

PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Development Programme

UN Action Plan Prepared for Chernobyl Decade

New York, 25 April 2008— At a high-level meeting of UN agencies convened today to mark the 22nd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident on 26 April 1986, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presented a draft “action plan” covering UN work on Chernobyl until 2016. Preparation of the plan was mandated by a 2007 General Assembly resolution, which proclaimed 2006-2016 the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of areas affected by Chernobyl. The aim of the Decade is to promote a “return to normal life” for the region. After review by the International Atomic Energy Agency, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and other agencies involved in recovery efforts, the UN action plan will be approved later this year.

The proclamation of the Decade reflects a UN-wide consensus behind a “development approach” to the Chernobyl legacy. Building on scientific findings showing that most people living in affected regions need not fear negative health effects from radiation, this approach aims spur recovery by promoting new economic opportunities, restoring community self-sufficiency, and providing accurate, up-to-date information to counter widespread myths and misconceptions.

In an statement marking the 22nd anniversary, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon honored those who suffered from the Chernobyl accident, adding that, “We can take heart, however, in the growing confidence that communities affected by the Chernobyl accident now have the chance and, increasingly, the means, to lead a normal life.” The Secretary-General called on the international community to sustain its generosity in supporting the full revival of the affected region.

Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova also marked the anniversary with upbeat comments. Sharapova, a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador, has family roots in Gomel, the city in Belarus closest to the damaged reactor. Later this year she plans to visit UNDP community development projects that her charitable foundation funded in 2007. “I look forward to visiting the region and delivering a message of recovery, self-reliance, and healthy choices to young people,” said Sharapova.

Another feature of the anniversary was the premiere US screening of a new film from Belarus, “Chernobyl Jungle,” at UN Headquarters. The film shows how, over the past two decades, the “exclusion zone” surrounding the damaged Chernobyl reactor has become an oasis for flora and fauna. Since humans were barred from the area, rare species, including bison, wolves, and owls, have flourished, and an area once thought a wasteland has in fact become a treasure of biodiversity.

UNDP and Chernobyl

As the coordinating agency for UN work on Chernobyl, UNDP spearheads efforts in three priority areas: information provision, including promotion of healthy lifestyles; community-based social and economic development, supporting initiatives aimed at improving welfare and encouraging self-reliance; and policy advice and advocacy. UNDP field offices implement Chernobyl recovery projects in Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine.

Further information

The draft UN action plan on Chernobyl, the Secretary-General's anniversary statement, the 2007 General Assembly resolution, the 2007 report by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on Chernobyl, and other documents may be found at: www.undp.org/chernobyl

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