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NEWS ITEMS

Dedicating 2005 to Sport and Physical Education Promoting Health, Peace and Development

The “International Year of Sport and Physical Education”, proclaimed for 2005 by the United Nations General Assembly in November 2003, offers a unique opportunity to show the positive values of sport and its vital role in society. These fundamental values, such as respect for rules, opponents, referee decisions and the environment, have much in common with those embodied in the UN Charter.

Sports are rapidly expanding, and economically the industry remains one of the fastest growing. There is an increasing number of global sporting events that are more diversified and attracting an ever-increasing public.

However, the number of people practising a sport on a regular basis has not increased. Sedentary lifestyles seem to be more common, depriving part of the population of necessary physical activity. This leads to illness, such as obesity and cardiovascular diseases, and causes deficiency in the development of bone and muscular systems, among others.

While physical education is considered indispensable to well-balanced development, mandatory physical education in school and its quality (for example, three hours per week of exercise are mandatory in Switzerland), as well as student competency, are constantly threatened. There are also some who would prefer to have private sports clubs and associations take care of teaching sports, confining intellectual studies to schools.

Moreover, the image of sport suffers from excesses linked to top-class athletics, such as revelations about doping, the role of money, and public

violence during sport events. These contradictory trends are a source of concern and deserve to be addressed. To encourage reflection on its role in societies and to promote its positive aspects, the General Assembly on 3 November 2003 adopted resolution 58/5, “Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace”. Its implementation helps to address more specifically its role in societies as a means to promote well-being and health.

An activity: The UN Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace has defined sport as comprising all forms of physical activities that allow social interaction and contribute to maintaining good physical and mental health. This includes games, occasional or competitive sports, as well as traditional or indigenous sports. Access to sport and physical activity is recognized as a fundamental right for all, in accordance with article 1 of the 1978 International Charter of Physical Education and Sport of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.



Right to play

A tool for peace: Although sport is apolitical, it has often helped to restore dialogue when political, cultural or religious tensions arose. Games are a means for communities, people and countries to compete with respect for individuals and the rules involved.

A means to promote health: It is recognized that physical activity contributes to maintaining both physical and mental health. Carefully choosing an activity suited to individual needs, its frequency and the level of difficulty contributes to making physical activity a tool to promote health and reduce its costs.

A channel of communication: The positive image of famous athletes can become powerful tools to convey messages of tolerance, respect for diversity and peace.

A contribution to development: When we speak of development and sport, it is primarily about the individual's development. Sports can be introduced, often at low cost, as a means of child development in schools and slums to promote integration and fight poverty. Sharing rules and games, as well as teamwork, aim at different objectives according to the social and economic environment. However, sport can contribute to many forms of social, economic and human development. Through public-private partnerships focusing on sport-based development programmes, it is possible to train and teach young people essential skills and encourage youth employment. Big sports events also contribute to economic development and often offer opportunities to initiate long-term projects.

In September 2000, world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit agreed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a set of measurable targets for combating poverty, illiteracy, hunger, lack of education, gender inequality, child and maternal mortality, diseases and environmental degradation. Endorsed by 191 Governments, the MDGs lie at the heart of the global development agenda and create a framework for action for the UN family.

A school of life: Sport plays an important role in reaching the MDGs. It is a school of life. It offers a complete learning experience: overcoming obstacles, accepting the transient nature of victory, working to get results, respecting opponents, decisions of referees and fair play. It also gives confidence and can contribute to social integration, especially for foreigners and the disabled.

The Year of Sport provides the international community with an opportunity to promote the value of sport as a partner for the achievement of development and peace goals. Overall, it will strive to achieve "a better understanding of the value of sport and physical education for human development and a more systematic use of sport in development programmes".

In 2005, we wish to see sports-based development projects implemented in partnership with the

UN system, sports federations, the sporting goods manufacturing industry, athletes and non-governmental organizations. Such projects should be evaluated and presented at the many conferences that will take place throughout the year. At the end of the celebration of the International Year, several publications should make the case for sport in a clear and pragmatic way. We should be in a position to show scientific proof that if used properly and in a supportive framework, sport can effectively assist in education, health, development and peace-building projects.

