

Ukrainian Canadians wait for news

Wilson, Deborah

The Globe and Mail (1936-); May 1, 1986; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail
pg. A14

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BY DEBORAH WILSON

Ukrainian Canadians waited fearfully yesterday for news of friends and relatives living in the Ukrainian city of Kiev.

The Canadian Ukrainian Committee, representing 800,000 Canadians of Ukrainian descent, announced in Winnipeg the start of a relief fund to aid people affected by the nuclear accident at the Chernobyl reactor in the eastern Ukraine.

Executive director Yurij Werentelnyk said the group will also press the federal Government to provide humanitarian assistance to the Ukraine.

The committee will depend on the Canadian Government and the Red Cross for distribution of supplies purchased through the relief fund, Mr. Werentelnyk said.

Special masses were organized in Canada and the United States for victims of the nuclear accident. The accident occurred as Ukrainians were celebrating their Easter Week.

Reports varied widely on the safety of travel in the area of the reactor, and telephone lines to Kiev were blocked, then booked solid, thwarting attempts to reach relatives in the city of about 2.5 million.

Yesterday morning, a Bell Canada operator said long distance operators in Moscow were not answering calls.

"They're not being very co-operative," the operator said.

During the afternoon, Bell Canada operators said no more calls were being booked to the city because of the call load.

The British Foreign Office said about 100 British students were being removed from Kiev and Minsk because of possible danger. The office also advised tour agents to cancel tours to the Soviet Union, resulting in the cancellation of Toronto's Yugotours trips yesterday.

Also yesterday, the Soviet Intourist state travel bureau Telexed its Canadian office in Montreal to say there was no hazard connected with travel in any part of the Soviet Union.

Most tour companies continued with plans to send tourists to the Soviet Union as early as today.

Eugene Cholkan, a member of the Toronto Ukrainian community, said he has been trying for several days to reach relatives in Kiev, without success.

"I've been able to find out nothing," he said.

Other members of the community have been unable to telephone Kiev, he said.

"It's sort of a helplessness," he said.

Rev. Roman Danylak, chancellor of the eparchy of Toronto for Canadian Ukrainian Catholics, said his bishop gave instructions for special services by all Ukrainian Catholic parishes during Easter Week masses, and announced a special mass for the victims on Monday at 9 a.m. at St. Josaphat Cathedral in Toronto.

Bob Mykytiuk, president of Ukrainian Immigrant Aid, said no one he has spoken to since news of the accident was released has been able to contact relatives in Kiev.

"We're getting quite a few frantic calls," he said.

Ida Lis, a typesetter for the Ukrainian Weekly in New Jersey, said she was able to contact an elderly aunt in Kiev on Tuesday.

She said her aunt told her the only information she had was that there had been a small explosion and two were killed. She did not indicate that any health warnings had been given to the population of Kiev or other areas.

"They know absolutely nothing," Ms Lis said.