**W**hat do a Hollywood actress, a Senegalese singer, a Russian tennis star, a Congolese basketball player, and a Palestinian ‘Arab Idol’ winner all have in common?  Actress Angelina Jolie, tennis star Maria Sharapova, basketball player Dikembe Mutombo, and singers Youssou N’Dour and Mohammed Assaf are among the celebrities serving as UN Goodwill Ambassadors.  Goodwill Ambassadors are [notable](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) people who use their fame and talents to call attention to some of the world's most [dire](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) problems.

**I**n her role as UNHCR\* Goodwill  Ambassador, actress Angelina Jolie has traveled to refugee camps in many areas of the world including the Balkans, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kenya, Namibia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. During her camp visits, Jolie talks personally with the people who live in the camps.  Of her talks with refugees at a camp in Ecuador, Jolie said, "What was really [shocking](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) was that every individual person you meet will tell you that their immediate family was affected. Somebody's child was killed, somebody's husband. Someone was [beaten](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm)." It is the work of Goodwill Ambassadors to bring an international spotlight to [egregious](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) human rights violations such as those [witnessed](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) by Jolie.

Mohammed Assaf, the first Palestinian to win the Arab Idol TV singing competition, has also become the UN's first Palestinian Goodwill Ambassador at the age of 23. A representative for both his generation and for his people, Assaf has made his fellow Palestinians immensely proud. He was born in Libya to Palestinian refugee parents and then returned to the Gaza Strip with his family at age 4 where he was raised in the refugee camp in Khan Younis under very difficult conditions. As a child, Assaf would sing at weddings and events in order to help his parents make ends meet. However, since using his “golden voice” to win Arab Idol, Assaf has embraced not only fame, but responsibility. By accepting his appointment as the first ever “Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees” by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)e will help spotlight UNHCR, the agency providing assistance and protection to a population of more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees. Assaf said, “Being a young refugee myself, I can understand better than anybody else the challenges and the opportunities before us. I’m committed to doing my very best to help UNRWA succeed in giving other young people like me the same chance.”

**Y**oussou N’Dour is “perhaps the most famous singer alive” in Senegal and much of Africa. (Rollingstone.com, 2004) He is also a Goodwill Ambassador. Mr. N’Dour has visited Somali refugees living in the Dadaab camps in north-eastern Kenya. Mr. N'Dour has spoken out about the suffering he witnessed in the camps, saying, “We have a responsibility to do all that we can so that every child can be reached, their immediate needs are met, their health is safeguarded and they are protected from all harm.” N'Dour now heads an [initiative](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) titled ‘New Africa’ which plans to use the fresh ideas of Africa’s youth to address the continent’s challenges.

**M**aria Sharapova is a Russian-born professional tennis player. She has been ranked number one in the world for singles tennis four times. In 2007 Maria became a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador. As Goodwill Ambassador, Maria is committed to improving the lives of people living in Chernobyl-affected areas of Belarus, where she has family roots.  In [conjunction](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm) with the UNDP, Maria has begun a $210,000 scholarship program for children from this area. She also broadcast a video message on the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. She said, “While the anniversary is filled with sadness, we also acknowledge that this is a time for hope as we move forward in building a better future for all those whose lives have been changed by this [tragedy](http://www.unepd.info/Vocab4.htm).”

**D**ikembe Mutombo, NBA basketball player for the "Philadelphia 76-er's" is also 'Youth Emissary' of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).  Mutombo has made world-wide public service television broadcasts encouraging young people to "do sports, not drugs", and also promoting AIDS-prevention and online literacy. The multilingual Mutombo is able to get his message out in ten languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and five African dialects - in the spirit of true internationalism of the Goodwill Ambassadors.

--authored by Pat Duffy and Jessica Ohnmacht