

One in four thyroid cancer cases registered near Chernobyl site likely caused by radiation exposure – new UN study

A quarter of all thyroid cancer cases among patients who were children at the time of the Chernobyl accident 32 years ago, are “probably” due to high doses of radiation received during and after the event, the United Nations body reviewing the effects of atomic radiation on human health and the environment has said.

About 20,000 thyroid cancer cases were registered from 1991 to 2015 among people who were under 18 in 1986 and lived in the affected areas of the former Soviet Union, according to the [latest study](#) by the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), which was released ahead of [International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day](#).

The Committee now estimates that one in four of those cases is attributable to radiation exposure.

“Thyroid cancer is a major problem after the Chernobyl accident and needs further investigation to better understand the long-term consequences,” said UNSCEAR Chair Hans Vanmarcke.

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on 26 April 1986 spread a radioactive cloud over large parts of what was then the Soviet Union, now the territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Nearly 8.4 million people in these areas were exposed to the radiation.

Around 116,000 people were evacuated from the area at the time, and a further 230,000 in recent years.

On 8 December 2016 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 26 April as International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day.

At Security Council, UN chief calls for ‘quantum leap’ in funding

activities to prevent conflict, address root causes

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace require a more coherent United Nations strategy, as well a 'quantum leap' in funding activities that prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said Wednesday.

"This is first and foremost about enhancing our strategic coherence to support efforts by national governments and their people [...] and enhancing support for inclusivity, particularly of those who are frequently marginalized and excluded," the UN chief [told](#) the Security Council during a briefing on his report, [Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#).

Today's Council [briefing](#) coincided with the UN General Assembly's [two-day meeting](#) on the same topic. In the Assembly, world leaders have recognized that efforts to sustain peace are necessary not only once conflict breaks out but also long beforehand, through preventative measures like dialogue and mediation, and addressing root causes.

In April 2016, the General Assembly and the Security Council [concurrently adopted](#) what have become known as the 'sustaining peace resolutions,' which Mr. Guterres has said send a clear joint message: while Member States have primary responsibility for building and maintaining peace, "we can all do more to strengthen the foundations of stability, wellbeing and cohesion."

The Secretary-General told the Council today that "building and sustaining peace requires addressing the roots of conflict, which often lie in poverty, exclusion, inequality, discrimination and serious violations of human rights," adding that the human and financial cost of focusing on responding to crises was unsustainable.

"Prevention is the foundation of building and sustaining peace," declared the UN chief, stressing that sustainable, inclusive development – deeply rooted in respect for all human rights – is the world's best preventative tool against violent conflict and instability.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General António Guterres addresses Security Council meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

"The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is our common global blueprint to tackle these root causes and create more peaceful, stable and resilient societies, founded on a fair globalization," he said.

Calling for smarter investment in UN peacekeeping missions, he noted that his report also set out several options to increase, restructure and better prioritize funding dedicated to peacebuilding activities.

Prevention is the foundation of building and sustaining peace – UN Secretary-General António Guterres

He reiterated his call for a "quantum leap" in Member States' support for the UN [Peacebuilding Fund](#), concluding that – following the General Assembly's imminent adoption of a resolution outlining the joint path forward – "now it is time for action."

Also briefing the Council, Dan NecuIyescu, of Romania, Chair of the UN [Peacebuilding Commission](#), reflected on that body's role in fostering coherence at the intergovernmental level in the Sahel, Liberia and the Gambia, which in turn allowed the UN to be "more valuable, strategic and effective in the field – where it matters."

Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union (AU), spotlighted the implementation of an AU Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy, which employs both preventative and stabilization dimensions. He also described the AU's quick-impact and peace-strengthening projects and work it carries out through its various liaison offices.

Citing critical lessons learned in the AU's work, he said there is an urgent need to strengthen cooperation in prevention, which remains the most cost-effective, but least-resourced, tool.

There is also a need to shift towards a more people-centred paradigm, with a specific focus on peace dividends, especially for women and girls, he said, also stressing that "local perspectives must be incorporated and marginalized communities must be empowered."

DPRK's suspension of missile tests should lead to 'irreversible' commitment to ban nuclear testing – UN-backed treaty body

The world's nuclear proliferation watchdog has welcomed the announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to suspend its nuclear and missile tests and shut down its Punggye-ri atomic test site.

It added that the move should lead to a "sure, definite" and "irreversible" commitment to ban nuclear testing.

"Saying is one thing, but until we have a signature and the ratification by the DPRK, to basically solidify the verbal commitment already to cease testing and close the nuclear test site, I think nothing can be for sure, definite, or irreversible," Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the UN-partner Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization ([CTBTO](#)), told the media at a news briefing in Geneva today.

"I can only welcome and hope for best."

He also highlighted that the upcoming talks between United States President Donald Trump and DPRK Kim Jong-Un could present a unique opportunity for a lasting contribution to world peace.

"It might be through this negotiation [...] that we open up a situation where the DPRK ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."

The [Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#), or CTBT, bans all nuclear explosions, by everyone, everywhere. It has not yet entered into force despite having been opened for signature and ratification over 21 years ago.

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996, the CTBT is nearly universal with 183 signatures and 166 ratifications.

