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MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIA'S UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF CHORNOBYL NUCLEAR DISASTER

The 27th anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster, the worst nuclear power plant incident in history, is a stark reminder of the need for contemporary Ukraine's democratisation, according to the peak body for Ukrainians in Australia.

"Disasters like Chornobyl in April 1986 – which directly killed more than 30 people and has subsequently caused upwards of 25,000 excess cancer deaths – are more likely to occur when political leaders operate without accountability," Mr Stefan Romaniw OAM, President of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO).

"With scant regard for design or operations at the plant, Soviet dictatorship and its culture of negligence caused Chornobyl. Its anniversary is a message to the international community that modern dictatorships cannot be accepted because they ruin countless lives.

"Australia and the international community need to press Ukraine's Euro-integration and the democratic pre-conditions it requires.

"Only recently, the current Presidential regime in Ukraine showed it responds to international scrutiny by releasing leading political prisoners.

"The Commonwealth Government can choose to use the Chornobyl anniversary to make strong representations to Ukraine's current Presidential regime to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in November 2013," Mr Romaniw said.

The Ukrainian Australian community significantly contributed and continues to contribute to helping Ukrainians cope with Chornobyl's social and health aftermath, including children with cancer.

"As a community, we again express our sympathy and extend our prayers to the families of all victims of the Chornobyl disaster, including those of the brave firefighters who were sent in without knowledge of the risks.," Mr Romaniw said.

Communities across Australia mark the occasion of the anniversary of this tragic incident with solemn commemorations.

The AFUO calls on all Australians to remember the victims of Chornobyl in the prayers and thoughts.

Further information contact Peter Shmigel 0419 541 531

