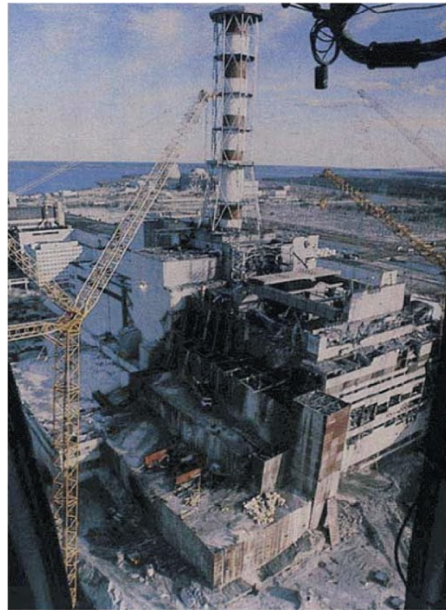


Chernobyl 20th Anniversary: Adequate iodine could have helped to spare many children from thyroid cancer

On the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, it is important to remember that the number of children who subsequently developed thyroid cancer from radiation exposure could have been significantly lower if they had been consuming iodized salt in their daily diet at the time of the accident. Considering the increasing use of nuclear power worldwide, this is another good reason to ensure adequate iodine intake for all children. Calling for universal salt iodization in an April 2006 press release, Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for CEE/CIS noted: "For the 4,000 children in question, iodized salt could have made all the difference. Many would have been spared from thyroid cancer. And amid all the other vast numbers - 400,000 people uprooted from their homes; five million still living in contaminated areas; 100,000 still dependent on humani-



Damaged Chernobyl nuclear reactor, 1986

tarian aid - it is too easy to overlook what is small: a drop of iodine costing just a few cents." The areas affected by Chernobyl were iodine deficient before the disaster, and are

still iodine deficient today. Despite many efforts to get legislation passed on universal salt iodization (USI) in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the issue is still being debated. Even mild iodine deficiency during pregnancy can affect fetal brain development and, as a result, up to 2.4 million babies are born each year in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States with mental impairment. UNICEF is urging the governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to legislate for universal salt iodization and is working with salt producers and the general public to raise awareness of the importance of iodine.

Current IDD control efforts in Belarus are covered on pages 14-18 of this issue of the Newsletter.

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CONTROL OF IODINE DEFICIENCY DISORDERS (ICCIDD) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to sustained optimal iodine nutrition and the elimination of iodine deficiency throughout the world. Its activities have been supported by the international aid programs of Australia, Canada, Netherlands, USA, and also by funds from UNICEF, the World Bank and others.