

Tennis star Maria Sharapova gives \$250,000 for UNDP Chernobyl projects



Current rating: **4.7**

GOMEL, Belarus – 2 July, 2010 – During a two day visit with children living in Chernobyl affected areas in Belarus, tennis champion and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova announced that she is making a personal contribution of \$250,000 – to expand a programme that provides sports and physical activities for youth in the area affected by the 1986 [Chernobyl](#) nuclear disaster. **Watch:** [Ms. Sharapova's visit](#) **View:** [photos from Maria Sharapova's visit](#)

"I've seen progress in Gomel and kids with a great potential to do even more," said Ms. Sharapova. "What they need is to work hard and believe in themselves. Having supported health and education initiatives I am very happy to start contributing on sports and physical activities that promote healthy lifestyles."

A report from the 2005 [Chernobyl Forum](#), involving eight UN agencies and the governments of Belarus, Russia and the Ukraine, found that although the health-related effects of the disaster have been addressed, poverty and diseases related to alcohol, smoking, stress and poor diets remain serious threats to people living in the region.

The [Maria Sharapova Foundation](#), together with UNDP, supports seven youth projects in areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine affected by the [Chernobyl](#) accident.

She met with the 2009 winners of a joint scholarship programme jointly funded by the Maria Sharapova Foundation and UNDP for talented students from the contaminated Chernobyl regions. The scholarship programme, launched in 2008, sends students to the leading universities in their countries.

Ms. Sharapova visited the [Gomel Oblast](#) Tennis Centre and to the delight of the children, she also played tennis with some young Byelorussians.

She visited a number of youth projects that the [Maria Sharapova Foundation](#) has helped fund, including a hospital in Chechersk, which provides treatment to children in the form of interactive games and psychotherapeutic sessions. She also met with children at the local arts centre who are raising awareness on environmental issues.

"I am so glad to be able to see these inspiring children and the wonderful projects that my Foundation and UNDP have been supporting for the past two years," said the tennis star. "They are definitely a good example of how local communities can overcome the 'victim syndrome', take greater control over their lives and build productive futures for themselves."

Antonius Broek, UNDP Resident Representative and UN Resident Coordinator in Belarus, said support from citizens like Maria Sharapova mean a lot to the local population and to the international organizations working in the region.

"These contributions go a long way towards supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the local level," he said.

Maria Sharapova was born in 1987 in [Nyagan](#), Siberia, after her family fled Gomel in the wake of the Chernobyl accident which exposed more than eight million people in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia to radiation. After two years in Nyagan, the family moved



Maria Sharapova on 30 July to visit with kids living in Chernobyl affected areas: they are big fans - check out the photos of their performances and Maria signing autographs

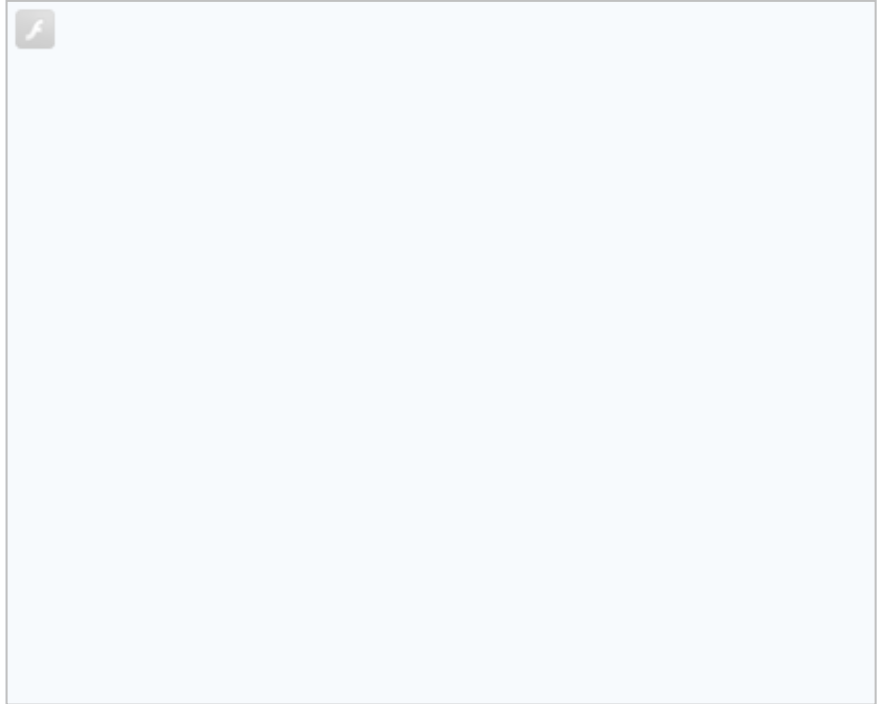
to the Black Sea town of [Sochi](#), Russia.

In 1995 she left Russia to study tennis in the United States. In 2004 she won her first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon and was named Women's Tennis Association player of the year. She won the US Open in 2006, and the Australian Open in 2008.

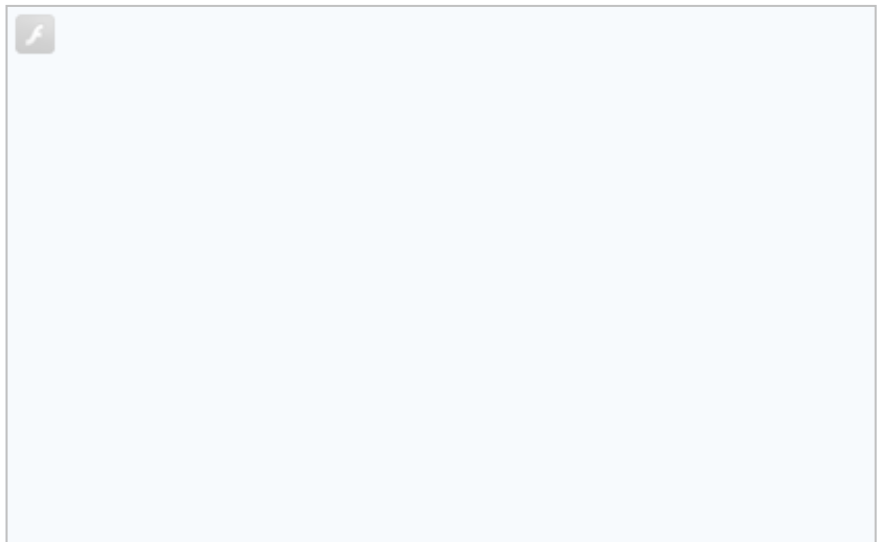
Maria Sharapova was appointed UNDP Goodwill Ambassador in 2007. Her role is to support the achievement of the [Millennium Development Goals](#), with an emphasis on promoting the recovery of Chernobyl affected areas. Other [UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors](#) include soccer stars Ronaldo of Brazil, Zinedine Zidane of France and Didier Drogba of Cote d'Ivoire.




UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova at press conference on 1 July 2010 announces her \$250,000 contribution to projects for youth living in Chernobyl affected areas of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation



On day one of her visit (30 June) UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova visited a number of youth projects that her Foundation has helped fund, including a hospital in Chechersk, which provides treatment to children in the form of interactive games and psychotherapeutic sessions. She also met with children at the local arts centre who are raising awareness on environmental issues.





On day two: Press conference with UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova where she announces \$250,000 contribution to youth projects in Chernobyl affected areas, and she plays tennis with some young Byelorussians

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