New York, 22 September 2011 - Secretary-General's remarks to the opening session of the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security

I thank you for attending this very important meeting.

Earlier this year, I visited Chernobyl to mark the 25th anniversary of the disaster. It was an extremely moving experience, and I thank President Yanukovych.

It is one thing to read about Chernobyl, another to hear from those whose lives were changed and see the harsh reality of environmental damage for generations to come.

I also had the profound honour of visiting Japan and meeting with the families directly affected by the earthquake, tsunami and subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Let me recognize the efforts of the Japanese Government and the resilience and spirit of the Japanese people.

Taken together, these accidents are a wake-up call for the world's people. After all, the effects of nuclear accidents respect no borders. To adequately safeguard our people, we must have strong international consensus and action. We must have strong international safety standards.

In the months following the Fukushima accident, the international community has mobilized to assess and apply lessons learned.

National authorities have undertaken voluntary reviews of natural hazards facing their nuclear installations.

Governments have reviewed safety standards and regulations.

The international community has discussed the issue at numerous fora – including the G8 – and has taken concrete steps.

I am grateful for the dedicated efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency led by Director General Yukiya Amano. I welcome the outcome of the Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety and the adoption of an Action Plan to strengthen nuclear safety.

These actions demonstrate the collective will of the international community. The message has been clear and unified: we cannot accept business as usual – and we all have a stake in getting it right.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen:

The United Nations has a clear role to play.
That is why I launched a UN system-wide study on the implications of the accident.

Clearly, there is a compelling need for greater transparency and open accountability. We must rebuild public trust.

We also need greater cooperation between international organizations and between governments.

Strengthening nuclear safety also means strengthening the capacity of the relevant international organizations – particularly the IAEA, given its central role in nuclear safety and security.

At the same time, we need to strengthen the link between the international nuclear response system and the international humanitarian coordination system.

Finally, we also need to focus on the nexus between safety and security, to ensure that any deliberate attack against nuclear facilities or nuclear materials does not have catastrophic consequences.

I am confident that this high-level meeting will help advance our efforts to meet all those needs by rallying high-level political support.

I trust it will also serve as a stepping stone to future meetings and related efforts, including the 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit.

Thank you once again for your support. Let us take this opportunity to learn from our experiences to build a safer, more secure and sustainable future.

Thank you.