

EUROPEAN YOUTH LEADERS CONSIDER WAYS TO USE SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND
PEACE AT VIENNA SUMMIT

19 June 2006

VIENNA (Austria), 19 June (UN Information Service) -- The United Nations European Youth Leadership Summit got underway in Vienna today with young people from 27 European countries participating.

The summit will discuss ways to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through sport, culture and peace. It is organized by the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace on behalf of the UN system and is hosted by the Government of Austria.

In his message to the summit the Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan said: "The United Nations European Youth Leadership Summit is a wonderful opportunity for Europe's new generation to become fully engaged in the global endeavour to reach the Millennium Development Goals. As leaders of the future, you are essential to our efforts to meet these simple, powerful, people-centre objectives, ranging from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education - all by the target date of 2015."

The Director of the New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace Djibril Diallo pointed out that the young participants were the first generation of the 21st century, gathered to discuss the future of Europe and how to be leaders. The youth leaders were meeting to show the active role they could play in achieving the MDGs, which touched upon many of the key issues which faced Europe too, such as youth unemployment and ethnic conflict. Sport could be a powerful component, with its emphasis on cooperation, teamwork, respect for rules and fair play.

Austria hosted the event in its capacity as the current holder of the European Union Presidency. Austrian State Secretary for Sports, Karl Schweitzer, focused on sport as a tool for development and a way to connect the youth of Europe in a practical way to the fight against hunger and poverty and achievement of the MDGs by 2015.

The State Secretary also launched a landmark report examining how governments around the globe are using sport as a low-cost, high impact tool for development and peace. The report by the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG) represents the first systematic attempt to document how governments are using sport to achieve development and peace targets, in particular to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Martin Kasika a youth leader from Austria pointed out that an event such as this shows that youth can also be effective at the political level. The representative of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

quoted from the UN Secretary-General, calling sport the best school of life.

The founder of the Geeta-Mohan Mittal Foundation, Lal Mohan Mittal referred to his own early life as a poor uneducated young man, whose family today was the world's largest producer of steel. "Train to become leaders and bring peace, think clearly, with focus and vision, inspire people to give their best. Each of you has a fire, and it can take you to any height," he counseled the youth leaders. "Even as European youth leaders, think beyond Europe, and help those less fortunate," he stated.

After the opening speeches, a torch, the symbol of youth, cooperation and sport, was handed over from an official from Morocco, where the last regional summit was held, to youth leaders from Austria and Finland - the latter country takes over the rotating Presidency of the EU from 1 July.

At the end of the conference on 21 June, the torch will be passed on to a youth leader from the United States, as the regional summits will end in a global summit at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 30 October 2006.

Many of the youth delegates at the summit welcomed the chance to come together and share experience of using sport for development and peace. Jana Cakanyova from Slovakia said her work promoting development education in primary and secondary schools and with university students had not so far involved sport but she wanted to be inspired at the summit to start doing something.

Corina Murafa from Romania said she had not seen the potential between sport and peace until now but she had already heard some very good examples of ways to bring young people together to make them forget their differences. She was now planning to organize a sports event to promote tolerance and ethnic diversity in Romania later this year.

Martin Kasika from the youth committee of the Austrian Sports Federation said: "Sport for a long time was just sport and not seen as something that could unite nations or bring development to some countries and now with the United Nations holding this summit focusing on sport and culture it's a great opportunity for us."

Kataryne Krawczyk from Poland was very pleased the European Summit was bringing together her contemporaries for such an important objective.

Laszlo Lasztovicza, President of the National Association of PhD Students in Hungary thought sport had winners and losers but in the end it was a positive endeavour for all.

From the Czech Republic, Martin Naprstek wanted to exchange experiences and set up a network of people with some experience of sport and development programmes because in the Czech Republic he was now starting a pilot project and wanted to learn from those who had already done it.

For further information please contact:

--United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace -
Richard Leonard: e-mail richard.leonard@undp.org, telephone 212 457 1254
or Vera Mehta: e-mail vera.mehta@undp.org, telephone 1 917 349 1454.
Visit www.un.org/sport2005

--United Nations Information Service Vienna - Anne Thomas: e-mail
anne.thomas@unvienna.org; telephone +43 1 26060 5693. Visit
www.unis.unvienna.org

--Austrian State Secretariat of Sport -Nicole Leithner: e-mail
nicole.leithner@bka.gov.at; telephone +43 1 53 115 4062.