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Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, Plenary: Sport for Development and Peace

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The history of sport traces back to ancient civilizations.

Our ancestors played sport to impress the gods. They played to mark the arrival of seasons and celebrate peace after conflict.

By engaging in healthy competition, they built physical strength, and fostered community spirit.

Indeed, the Ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Truce – a temporary ceasefire to enable athletes and spectators to travel and compete safely at Games – was premised on the recognition of the importance of sport in building peace and goodwill.

Across our world, sport has been used time and again to advance peace and reconciliation. Who can forget the iconic image of Nelson Mandela holding up the 1995 Rugby World Cup and using that moment to unify the people of South Africa in the wake of apartheid.

To this day, whether we are watching children kicking around homemade footballs, our athletic heroes breaking records, the determined look of Paralympians competing, or the Refugee Olympic Team entering the Rio stadium, sports have the power to transcend borders and inspire us all.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the importance of sport as an ‘enabler’ of sustainable development and peace through its promotion of tolerance and respect, the empowerment of women and young people, and its contribution to health, education and social inclusion.

Excellencies,

Sport is a tool for driving achievement of the SDGs. We see its application in the goals relating to health and well-being, the empowerment of women and girls, and achievement of peaceful and inclusive societies. We see it helping to build the confidence, strength and the capacities of young people, of persons with disabilities, and of minority communities.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly's decision in 2013 to declare 6 April the annual 'International Day of Sport for Development and Peace' elevated global awareness of the role of sport in peace and development. I congratulate the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace for its work in this regard, and for promoting the importance of sport more broadly.

I also commend the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace for its work to promote sport as a means for furthering the goals of the United Nations, including through the UN Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace. The Offices' priority areas of conflict resolution, gender equality, development of Africa, and inclusion of persons with disabilities and youth development, are particularly important.

Excellencies,

Nelson Mandela said "sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination."

Today we celebrate sport for its role in driving sustainable development, for promoting goodwill and understanding, and for its push for a more peaceful, just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

I thank you.