



# GROWING CANADA-UKRAINE HEALTH LINKS

More than 120 people crowded into a room set up for 80 in Ottawa in early November to learn about health reform in Ukraine and to discuss Canada-Ukraine links. Those in attendance included health officials from Ukraine, Canadian health workers and people involved in Canada-Ukraine projects.

Charles Bassett, Vice-President responsible for Central and Eastern Europe at CIDA praised the successful CSIH/PIH initiative (see box) and stated that the unexpectedly large attendance reflected "the broad growth of Canadian interest in Ukraine in the last few years."

"We are aiming at carefully-focused projects to remove bottlenecks that are blocking progress," he added. "These bottlenecks prevent Ukraine from gaining access to the large-scale finances supplied by international financial institutions in every sector... including health."

CIDA feels its most effective contribution to sustain the reform process is to seek out projects which, with a relatively small financial commitment and over a relatively short period of time, have the potential either to 'spark' activities which will contribute directly to the reform process or to serve as a catalyst for other existing or planned reform-oriented projects.

M.P. Dr. Rey Pagtakhan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, said that the goal of the bilateral assistance program was to deepen economic assistance linkages, support democratic development and the transition to a market-based economy. The emphasis had been on projects which result in additional reform.

Professor Borys Polyachenko, First Secretary at the Ukraine Embassy, outlined the current situation in Ukraine. The health sector was facing particular problems because of the Chernobyl meltdown -- a disaster that abruptly changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Although 10 years have passed since the meltdown, little has changed, and currently 12% of the national budget has to be devoted to Chernobyl projects.

Myroslaw Kohut, a consultant who has worked on

health reform studies in Ukraine since 1992, pointed out that Ukraine's economic transition, hyperinflation and unemployment have detrimentally affected the health of its population. Canada's medical and nursing professions have contributed major support to the renewal process, and the transfer of knowledge has included transfer of Canadian values such as volunteerism and democracy. Institutional linkages are ensuring that even if people leave, the work will continue.

A number of speakers gave presentations on their projects in Ukraine during the day-long forum. Ehor Gauk described the OSVITA project (University of Alberta) which provides teaching upgrading in the area of pediatrics and maternal disorders. Jaroslaw Barwinski discussed the newly-formed Canada-Ukraine Foundation (CUF). Dr. Wolodymyr Medwidsky (University of Toronto) gave details of the Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund. Walter Yarosh (Health Canada) spoke on the immunization assistance project. Ivan Solonenko (Ukraine's Academy of Public Administration) detailed work on graduate health administration and health system information being undertaken as part of the PIH. Dr. Jack Lee (Toronto Public Health Department) talked about a community health project link with Ukraine.

Other presentations included the Dnipro River Basic Program (Jean H. Guilmette, International Development Research Centre); Partners in Health Nursing Project (Geraldine Nakonechny, Grant MacEwan Community College); Healthy Schools Project (George Zerebecky, Saskatchewan Education); Olga Zaverucha-Swyntuch (Canada Ukraine Relations Committee, UCC); and Jonathan Goodman, of Pharmascience (Montreal).

Paulette Schatz, PIH program manager, and Olena Kurysko, the program's Kyiv coordinator, explained how their program is working, with 14 Ukrainian health institutions to help them improve their capacity. PIH is involved with six training centres and has created 20 pilot sites in such areas as health system information, nursing and healthy schools.

Dr. Andrei Butenko (Ukrainian Academy of Medical Sciences) stressed that the economic crisis and the Chernobyl disaster were taking their toll. Paradoxically, the disaster has produced an unparalleled mass of unique information for use by scientists and researchers worldwide. Collating this data is a

## Health Reforms: A Vital Link in Cooperation

In addressing the Canadian Society for International Health Meeting on Health in Ukraine, Nov. 10, 1996, CIDA VP Charles Bassett pinpointed the scope and strengths of cooperation:

"CIDA, and before us the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, has been working together with CSIH for four years. During this period, we have been impressed with the number of Canadian organizations and the expertise and talent they have mobilized, and with the constructiveness of interactions these individuals and organizations have had with their Ukrainian partners."

Since the origin of its Program of Cooperation with Ukraine, Canada has provided \$13 million of assistance to a range of health projects in Ukraine. Some of the major ones include:

- ◆ **University of Alberta/Faculty of Medicine's Chernobyl's Children and Osvita Projects**, to provide training for Ukrainian physicians to improve the provision of health care to mothers and children (\$2.5 mln)
- ◆ **Pharmascience Inc.** of Montreal, to assist Ukraine develop commercial production of drugs (\$750,000)
- ◆ **Health and Welfare Canada**, to help create a regulatory and quality control framework for vaccines and other biological products (\$615,000)
- ◆ **UNICEF**, to purchase basic pediatric vaccines; (\$2.0 mln)
- ◆ **The Red Cross**, to provide medical kits to all maternity hospitals and wards (\$1.765 mln)
- ◆ **UNDP**, for health assistance for recently resettled groups in Crimea as part of a 5-year US\$15 million program - **Crimea Integration and Development Program** (\$100,000)
- ◆ **UNESCO**, for its project to assist in the development of a special **Clinic for the Protection of Children against Radiation** in Kyiv (\$550,000) and
- ◆ **The World Bank**, using Canadian expertise to develop and initiate a health sector reform project in Ukraine (\$894,000). About \$400,000 awaits their proposals for new initiatives.



CIDA VP Charles Bassett addresses session on health reform.

challenge in which Ukraine urgently needs assistance.

The day concluded with a "Tryzub" dinner at which guest speaker Senator Raynell Andreychuk reminded the gathering that gaining democracy was the easy part.

"The fight to gain independence usually culminates in the first election," she pointed out. "After this effort, people think it (the battle) is won. In fact, the most difficult task lies ahead -- in maintaining democracy. Many of us fought to assist Ukraine in achieving the goal of independence. Well, our work has just begun.."