

AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS FOR RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY

Dr. Rozhkov (Ministry of Health), Mr. Vidrin (NS&DC), Mayor Hurvitz, Dr. Podzdyakov (director of ICRL), it is with great pleasure that we celebrate the commissioning of this Interim Central Reference Lab (ICRL) here at the Mechnikov Anti-Plague Institute in Odesa today.

With me is Mr. Kenneth Myers, Director, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, whose team along with our Integrating Contractor, Black & Veatch, were directed by the Pentagon to make this ICRL a reality under our bilateral agreement known as the Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP) in Ukraine.

As it stands, this ICRL represents the first Biosafety Level-3 laboratory to be successfully completed AND commissioned under the BTRP in this entire region. That speaks well of the cooperation we have received from the staff here at the Mechnikov Anti-Plague Institute and the leadership at the Ministry of Health of Ukraine.

As I understand, the Mechnikov laboratory complex was originally established in Odesa on 11 June 1886, the second institute of its type in the world at that time – the only other being the Pasteur Institute in Paris. After 124 years of biological threat reduction expertise, it seems only natural and appropriate that this ICRL of the 21st Century begin its work here in the fine city of Odesa.

This facility represents a modest investment in terms of resources. Of the \$3.4 Million spent on this project, \$2M was allocated to construction and the balance went towards procurement and installation of sophisticated state-of-the-art equipment. Despite this modest price tag, this investment will reap great rewards in terms of biological safety and security for the citizens of Ukraine.

On behalf of the U.S. Government, I want to thank the leadership of Ukraine and congratulate its technical experts for a job well done. The United States is committed to the long-term national security interests of Ukraine and we look forward to more fruitful cooperation to come. One such idea recently raised by the Ministry of Health is establishing a supply-chain for Especially Dangerous Pathogen laboratory test kits here in Ukraine. Currently, we have to import these test kits from abroad, which is obviously expensive.

In principle, this is an excellent idea and Ukraine has the technical infrastructure capable of achieving such a goal. Therefore, we look forward to working with your technical experts to review ISO-certified labs in Ukraine that can be involved in solving this long-term supply-chain requirement not only for the Bio Threat Reduction Program in Ukraine, but for the entire region, including Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

Best wishes to all of you in this endeavor.

END REMARKS