

Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General
on the 21st Anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster

The 21st anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster -- the worst nuclear power plant accident in history -- is an occasion to remember the hundreds of emergency workers who risked their lives in responding to the accident; the thousands who laboured to build a shelter around the damaged reactor; the more than 330,000 people who were uprooted from their towns and villages; the 5,000 children afflicted with thyroid cancer; and the many millions who were left traumatized by lingering fears about their health and livelihoods. The world should never forget this loss and pain. Yet while paying respect to the past, we need to take stock of the present and look ahead to the future.

Science has shown that, after two decades, a return to normal life is a realistic prospect for people living in the Chernobyl-affected regions. To achieve this aim, what these areas need most now is sustainable social and economic development, new jobs, fresh investment and the restoration of a sense of community self-sufficiency. Great progress has been achieved, but international assistance remains essential. Toward that end, I am glad that Maria Sharapova, one of the world's top tennis players, has agreed to serve as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Programme, thereby helping to give a global voice to Chernobyl recovery efforts.

The communities affected by Chernobyl have shown great resilience in coping with a disaster of tremendous magnitude. The Secretary-General calls on the international community to do its part in helping them to bring a region so rich in history and potential fully back to life.

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