

Statement by Ms. Rebeca Grynspan
UNDP Associate Administrator

Opening of the Photo Exhibition “25 years after Chernobyl: Cooperation for Sustainable Development”
25 April 2011

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you today as we mark 25 years since the world’s worst nuclear accident that occurred on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. As the United Nations Deputy Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, I am honoured to be here at the opening of a photo exhibition, together with representatives of the most affected countries of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. As you know, **the UN Secretary General has just completed his visit to Ukraine** where he attended an international conference “25 years after the Chernobyl Disaster. Safety for the Future” and visited the site of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

For a very long time, the Chernobyl legacy has been one of victims and despair. But now we are working together to change that: we support the region’s people in regaining hope and assist governments and communities in building a better future for themselves. To get a sense of the region’s talent and potential, one need to only look at the faces in the photos – and behind the cameras – in **this extraordinary exhibit** that is organized

by the missions of the three most affected countries – Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine - in cooperation with my agency, UNDP.

In recognition that the challenges facing Chernobyl-affected communities are best served not through emergency aid, but by promoting recovery and development , since 2004 **UNDP has been designated by the UN Secretary General as the agency responsible for coordination of Chernobyl** efforts across the UN. . This is of course very much UNDP’s mandate: to work together with the three governments, the affected communities, as well as with other UN agencies and international organizations, to find the right solutions to the development challenges posed by Chernobyl. Our programmes in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine have offered advisory and capacity building support to bring local authorities and communities in implementing projects that create jobs, restore a sense of community self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and improve the living conditions in the affected territories.

The new resolution on Chernobyl was adopted at the end of last year by the **UN General Assembly, and fully endorsed these priorities.** They serve as guiding principles behind the “**Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development**” (2006-2016) that the General Assembly has proclaimed for the affected areas. We at UNDP took the lead on the **UN Action Plan on Chernobyl to 2016** as a framework for the Decade implementation. The Action Plan defines a shared goal of the UN family that by 2016 the Chernobyl-affected areas fully overcome the stigma they now suffer, communities take full control over their lives, and normalcy becomes a realistic prospect.

The Action Plan is now entering its mid-point of implementation, and our **field work in Chernobyl-affected communities is already yielding results**. This gives us grounds for optimism. These efforts are personified by our UNDP Goodwill Ambassador: the tennis star Maria Sharapova whose family roots go to the Belarusian region of Gomel affected by the nuclear accident. She is already a role model for young people and a symbol of recovery. I invite you to watch an inspirational video message from Maria which she filmed on the occasion of Chernobyl's 25th anniversary and will be demonstrated later this afternoon.

We see the same upbeat spirit in many of the photos exhibited here. One of the captions, from a photo taken in the Chechersk city of Belarus, shows children expressing joy in a fruit and berry garden "Dream". Children hold the key to recovery of their region and we draw inspiration from their can-do attitude. **We fully believe that communities traumatized by the Chernobyl disaster can regain self-reliance** and that a region so rich in potential can spring back to life.

Thank you for your attention.