

ACST – UN day 12 Novembre 2005

2005 has been proclaimed by the United Nations the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. As Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, said “sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status”.

The fundamental principles of sport -- respect for opponents and for rules, teamwork and fair play – are consistent with the United Nations charter and beliefs

By its very nature, sport is about participation, inclusion and a sense of belonging. It brings individuals and community together, highlighting commonalities and bridging cultural and ethnic differences. Access to and participation in sport and physical education can provide an opportunity to experience inclusion for populations who would be otherwise marginalized by social, cultural or religious barriers due to gender, disability or other type of discriminations. Through sports, people can feel equality and freedom. Sport is a universal language and a powerful vehicle to promote peace, tolerance and understanding, it brings people together across cultures and religions.

Sport and physical education provide also a forum to learn skills such as discipline, confidence and leadership and it conveys core principles that are important in a democracy, such cooperation and respect. It teaches the fundamental value of effort and how to manage essential steps in life such as victory and defeat. Sport has a long-lasting positive impact on development and health.

For many years the United Nations, its funds, programmes and related specialized agencies have acknowledged the importance of sport in society. United Nations bodies have enlisted star athletes, like for example David Beckham, and major sporting events in campaigns to promote immunization against childhood diseases and other public health measures, to support the fight against racism and apartheid, and for human rights.

During the past decade relations between the United Nations and the sport world have grown in every respect. Sports organizations have given support to UN efforts: the international Volleyball Federation has supported programmes for refugees, the International Federation of Football Association has established working relationships with the World Health Organisation and UNICEF for

campaigns against polio and for the rights of the child; the USA National Basketball Association has supported UN anti-drug abuse campaigns.

The United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) is incorporating sports into its programme in developing countries, because sport is a way to defend the right of every child to a healthy start in life, the right of every girl and boy to be educated, and the right of every adolescent to have the opportunity to develop into caring and involved citizens. Sport is a means as well to ensure to every child the right to play which is embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child signed by almost all countries in the world.

I would like to end this short intervention, again, with a word of our Secretary General Kofi Annan: "People in every nation love sport. Its values – fitness, fair play, teamwork, the pursuit of excellence – are universal. It can be a powerful force for good in the lives of people devastated by war or poverty – especially children. The International Year of sport and Physical Education is a reminder to Governments, international organizations and community groups everywhere to draw on the promise of sport to promote human rights, development and peace."

Thank you and have a nice UN day.