

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Probably, you have all read reports stating the importance of education. Like I did.

You might have seen research showing that education is vitally important in making sure that youngsters have the possibility of a bright future. That they have the possibility to read and write. That education is key to ensure equal rights for boys and girls and to rapidly reduce child mortality. I hope you have read it all, like I did.

Maybe you have also seen the case studies stating that combining regular education with out-of-school activities, like non-formal education, sport and leisure time activities, greatly increases the level of school attendance and the joy of children in school. Like I did.

Most likely you know about all the examples where, by just adding sport to the school curriculum and providing young people one daily meal, school attendance increased with over 40 percent.

Many of you may have heard about research that showed that for families to really overcome traumas after armed conflict, it is an absolute necessity that children go to school. School gives children and families alike a new stable structure in life. It gives them a sense of security and hope for a better future. I hope you have seen the studies, like I did.

Maybe one day, you have been to another country and have seen a totally different situation from what you are used to. Maybe you went into slums and saw people living in nothing more than tents or small shacks. Places where over 50 percent of the people are infected with HIV/AIDS. Where youngsters are extra vulnerable for rapidly spreading sexually transmitted diseases. Where everyone knows someone who is a drug addict. Where youngsters are trapped in misery and where it seems as if they can never have the chance of leading a happy, healthy and trouble-free life. Maybe you have been there, like I have.

There is, however, one thing you might not have done. When I was in a slum, I talked to a young boy, age 10 called Themba and he told me his story. Themba never knew his father. His mother had HIV/AIDS and his oldest brother was a drug addict. Themba went to school every single day. When I asked him if he did so because he wanted to have a good future, he firmly replied 'No'. Themba said he went to school because if he attended all his classes, he

could go to football practice afterwards and his biggest dream was to play for the national team. So he went to school every single day and he did not wander the streets after school, because after school, he had his football practice.

Because Themba goes to school he is more likely to get a good job later on in life. In school he learns valuable life skills and social skills. Furthermore education ensures that Themba and his richer peers, who live in a fancy neighbourhood, have equal opportunities. But will his friends who do not go to school have the same opportunities? Will their dream of becoming policemen, firefighters or maybe even diplomats like yourself, become a reality?

Imagine this; on a sunny afternoon, three young boys are fanatically playing football on a perfectly shaped field in Central Park. As one boy gets the ball, the others chase after him. Just as he is about to score, one of the other boys tackles him. Now picture the same three boys, yet this time, there is no field. They are playing football on a dusty road near what was called a war zone only a month ago. As one boy gets the ball, the others chase after him. Just as he is about to score, one of the other boys tries to tackle him. Yet this boy is quick and he avoids the tackle, he shoots and he scores. Can you picture his delighted face? I do not ask you to pity these boys because they cannot play on a nice football field in Central Park. I ask you to feel their joy because they can play football. And I ask you to make sure young people worldwide have the chance to benefit from sport.

The importance of sport in young people's lives is greatly underestimated by most people. When we, young people, play sport, it is not just about being active. It is not just about enjoying physical activities. Sport is about working together as a team. About building self confidence and sport vastly improves the ability of young people to stand up for themselves. Sport is a language shared by young people all over the world.

About six months ago I told a girl in the Netherlands that I was hosting a project that gave young people the chance to go to South Africa. She was very enthusiastic and asked me what kind of work we were going to do. Organising sport activities, I replied. She suddenly looked disappointed. When I asked her what was wrong, she said: "I thought we were going to work on development cooperation there". A couple of months later my phone rang. When I picked up, this young woman told me that she understood it now. After she had organised various

games in South-Africa, where young people learned to stand up for themselves, she had understood.

Sport and education greatly enhance each other when combined into one programme. Such a programme appeals to all young people alike. It empowers them. By combining sport and education, youth gain knowledge and social and physical skills. This way young people are active in an easy accessible programme that totally fits our way of living.

If you have read all the reports, you know the importance of education. You know the big role sport can play in reaching the MDG's. You know why it is important to combine formal education with out of school activities such as sport.

Education and sport are vitally important for youth worldwide. I therefore ask you to enable youngsters worldwide to enjoy their benefits. I call upon you to invest in education and sport to make sure we win this match to reach the MDG's, a match we cannot afford to lose. To you, it may seem unlikely that investing in sport in the context of efforts to achieve the MDG's can make a tremendous difference. Yet I urge you to give it a try and prioritize both sport and education, like I did. Because one thing we know for sure: if we do nothing, there will be no result.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman