



## PRESS RELEASE

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### 21 Years on from Chernobyl Disaster: Limited Access to Environmental Information Prevails in Ukraine

Ukraine, the site of the worst environmental disaster in recent history, is still failing to protect the right of its citizens to access environmental information, reveals ARTICLE 19 in its new report, *For Internal Use Only: Is Post-Chornobyl Ukraine Ready for Access to Environmental Information?*, launched yesterday in Kyiv, Ukraine, and based on several months research in Ukraine.

Serious environmental problems remain in Ukraine, including unsafe storage of obsolete pesticides, military chemicals and radioactive waste. Inadequate treatment of industrial waste causes serious atmospheric and water pollution. According to research, 48% of Ukrainians find the condition of their environment unsatisfactory. Speaking about the dumping of toxic waste in the centre of a village a local resident told researchers: 'It was the same information policy as during Chornobyl: actually, none'.

The detailed field research in Ukraine highlights the crucial importance of reliable and accurate information on environmental matters to people's lives, health, and well-being, and to environmental protection. The report demonstrates that only limited information is made available by the authorities, resulting in the Ukrainian population remaining largely unaware of the ongoing environmental hazards within their regions, and of the importance of adhering to environmental safety standards.

#### **Key findings of the research include:**

- Despite the clear legal obligation of the State to disseminate environmental information, legislation does not specify in sufficient detail how the right to information can be exercised and what measures public bodies must take to ensure access to information.
- Political and business elites perceive natural resources as means for personal enrichment. Corruption remains widespread.
- The authorities lack a commitment to effective dialogue with the public. Excessive bureaucracy in policy development and other factors contribute to a culture of secrecy.
- Regulations on access to public interest information held by private businesses are still underdeveloped, although basic legal provisions do exist. The same is true for corporate social responsibility.
- Poor educational policies and limited media coverage have resulted in low awareness of environmental issues among the general population, exacerbating problems.

#### **ARTICLE 19 recommends:**

- Ukrainian authorities should adopt a freedom of information law as a matter of urgency
- Existing legislation on environmental information should be amended to create effective systems of access to information, ensure oversight of compliance with access to information requirements, and so as to encourage public participation in decision making processes.

- Local and international civil society should continue to monitor the situation on access to environmental information, and work to improve citizens and the media's knowledge and usage of access to information provisions.
- Ukrainian media should intensify reporting and investigation on issues of environmental concern with a view to informing and educating the public broadly on such matters, and avoid covering only emergencies.
- Companies based in Ukraine should proactively review the information they provide on their activity, and take a lead from the small number of Ukrainian companies who have pioneered policies of environmental protection and openness. A self-regulation approach could lead to a considerable improvement of the situation.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

- A copy of the report '*For Internal Use Only: Is Post-Chornobyl Ukraine Ready for Access to Environmental Information?*' is available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/ukraine-foi-report.pdf>
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