



United Nations Development Programme

PRESS RELEASE

Maria Sharapova launches programme of scholarships for youth from Chernobyl-affected areas in Belarus

Geneva/ Minsk 18 September 2008—Tennis star Maria Sharapova announced today that she is launching a US\$210,000 scholarship programme for students from Chernobyl-affected areas of Belarus. The programme is a joint initiative of the Maria Sharapova Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she serves as Goodwill Ambassador. The scholarships will enable 12 talented young people from Chernobyl-affected regions to follow a full course of studies at two leading universities in Belarus.

Sharapova's foundation has already contributed US\$100,000 to youth-oriented projects in the regions of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Sharapova was expected to travel to Belarus to launch the scholarship programme in person this month, but was forced to postpone her visit in order to receive medical treatment for a shoulder injury that prevented her from participating in the Beijing Olympics and the US Open. Her visit is now planned for 2009.

“It has always been my dream to contribute to the recovery of a region where I have a personal connection,” said Sharapova, who has family roots in Gomel, Belarus. “Enabling talented young people to pursue higher education is part of a broader effort to build a brighter future for the region.”

“UNDP is honoured to count Maria Sharapova among its Goodwill Ambassadors,” commented Kemal Dervis, UNDP Administrator. “Her engagement helps to convey a message of optimism to young people in a once-blighted region where a return to normal life is now a realistic prospect.”

The Maria Sharapova Foundation Scholarship for Youth from the Chernobyl-Affected Areas of Belarus —as the programme is called— will award five-year scholarships consisting of annual cash grants to 12 students at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts and the Belarusian State University. The programme aims to assist talented students who might otherwise not have an opportunity to attend university. The Maria Sharapova Foundation will select the scholarship winners from shortlists prepared by the universities, working together with UNDP and the Ministry of Emergencies of Belarus, which is responsible for Chernobyl programmes. Three incoming students will be awarded scholarships each year, over an initial four-year period. It is the first instance in Belarus in which an international non-government organization will provide

support of this type to education. The first scholarship recipients will begin their studies in September 2009.

Sharapova was born in 1987 in Nyagan, Siberia, after her family fled Gomel in the wake of the Chernobyl accident. She later moved to the Black Sea town of Sochi. In 1995, Sharapova became a full-time student at IMG's Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy in Florida. In 2004 she won her first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon and was named World Tennis Association player of the year. In 2006, she won the US Open, and in 2008, the Australian Open.

UNDP coordinates the UN's work on Chernobyl and implements recovery projects in Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, the three countries most affected by the Chernobyl accident. These efforts strive to promote healthy lifestyles; support community-based initiatives that improve living standards and encourage self-reliance; and provide policy advice and advocacy services on Chernobyl.

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