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Go for It! How Sport Can Make a Difference in the Fight against Poverty: The UN Year for Sport and Physical Education 2005

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Summary: Sport has great potential for contributing to peace and development. The forthcoming 2005 UN Year for Sport is an ideal opening for kicking-off broad-based activities to help achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. Sports-related organizations, sportspersons, companies in the sporting goods industry, business in general, but also foundations and individual philanthropists, can all help beat poverty.

Background

Amongst development experts, it is generally recognized that sport for all¹ can be used successfully as an effective engine for peace and development. In order to draw wider attention to this realization and to encourage new and well-designed² activities, the United Nations has proclaimed 2005 as *the International Year for Sport and Physical Education*. Relevant stakeholders such as sports federations, sports organizations, sportspersons, companies in the sporting goods industry, business in general, but also foundations and individual philanthropists, are all invited to contribute to helping achieve peace and development through sport, be that aerobics, basketball, cricket, cycling, dance, football, mountaineering, polo, rowing, rugby, sailing, skiing, swimming, tennis, volleyball....

Switzerland

Switzerland has been in the centre of recent international efforts to achieve development and peace through sport. In 2001, the former Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi was appointed by the UN Secretary-General as his Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace. In

¹ Defined by the United Nations as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction including play; recreation; organized, casual or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games.

² Sport should not be idealized as in many circumstances in the past it has been tarnished by racist uses of physical violence and verbal abuse.

early 2003, the first international conference on sport and development took place in Magglingen. Later that year, in December 2003, the UNDP³ Goodwill Ambassador Ronaldo and Zinédine Zidane invited to The Match against Poverty in Basel, thereby helping to gain the interest of some 30'000 people in the fight against poverty and to mobilize funding for anti-poverty projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Sport for Development and Peace

There are several ways in which sport and physical education can potentially contribute to peace and development:

- § **giving hope and choices:** the use of sport in development and peace-building activities;
- § **increasing awareness and money:** the use of sporting events to highlight the different facets of poverty and for fund-raising purposes;
- § **promoting quality sport:** the use of campaigns to emphasize potential positive benefits and negative aspects of sport; and
- § **engaging the famous:** the involvement of sports personalities in the fight against poverty.

Giving hope and choices: *The use of sport in development and peace-building activities:* Apart from benefiting physical and emotional health, sport can provide an experience of solidarity, pride, and hope. It can also offer people opportunities to learn to communicate, cooperate, work in teams, take responsibility, and respect others. The example of thousands of glue-sniffing street children in the largest and poorest slum in Nairobi being given support, hope, life-skills and the security of a safe environment by providing them with the choice to be part of a local football club and team is impressive.⁴ Sport is also used to resolve conflict and foster good relations between different ethnic groups of refugees and local communities where tensions can easily arise. *What can be done to support such efforts?* Everyone can donate or help to raise funds for activities that maximize participation and access to sport for all and disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in particular (e.g. girls, AIDS orphans, former child soldiers, people with disabilities, and unemployed youth). Sporting goods manufacturers can donate sportswear and equipment. Nike, for instance, has made several donations of sportswear and balls for the

³ United Nations Development Programme.

⁴ Mathare Youth Sports Association in Nairobi, Kenya.

benefit of UNHCR⁵ sports programmes in refugee camps in Kenya where refugee teams and local residents compete in football matches. Business in general can include in their corporate volunteering programmes the possibility for their employees to take an active role in sports-related social projects.

Increasing awareness and money: *The use of sporting events to highlight the different facets of poverty and for fund-raising purposes:* Numerous professional sporting events are ideal occasions to address prevailing problems and to convey important messages to spectators and the broader population, both in developing and developed countries. Sports federations and sports clubs can so provide aid agencies with major communications and fund-raising opportunities. Following are some examples:

- § The African Football Federation, on the occasion of the African Cup of Nations football tournament in Mali in 2002, teamed up with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to raise awareness of millions of people in Africa and beyond about *child labour*.
- § Through the FIFA-UNICEF “Say Yes to Children” partnership, the 2002 FIFA World Cup was dedicated to *respecting children’s rights and fulfilling their needs*.
- § The International Rugby Board joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in drawing the attention of the 2003 Rugby World Cup’s global audience to the plight of millions and millions of people around the globe impacted by *chronic hunger*.
- § In 2003, the UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Cricket Council and its member National Cricket Boards, announced their collaboration to make use of cricket matches to raise public awareness of the *HIV/AIDS* pandemic.⁶

Amateur sporting events such as sports tournaments and school sports days are an additional valuable platform for information, sensitization and education of both participants and spectators.

Promoting quality sport: *The use of campaigns to emphasize potential positive benefits and negative aspects of sport:* In 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the global initiative *Move for Health* to promote physical activity as a key element of health and well-being. Key partners of this initiative are amongst others the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry and its members. Also in 2003, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the *Play for the Planet* campaign

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁶ Of the estimated 42 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, it is estimated that over 12 million live in cricket playing countries.

aimed at using the popularity of sport to promote environmental awareness amongst the public, especially young people, and at promoting the environmentally-friendly development of sports facilities and manufacturing of sporting goods. Most recently, for instance, in an effort to limit adverse ecological effects from the upcoming Athens Olympic Games, UNEP and the organizers signed an agreement to boost goals such as waste management, anti-littering, and water conservation. *What can be done to support such initiatives?* Business in general can set up schemes for promoting employee health and well-being (why not motivate your employees to take an hour a week off work to do sports?). Apart from accepting full social and environmental responsibility for their own operations, companies in the sporting goods industry, including sporting goods retailers, can also make use of their communication channels to promote and facilitate access to sport and physical activity. Doctors, pharmacies, and hospitals might want to follow suit.

Engaging the famous: *The involvement of sports personalities in the fight against poverty:* It is well-known that athletes are powerful role models for youth in particular, and that they enjoy great influence on their many fans worldwide. Committed sports celebrities of all nationalities such as the football stars Ronaldo and Zidane Zinedine, the tennis player Martina Hinggis, the balloonist Bertrand Piccard, the marathon world record holder Paul Tergat, and the Olympic speed-skating champion Johann Olav Koss offer their time and talent to the causes of peace and development by supporting the work of the United Nations or other organizations such as the international NGO Right to Play⁷. Other national and international sports champions of all disciplines are called on to step forward and add their voices to this growing global movement.

Worldwide and in Switzerland, there is enormous potential for more, and the 2005 UN Year for Sport provides a good opportunity for being part of a real team effort – enabling the world to eradicate poverty by 2015, the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

⁷ www.righttoplay.com.

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