But 44 specific nuclear-capable nations need to ratify the Treaty before it enters into force. Of these, eight – China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, DPRK, Pakistan and the US – are still missing. The last country of the 44 to ratify this treaty was Indonesia, on 6 February, 2012.

Since the Treaty is not yet in force, the CTBTO is officially called the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.

[UN-backed programme logs record high cocaine seizures at seaports in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

UN-trained law enforcement units have intercepted huge shipments of illegal drugs being trafficked through seaports this year, including 2.8 tons of cocaine at Brazil's Port Santos, the largest such seizure in the port's history

The joint customs and police Port Control Units, work at some of the world's busiest ports and are trained to combat smuggling of drugs, precursor chemicals, as well as merchandise breaching intellectual property rights and protected wildlife.

Recently, the Unit in Ecuador has seized two contaminated containers with over a tonne of cocaine. Similarly, the Unit in the Port of Callao in Brazil, interdicted a container with 1.5 tons of cocaine hidden inside.

These units are [at the heart](#) of a joint programme launched in 2003 by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) and the [World Customs Organization](#).

The aim is to train customs and law enforcement officials in Latin America and the Caribbean, and elsewhere, to detect and disrupt the flow traffic of illicit goods, while facilitating legitimate trade and raising State revenues.

Every year, more than 720 million containers move around the globe by sea, transporting 90 per cent of the world's cargo. Most carry licit goods, but some are being used to smuggle drugs, weapons, and other illicit goods.

"The [Container Control Programme](#) has become one of the most effective and result-oriented programmes worldwide," said Tofik Murshudlu, UNODC's Chief of the Implementation Support Section.

The Programme also helps Member States build capacities and expertise to

identify and seize suspicious container shipments of drugs, firearms, precursors, counterfeit medicines, wildlife species, smuggled goods and many others, he added.

According to the UNODC, 18 operations have netted more than 8.9 tons of drugs. In addition, 18 containers have been detained due to intellectual property rights violations.

So far, the Programme is operational in 14 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing site visits, technical assessments, trainings, and other support to create long-term enforcement structures in select seaports. It is also operational in Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Pakistan, Senegal, Togo and Turkmenistan.

UN-EU conference raises \$4.4 billion for war-ravaged Syria; leaders underscore need for political solution

International donors at a United Nations-European Union humanitarian conference pledged nearly \$4.4 billion on Wednesday to fund critical aid programmes in war-torn Syria throughout 2018.

Gathered in the Belgian capital, Brussels, alongside top officials from over 85 countries and organizations, UN and EU leaders also stressed that the stalled UN-led Syrian political negotiations, known as the intra-Syrian talks, must be revived.

In a video message to [the conference](#), which aimed to boost support for the future of Syria as well as the wider region, which is hosting millions of refugees, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said that negotiations are the only way forward.

"We see confrontations and proxy wars involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, terrorist groups, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world – all these creating a bleak panorama of Syria today where there is no military solution to the crisis," he said

"The solution must be political."

The UN chief also stressed the importance of Security Council [resolution 2254](#) (2015), which endorsed a road map for a peace process in Syria, and the 2012 [Geneva Communiqué](#), which set out the principles for a political transition in the country.

Mr. Guterres said he will continue to engage with Member States to move towards a genuine and credible political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to dignity and freedom.

Translate every cent into action

[Relentless fighting](#) across Syria, a conflict that has now lasted longer than World War II, has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and left over 13 million in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

It has also forced 5.6 million Syrians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries where vulnerable host communities are reeling under the pressure.

Against this backdrop, the funds committed for 2018, and the additional \$3.4 billion for 2019 and beyond, will ensure continuity of critical aid efforts – both for Syrians and refugee hosting communities.

“Every single cent we pledged today needs to be swiftly translated into action, spent in an effective and transparent way, this is our common responsibility,” said Christos Stylianides, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, announcing the figures.

The funds will make a ‘real difference’

Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, welcomed the commitments and said that the resources will make a “[real difference](#)” for those suffering in the crisis.

“The pledges announced today are a good start,” Mr. Lowcock said.

He echoed Secretary-General Guterres’ call for a political solution.

“We are appealing on [the Syrian peoples’] behalf for an end to the violence: for a political solution, for a safe future with hope – of education, healthcare, work, and a return home. In other words: for a normal life.”



A vehicle from the UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) convoy drives past destroyed buildings in eastern Ghouta (March 2018). Insecurity and access restrictions have severely hampered delivery of life-saving assistance to people in desperate need across Syria.

Parties to the conflict must respect the rules of war

Meanwhile in New York, Ursula Mueller, the UN deputy aid chief, briefed the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria where called for the full implementation for [Council resolution 2401](#).

In that resolution, the 15-member body demanded an immediate cessation of hostilities to enable aid to flow into the areas in need.

“We need to see firm steps taken to ensure that [all parties respect the rules of war](#),” she said, stressing the need to protect civilians and stop attacks on health facilities.

Ms. Mueller also called for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need and underscored that medical items must stop being removed from convoys.

“There is no reason why items previously agreed with the authorities are removed at the last minute. These are critical life-saving items and they must be allowed on our trucks.”