

International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005

Q & A With Mr. Adolf Ogi,

Under-Secretary-General Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace

Why should 2005 be dedicated to sport and physical education?

Little attention is paid to the value of sport and physical education. In fact, sport is a unique tool for sustainable human and socio-economic development and it can assist in building lasting peace.

With sport young men and women have the opportunity to make the mistakes and learn valuable lessons that will help them later in life. By doing something healthy and enjoyable, one learns lessons of social behaviour and integration, self-knowledge and respect for others. Through sport, young people actively prepare themselves for their professional life.

How did you manage to have 2005 dedicated to Sport and Physical Education?

In January 2003, at a Conference of Sports ministers at UNESCO in Paris, I called upon the ministers to give stronger recognition to sport and its values. I asked the ministers to help me bring a resolution to the General Assembly, which would receive the world's attention.

Tunisia took the leadership in preparing this resolution and managed to gather strong support from the rest of the international community. By 3 November 2003, the resolution was adopted. Among its many important elements, it proclaims 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

How did you manage to convince the delegates at the United Nations?

I told the delegates involved in the United Nations intergovernmental process that we desperately need a better world and that I had a positive tool to help them. They are constantly dealing with negative aspects of life and are trying to fix all that goes wrong in the world. I told them that I was able to provide them with an instrument that enjoys great universal acceptance, in particular among youth, the most difficult audience to reach, although they have a very strong impact on all parts of society.

I also mentioned that many United Nations system organizations are already using sport in their programmes. The UN system is making use of sport's positive values to improve the quality of life of children, of refugees or of people with disabilities. Sport is also being used to convey messages about HIV/AIDS prevention, sustainable development, respect for the environment. What is required now is a more systematic and integrated approach to the use sport.

What do you wish to achieve with IYSPE 2005?

It is important that every country is given a platform to link sport and physical education to education, health, development and peace. Today research clearly demonstrates the need for the regular practice of sport and physical activity to add quality and time to our increasingly sedentary lives.

In order to achieve stronger recognition for the contribution of sport and physical education, we must build on the scientific material available, promote it and get the attention of politicians.

Aren't there more important issues to deal with, such as poverty, hunger and conflicts?

I see it differently. For me sport is not a theme that will take the attention away from the most urgent issues of this world. On the contrary, it will increase the attention given to the most pressing matters by offering innovative and pragmatic solutions.

The world sport federations and the sport manufacturing industry are willing to get involved in the betterment of humanity. The universal language of sport is still too often absent from efforts to improve international relations. Large sports competitions are among the most popular events of our times. The sports manufacturing industry is among the fastest growing industries. That carries a tremendous potential to influence society and widely disseminate the positive values that are so close to those of the United Nations Charter.

Human development, the fight against poverty or for better health conditions could largely benefit from a stronger involvement of sport.

What does the support of world-class athletes mean to you?

For me, it is the sign that sport is ready to accept new responsibilities. The world-class athletes are the very visible tip of a huge iceberg. They are the role models that are listened to by our children. Athletes have a great influence. By

donating their time and effort and dedicating hard work to the United Nations activities the athletes are setting an excellent example, as they are an essential element of the worldwide campaign we are starting today.