

Senator Catryna Bilyk

Speech – Hopak in the Park

30 April 2011

Dobryy den.

It is my great pleasure to be here today, to address you on behalf of the Australian Government, and also as Chair of the Australia-Ukraine Federal Parliamentary Group.

I wish to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are on today, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I acknowledge Members of the Victorian Government present - Minister Guy and Minister Kotsiras.

And to someone who has put a lot of effort and hard-work into organising today, I wish to acknowledge and thank, Stefan Romaniw OAM, the Chairman of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations.

I have a close association with Ukraine, as my husband, Robert, who is here today also, is of Ukrainian descent.

This has led me to take a strong interest in your country and its culture, although I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting Ukraine.

Hopak in the Park is a cultural event of national significance.

It is a chance for Ukrainians in Australia to share their culture, with each other, and the broader community.

Australia's multicultural policy supports the rights and liberties of Australians, of all backgrounds, being entitled to celebrate, practise and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language, within the law and free from discrimination.

However, Australians do not just believe in protecting and maintaining our cultural diversity—we believe in celebrating and embracing it.

The celebration of our cultural diversity, our acceptance of migrants as a valued and integral part of our community, makes me *very proud* to be an Australian.

According to the latest census, in 2006, there were 13,666 people living in Australia who were born in Ukraine.

It is estimated that the Ukrainian community in Australia is somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 strong.

This community makes a very valuable contribution to Australian society.

On behalf of the Australian Government, I would like to thank the organisers of Hopak in the Park for their efforts in keeping Ukrainian culture alive and vibrant in Australia.

I would like to thank you for enriching the experiences of Australians by sharing your culture with us.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, and other organisations concerned, for taking a leadership role and encouraging members of Australia's Ukrainian community to be active in community life.

And on a sadder note, finally, I would like to acknowledge that four days ago was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster.

This is a tragedy that still affects many Ukrainians even today, 25 years after the event.

On April 26 1986, a reactor at the nuclear power plant at Chornobyl failed, leading to an explosion, and fire, that demolished the reactor building and released large amounts of radiation into the atmosphere.

The initial explosion resulted in the death of two workers.

Twenty-eight of the firemen and emergency clean-up workers died in the first three months after the explosion.

The entire town of Pripyat, with a population of approximately 49,000, and which lay only three kilometres from the plant, was completely evacuated 36 hours after the accident.

During the subsequent weeks and months an additional 67,000 people were evacuated from their homes in contaminated areas, and relocated on government order.

In total, some 200,000 people are believed to have been relocated as a result of the accident.

This extensive relocation of people, the loss of economic stability, and potential long-term threats to health in current, and possibly future, generations has led to widespread feelings of worry and confusion, as well as a lack of physical and emotional well-being.

It is noted that high levels of stress, anxiety and medically unexplained physical symptoms continue to be reported among those affected by the accident.

The High-level Summit in Kyiv, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, was attended by Australia's Ambassador, and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vienna, Michael Potts, who is also the Ambassador with responsibility for Ukraine.

The Australian Government was pleased to sign onto the Declaration of the Kyiv Summit on 'safe and innovative use of nuclear energy.'

The anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, and the recent Fukushima disaster in Japan, both serve as timely reminders of the importance of nuclear safety.

Today, Ukraine's nuclear power plant operators follow the internationally agreed nuclear safety standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (the IAEA).

Australia believes that IAEA standards must be adhered to in the development of any new nuclear power plant.

The Australian Government is keen to ensure that the impacts of the Chornobyl disaster are well-researched, and documented, and that all steps possible are taken to prevent such future disasters.

On behalf of the Australian Government, I extend our sympathy to the families of those that died, and our prayers to those that continue to suffer.

Finally, I will conclude, this afternoon, by thanking Stefan Romaniw for the invitation to attend this fantastic event, and the opportunity to speak.

I am eagerly looking forward to watching spectacular dancing, and listening to fantastic music and singing events.

I hope that you enjoy *all* that is on offer at, Hopak in the Park 2011.