

Statement by Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu
UNDP Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Director
UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS
Opening of the Photo Exhibition “Chernobyl Seen by Children”
11 December 2007

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

I am honoured to address you tonight on behalf of UNDP. I congratulate UNICEF and the three Missions for this very timely initiative. The occasion is particularly poignant for me since during the last three and a half years that I spent in Belarus as UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, I was privileged to visit the Chernobyl affected regions of Belarus many times and meet the people living in the territories. Each time, I returned inspired by their resilience, dynamism and commitment to their land.

For a very long time, the Chernobyl legacy has been one of victims and despair. But now UNDP and the entire UN family, hand in hand with Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine and other partners, are working to change that – to support the region’s people in regaining hope, and to assist governments and communities in building a better future for the younger generation. To get a sense of that generation’s talent and potential, one need only look at the faces in the photos – and behind the cameras – in this extraordinary exhibit.

The challenge as we see it is no longer to provide emergency assistance, but rather to overcome poverty, hopelessness, and a lack of opportunity. We at UNDP embrace the development approach to Chernobyl. We believe that time has come to look ahead and focus on recovery, new jobs, fresh investments, and community self-reliance.

The resolution on Chernobyl adopted on November 20th by the UN General Assembly endorsed these priorities. They will serve as the guiding principles behind the “Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development” that the General Assembly has proclaimed for the affected areas. We, at UNDP, look forward to drafting a UN Action Plan for the Decade, in

cooperation with the three most affected countries and the UN agencies, that will coordinate efforts to promote prosperity and a return to normal life in the affected region -- a return to normal that will benefit young people most of all.

Our work in Chernobyl-affected communities is yielding results and gives us grounds for optimism. These efforts are personified by our new UNDP Goodwill Ambassador: the tennis star Maria Sharapova. A daughter of the region, she is already a role model for young people and a symbol of optimism and recovery. We see the same upbeat spirit in many of the photos exhibited here. One of the captions, from a photo taken in a school in Luninets, Belarus, reads: "The more I know, the more confident I am."

We draw inspiration from this can-do attitude. We fully believe that communities traumatized by the Chernobyl disaster can regain self-sufficiency and that a region so rich in potential can spring back to life.

Thank you for your attention.