

Information note: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2010

“Disqualify Racism”

Every year on 21 March, people around the globe observe the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year’s theme “Disqualify Racism” focuses on racism in sports. Ending discrimination is a priority of the United Nations Human Rights office.

Racism at sporting events remains a disturbing occurrence in different parts of the world, and it is not confined to a single sport. In a recent resolution (64/148), the United Nations General Assembly expressed concerns about the increasing frequency of racist incidents at various sporting events and called for global efforts to totally eliminate racism.

“Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality.” The 1978 UNESCO Charter of Physical Education and Sport (Article 1.1) points to a human rights approach to sports. It stresses that everyone should enjoy “full opportunities” for practicing physical education and sports, and that the requirements of disadvantaged groups in society should be treated as a priority.

“Any form of discrimination with regard to...a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.” The Olympic Charter of 2007 also emphasizes the human rights dimension of sports. “The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play,” it states.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination has been ratified by almost all countries in the world. Yet the fight against discrimination remains a daily struggle for millions around the globe. Intensified efforts are required to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which monitors whether governments fulfill their obligations under the Convention. Enforcement of the Committee’s decisions, withdrawal of reservations to the Convention and timely submission of reports are of utmost importance.

Racism and Sports

Durban Programme of Action 2001

States are urged, in cooperation with intergovernmental organizations, the International Olympic Committee and international and regional sports federations, to intensify the fight against racism in sport (para. 218)

Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference 2009

All international sporting bodies are urged to promote a world of sports free from racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (para. 128)

FIFA is invited, in connection with the 2010 Football World Cup tournament to be held in South Africa, to introduce a visible theme on non-racism in football. It is requested that the High Commissioner for Human Rights bring the issue of racism in sport to the attention of other international sporting bodies (para. 129)

On 21 March 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people and injured more than 300 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid laws in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa. In 1966, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to commemorate the Sharpeville tragedy. 21 March has since served not only to remind the international community of the dire consequences of racism, but also to recall our obligation and determination to combat racial discrimination.