An office to assist with the preparation for the International Year was established in Geneva under my leadership. I have also received substantial support from the United Nations Development Programme, which has allowed me to open an office in New York that will be responsible for public information activities, as well as assist with the implementation of sports-based programmes and projects within the United Nations system, in partnership with Governments, civil society and the private sector. The office works closely with the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, which is providing guidance and support for the Year. UNFIP will continue its efforts to promote sports-related partnerships on the field level and assist in the implementation of sports-based programmes for development and peace, as well as raise the profile of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

Examination of the Child Rights convention: Every year in the multi-billion-dollar sex industry, many children are bought and sold by organized crime rings and moved around the world as slaves. More than 14 million are orphaned by HIV/AIDS and many of them, although often carrying the disease themselves, are forced by circumstances to raise their siblings and step prematurely into the shoes of parents who have already died. Sex discrimination abounds in many countries and 65 million of the estimated 121 million children who are denied education worldwide are girls. In some overpopulated countries, infant girls are aborted or left to die soon after birth, merely because of their gender. Countless numbers of children live in poverty and experience hunger on a daily basis.

The theme of the 4th World Congress examines the effects and effectiveness of the Child Rights Convention, including among others: child trafficking, children and legal processes, HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, children's financial security, child refugees, immigration and nationality, armed conflict, cross-boarder cooperation, domestic enforcement of children's rights, culture and religion, judicial and public education, fulfilment of

the Convention's ideals, social, political and economic rights, international cooperation for the protection of children, dispute resolution, domestic violence, disability, women's and children's rights, and political participation.

The international community and the UN Millennium Development Goals detail measurable targets for nations. The rights of children are central to sustainable social and economic development, and the World Congress provides a timely opportunity to reflect on progress in light of these development targets. The events surrounding the Asian tsunami, and in particular the continuing problems in war-torn Sri Lanka, prompted Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, to observe that "one should look for opportunity in adversity". She hopes that this tragedy will provide a catalyst to bring to an end the civil war in that country and stop the recruitment of child soldiers by rebel forces.

The issues of children and armed conflict, trafficking, sexual exploitation and many others that affect them are the focus of the 4th World Congress. Past conflicts in tsunami-affected Somalia, Sri Lanka and Banda Aceh in Indonesia have had a devastating effect on children and families. The Congress represents an opportunity to address long-term human rights in these areas, as well as other issues that will impact on the children in the years ahead.

For more information, visit www.lawrights.asn.au

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Creating an international coalition to fight childhood obesity

A new global alliance for prevention building was established between five non governmental organizations concerned with chronic diseases, including the International Association for the Study of Obesity, the International Diabetes Federation, the International Pediatric Association, the Interna-

tional Union of Nutritional Sciences and the World Heart Federation. Professor Philip James, Chairman of the International Obesity Task Force and senior Vice-President of the International Association for the study of Obesity, announced the new structure during the 6th International Conference on Preventive Cardiology stressing the importance of creating an international coalition for chronic disease prevention.

The informal collaboration established between the medical NGOs dealing with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, nutritional and paediatric issues has been very successful in helping WHO as it developed its *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity And Health*. With the acceptance of this strategy by the World Health Assembly in May 2004, there was an urgent need to develop practical prevention programmes on a national basis throughout the world to improve the diet and physical activity patterns of whole populations.

WHO has already indicated their need for coherent NGO support as they become involved both globally and on a WHO regional basis in supporting governments seeking to develop their own national strategies. To ensure synergies and cost effectiveness, it was suggested that NGOs act together to drive forward co-ordinated new initiatives without the need to form a separate organization.

The need to devise and implement coherent approaches to the prevention of childhood obesity is a major priority for the prevention of chronic diseases in later life.

Urgent action is essential because the explosive epidemic of childhood obesity and the emergence of early type 2 diabetes are already condemning a generation to ill health and probably to a reduced life expectancy, particularly in the developing world. Excess weight gain in early life is remarkably conducive to amplifying the risks of early adult diabetes and cardiovascular disease and is the time when individuals establish their dietary patterns and condition themselves to more or less physical activity.

Given the increasing evidence that preferences for inappropriate fat, sugar and salt intakes are established early in life, the issue of children's well-being is a clear national and international priority which has not yet led to coherent, robust and sustained policies and programmes for change.

The goal of the international alliance is to organize a plan for translating policy into action to enable the development of a range of practical obesity prevention programmes aimed particularly towards addressing childhood as the critical prelude for life-long health.