



**Statement by UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Maria Sharapova  
To mark the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl accident  
24 April 2009**

Dear friends,

It is a true honor to address you today as we mark the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the terrible events at Chernobyl. While years have passed, the impact remains with us to this day.

As you may know, the area around Gomel is very close to my heart. My family has its roots there and its spirit remains with me always. Despite what happened on that tragic day in April 1986, the people of the region, in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, continue to show resilience and determination in rebuilding their lives.

In this process of rebuilding, they are not alone. The United Nations Development Programme and the rest of the international community are there with them. We must continue to work with the same goal in mind: bringing life back to normal for all the people touched by the disaster.

Investing in the young is the key to building a better future. My foundation has already funded seven UNDP youth projects in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine and a new scholarship program for talented students in Belarus that will start in 2009.

United behind the shared goal of a “return to normal” for the region, UNDP and the wider UN family are spearheading initiatives across the region designed to improve living conditions and help affected communities regain a sense of self-reliance.

Unfortunately, my schedule does not allow to me to be here with you in person. So I want to say a few words in Russian to young people in the region:

*[Translation: Ever since I was a little girl, I have tried to follow my dreams. I have worked hard and believed in myself, even when I had to face injuries and setbacks. No victory came easy, but I kept my faith that determination and hard work would pay off.]*

*I am sure you have your own hopes and aspirations. My message to you is to reach for your dreams. Whatever obstacles you may have faced, you need to persevere in pursuing your dreams and realize that the future is there for you to grasp.*

*My heart will be with you always.]*

С раннего детства я старалась следовать своим мечтам. Я много и напряженно трудилась и верила в себя, даже тогда, когда мне приходилось сталкиваться с травмами и неудачами. Ни одна победа не доставалась легко, однако я продолжала верить, что моя целеустремленность и работоспособность окупятся.

Я уверена, у Вас есть свои собственные надежды и стремления. Я желаю Вам, чтобы Ваши мечты осуществились. Какие бы препятствия Вам ни встретились, надо упорно стремиться к достижению Ваших целей и помнить, что будущее в Ваших руках.

Мое сердце всегда будет с Вами.

Thank you for your attention.

Maria Sharapova  
UNDP Goodwill Ambassador