossible for the population to live, special zones of evacuation (exclusion) and resettlement were established, covering an area of 1,700 square kilometers.

The list of populated areas and objects located in radioactive contamination zones, depending on changes in the radiation situation today, is approved and revised by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus at least once every five years upon the submission of the republican government body implementing regulation and management in the field of overcoming the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

The Chernobyl disaster caused colossal damage to our country. These primarily resulted from deteriorating public health. People living in areas contaminated with radionuclides have higher rates of nervous and endocrine diseases, as well as malignant tumors.

Agriculture also suffered enormous damage. 2,640 square kilometers of farmland were withdrawn from agricultural use, 54 collective and state farms were liquidated, nine agro-industrial processing plants were closed, sown areas and the gross harvest of agricultural crops were sharply reduced, and livestock numbers declined significantly.

The exploitation of forests, minerals, and other resources has been significantly reduced. Forestry has suffered significant damage. About a quarter of

Belarus's forest resources—17,300 square kilometers—have been contaminated with radioactive fallout. Operating conditions for industrial enterprises in the contaminated zone have significantly deteriorated.

The damage assessment conducted is not final, as the cause-and-effect relationships reflecting the impact of radioactive contamination on various aspects of life are quite complex. Science does not yet have complete and definitive information on the medical, biological, social, and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Today, the Republic of Belarus is implementing a comprehensive set of measures that have mitigated the negative impact of the Chernobyl disaster. The state has taken significant measures to address radiation, environmental, medical, socioeconomic, and other issues related to the disaster. State programs are the primary instrument for implementing state policy in addressing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Since 1990, six state programs have been implemented to address the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The main goals of the programs are social protection for the affected population, ensuring radiation safety requirements, accelerated socioeconomic development, and the restoration of areas contaminated with radionuclides.

From the first days after the Chernobyl disaster, the Belarusian government began taking measures to protect the population living in the immediate vicinity of the plant.

Belarus has established a state registry of individuals exposed to radiation as a result of the Chernobyl disaster and other radiation accidents, as well as a Unified Chernobyl Registry of Russia and Belarus. The primary focus of state social policy for citizens affected by the Chernobyl disaster is providing assistance to socially vulnerable groups and benefits and compensation as stipulated by the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Social Protection of Citizens Affected by the Chernobyl Disaster and Other Radiation Accidents."

One of the most important tasks is to improve the efficiency and quality of medical care for those involved in the cleanup efforts , as well as health resort treatment and rehabilitation for the affected population, especially children living in contaminated areas. The foundation of the medical care system is specialized medical examinations for those affected by the Chernobyl disaster, ensuring early detection of diseases and timely treatment, rehabilitation, and preventive measures. New medical institutions, institutes, specialized clinics, and centers have been opened in the republic.

The Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology is a key link in the multi-tiered system of medical care for citizens affected by the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant disaster . The Center's primary goal is to preserve and improve the health of people exposed to ionizing radiation.

Along with state programs to address the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, Belarus has implemented a number of international projects over the past 40 years. Joint programs to address the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

within the Union State have made a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of the territories.

A radiation monitoring system has been established and is operational in the Republic of Belarus, integrated into the national environmental monitoring system. The primary objects of monitoring are atmospheric air, soil, surface water, and groundwater, taking into account the specific radioactive contamination of individual regions, their landscape and geochemical characteristics, and other factors.

Today, Belarus has unique scientific and practical experience in medicine and ecology, emergency preparedness, clean food production, land and forest reclamation, and their return to circulation.

In 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus Resolution 71/125, "Long-term Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster," initiated and drafted by the delegation of Belarus. An important symbolic element of the resolution is the proclamation of April 26 as International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day. International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day serves as a reminder of the dangers of nuclear accidents and the need to strengthen international cooperation to mitigate the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

The scale of the Chernobyl disaster was enormous. However, a significantly greater number of people could have been harmed if not for the courage and heroism of the accident liquidators. These people, at the cost of their own health, and sometimes their lives, helped protect the population from radiation exposure. The bulk of the cleanup work was carried out in 1986–1987, involving approximately 240,000 people. The total number of liquidators (including subsequent years) was approximately 600,000 .

The Chernobyl disaster liquidators weren't just those who worked directly at the reactor during the April days of 1986. The scale of the tragedy was so great that the cleanup efforts required a great deal of effort. And therefore, there are more heroes. These included the rescuers who decontaminated houses and resettled villages. Doctors and nurses who examined local residents in the affected areas. Ordinary factory and collective farm workers who voluntarily traveled to the 30-kilometer zone to feed and transport livestock. Employees of district executive committees and village councils who evacuated people from contaminated areas by bus, and many others.

All of these people received varying levels of individual radiation doses. Many of those who participated in the cleanup efforts are no longer alive.

The City Clinical Pathological Anatomy Bureau , like many other organizations in our country, has employees who participated in the liquidation of the Chernobyl accident.

The 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster is an opportunity to honor the memory of its victims and reflect on the importance of preventing similar large-scale accidents. The management and staff of the City Clinical Pathology Bureau express their deep appreciation and gratitude for the professionalism, courage, and heroism of those who participated in the aftermath of the accident, saving many lives and mitigating the scale of the tragedy.

The material was prepared by the physician-methodologist of the pathological anatomical department of organizational and consultative work, O.V. Ignatova.